

Memo to Riverfront Redevelopment Commission, Middletown, CT
Date: November 15, 2013
From: PPS
Re: Preliminary Recommendations; Workshop and Focus Group Summaries

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the placemaking workshops, focus groups and interviews with stakeholders, two things are clear in terms of revitalization of the riverfront. The first is timing. There is excitement and momentum in Middletown to make visible change and better connect the riverfront to downtown. Discussions and site visits with participants in the placemaking process have demonstrated that the riverfront could be much better used right away, even with its weak linkages and underperforming facilities. The key to stronger use in the short-term will be programming and outreach. Second is that the difficult access to the riverfront only appears to be an insurmountable issue. Many residents of Middletown were unaware of the upgrades that the town has already made to the pedestrian tunnel for example. The existing connection along Union Street seemed under-utilized and unfamiliar to many. With a good enticing program, strong signage, and enhanced transit options for special events, the riverfront can become a much stronger place in the very near future.

DRAFT VISION STATEMENT

The revitalized Middletown Riverfront will be a vibrant public destination that strengthens the community, attracts visitors and sets the stage for appropriate, beneficial private development. It will be a place with...

- Strong pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections from downtown, Wesleyan and neighborhoods as well as between riverfront destinations;
- A year-round program of activities for a variety of people including active and passive uses, community celebrations, educational and cultural programs, active recreation, nature and environmental education, and lots of ways to be near or on the water;
- Amenities, art installations, and other physical features that reflect the history and character of the Middletown community.

What makes a Great Riverfront?

In studying how public spaces are used, PPS has distilled the qualities that make a great riverfront into the following four basic ingredients:

Activities and Uses: A great riverfront has a range of destinations and activities that attract a variety of community members, for social interaction, companionship, play or relaxation. Water uses and the feeling of being “on the water” are essential for a great riverfront. The activities keep the place lively, inviting and safe throughout the week and the year.

Access and Linkage: A great riverfront is easy to get to and visible from afar. Linkages and open sight lines should connect different destinations, offer views of the river and help create a people-friendly environment that encourages interaction among neighbors and people of different ages. Institutional and commercial anchors within and on the edges of the riverfront should connect to it programmatically and provide easy access, but also have their own activities and be linked to one another through walkways and signage.

Comfort and Image: Great riverfronts are comfortable to use and help give a town a unique identity. Amenities, such as benches, picnic tables, shade trees, play equipment, art, places offering food, bike racks, and information boards, well-designed and in the right place, are essential in any good public space. Carefully designed and well-maintained

amenities can have a powerful effect – they signal to people that someone took special care in making a place welcoming and comfortable.

Sociability: A sociable place is one where people want to go to observe the passing scene, meet friends and interact with a wide range of people who are different from themselves. The riverfront needs sociable places, where people come for a variety of reasons, where information and skills are shared among residents and visitors informally, where young and old interact comfortably and in a meaningful way. Community events, festivals, cultural and educational programs offer great opportunities to make the place sociable.

Placemaking through the Power of Ten

To be successful, all cities need great places and destinations. They need the places that give them an identity and character, that make them interesting and dynamic, that help attract new residents, visitors, businesses and investment. In short, they need interesting places for people to go. A place might be a main street, a town green, a downtown square, a park, a natural area, or an entire riverfront. Towns and cities of any size should have at least ten great destinations where people want to be.

The Power of Ten is a concept that helps to think about places, with the idea that the layering of multiple uses, activities and features creates the richness that all great places have, and an exponential synergy that breeds and complements new activity and supports existing uses. Thus, 10 things to do in each place of Middletown's Riverfront will create a critical mass that will attract people and make it a real destination.

A successful destination has sub-places within it. Middletown's riverfront needs at least ten sub-places: some of them already exist, others will have to be created, and all need to strive for excellence. The boathouses, Harbor Park, the Canoe Club would need to be improved or expanded, but the riverfront also needs more food at a difference price point, a place for children to play, places to fish or to enjoy the water, comfortable places to sit and picnic, somewhere to meet friends, and so on. Within each of the sub-places, there could be ten things to do. Some of these activities could be very simple – sit comfortably, take in the view of the river, watch other people, observe wildlife, experience nature, learn about the place and its history, eat, play, row, paddle, kayak, exercise, etc. Cumulatively, these activities, places, and destinations make a great riverfront.

Applying the principles of the Power of Ten, Middletown's Riverfront should have at least 10 great destinations within it. Next those destinations should be connected to form a compelling experience, where even a full day is not enough time to explore and experience all that the riverfront has to offer. Within each destination, at least 10 things to do should be clustered along with the amenities that support these activities to create a synergistic, vital place to be.

For example, a visitor center in a park is a destination that people will go to. A visitor center with a café, a bicycle rental shop, an outdoor classroom, and a natural play area for kids triangulates compatible uses and brings more people together and extends their stay in a meaningful way. Thus a family with kids may go to the visitor center for information and stay just a few minutes. But they could spend an entire afternoon at the triangulated visitor center and use it as an anchor of family members' individual explorations of the park.

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper

"Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper" (LQC) describes a moderate cost, high-impact framework for short-term, experimental interventions. LQC experiments allow for lower risk, and lower cost improvements to become the launching pad for a larger, long-term plan. These experiments capitalize on the creative energy of the community to generate new uses, test ideas, and build a new image for places in transition.

Demonstration projects are essential to the LQC approach and draw upon local assets to transform under-utilized spaces into exciting laboratories that reward citizens with authentic places and provide a boost to areas in need. These projects provide a powerful means of quickly translating a vision into physical reality. Short-term interventions can take many forms requiring varying degrees of time, money and effort, but the spectrum of interventions aims to build lasting change.

This is an incremental strategy that can start with small steps. For example, under-utilized Harbor Park could attract people with seasonal programming and special events. At the same time comfortable, well designed, light amenities such as movable chairs, tables, hammocks, fire pits, flags and banners could be used to spruce up the place and give it a new image. Harbor Park can become a "stage" that could then host events and incubate new activities.

By championing use over capital-intensive construction, short-term interventions help determine the public's interest in specific activities and can boost long-term transformative campaigns. A great program of events can put a place on the map. When people have positive experiences during the experimental phase, they are likely to return for more, and return regularly, after larger capital improvements have taken place.

To revitalize Middletown's riverfront, we propose to build on existing facilities and programs, while developing new destinations strategically. This would require establishing a priority of places and staging the growth of the riverfront through its destinations, both public and private.

SHORT-TERM EXPERIMENT PHASE

In order to keep momentum, assess interest and test ideas, a combination of programming and design experiments should be the focus of a concerted, well-managed effort in the next year that will spark dramatic change in how the riverfront is used and transform its image, starting with:

- ***Improvements to Harbor Park adding both programs and amenities.***
Harbor Park is the logical place to start with simple improvements. The proposed floating dock is a good beginning along with the renovations the city has already made to the pedestrian tunnel. A summer "happening" taking advantage of the proximity to the water, like a temporary beach, could be considered here.
- ***Create focal points in Harbor Park*** by installing a specially designed (but temporary) children's play area, a place for games such as chess, and attracting a food cart or truck to offer snacks and ice cream.
- ***Complement the above with amenities*** such as benches along the boardwalk, movable seating such as Adirondack chairs or deck chairs, picnic tables and umbrellas.
- ***Add signage and information*** to encourage people to take the tunnel and arrive to the park on foot. Art installations in the tunnel would be a good short-term next step.

- ***Create a performance area/use existing gazebo*** for small concerts, dances, yoga, outdoor classes or YMCA programs, and other programs near the boathouses.
- ***Experiment with a significant special event at the Peterson site.***
Alternatively, this could be a “sneak peak” style event that includes other places on the riverfront like the OMO site, the waste treatment plant, River Road and the well-head area. An outdoor concert, movie or community gathering could attract a large cross-section of the community to the Peterson site to inaugurate a future “great lawn” or outdoor performance space.
- ***Develop a seasonal program of active recreation events*** that include more of the Riverfront such as 5k runs, bike races, boat parades, etc. building off the success of 4th of July and the regatta.
- ***Develop a parking strategy for the riverfront*** with agreements to use private lots for parking for events, display signage, and create safe and pleasant pedestrian route along Union Street.
- ***Develop a pop-up market or gallery program*** for the vacant buildings at the OMO site. Art and crafts markets as well as artist studios could be experimented with here, along with other special markets, like a night market, holiday market, carnival market with food truck rally, etc.
- ***Develop a strategy and funding plan for new events*** of varying scale, such as:
 - Various markets—arts and crafts fairs, flea markets, etc.;
 - Art Exhibits and Rotating Art sponsored by various art groups;
 - Community events and performances on the riverfront;
 - More frequent, small events; events that last longer;
 - Boating and water-oriented events like the regatta, boat parade, bass fishing contest, etc.
- ***Identify a partner to actively manage riverfront experiments*** in the short term, coordinate events, improve maintenance, and help determine additional studies needed.

SUMMARY OF PLACEMAKING WORKSHOP RESULTS

On September 26 and 28, 2013, PPS facilitated two public placemaking workshops intended to gather ideas for how to best program and revitalize Middletown's Riverfront so that it can become an extraordinary necklace of waterfront destinations and a great asset for the city and the region. After years of planning, Middletown is poised to transform its riverfront from a place used by few on a regular basis, hosting but a few large events per year, into a great waterfront used and enjoyed by all throughout the day and the year. Recent redevelopment opportunities, including the decommissioning of the waste treatment plant, and the clearance of the Peterson site, along with residential and mixed-use development proposed for privately owned land near the river have made this visioning effort timely and exciting.

Over 150 residents of Middletown attended the two workshops and shared their vision for the riverfront. The workshops began with a presentation by PPS of great waterfronts from around the world, including the elements that make them successful. Benchmarks were research and selected based on the information and preliminary ideas PPS had collected in a series of stakeholder focus groups and interviews conducted prior to the public workshops. The workshops included group visits to selected sites along the riverfront, and participants were charged with brainstorming ideas for the specific site they had visited as a group. Middletown's transit agency provided transportation to the sites further removed from City Hall where the workshops took place. Participants were asked for their opinions on how to best attract a variety of users to the riverfront, how to make it more welcoming and better connects, and how it could provide appropriate programs and activities and allow and encourage social interactions. Special attention was given to water uses and ideas for increasing the access and enjoyment of the river for the people of Middletown and the entire region. Presented below is a summary of workshop findings organized by site.

River road/Rushford Center area

Environmental/education:

Use water treatment plant as education Museum and education plantings

Aquarium similar to Burlington VT

Nature center

Improve well houses area (viewpoints/decks/murals)

Educational/nature trails(>2015)

Nature walk
Bird watching
Solar panels

Recreation:

Short-term: dog park, 5K, fishing, walking, biking (events)
Picnic tables/benches
Jogging
Biking
Tai chi
Skinny cycling
Playground
Snow shoeing
Winter tents
Camping
Bonfires
Fishing / hunting hut as multi-use facility
Ball field
Showmobile

Water related:

Water craft take out area
Small boat launch (non-motorized)
Fishing
Improvements - Clear underbrush for better view; more entrances to the river (access); Signage and lighting; repave.

Cultural

Concerts
Passive music

Commercial:

A little restaurant, maybe at Rushford center
Parking area

Community events:

Short-term: 5K, food trucks
Green eco-community development/housing
Road bike race – starting point

Access:

Water taxi
Tram
Boardwalk
Tram-trolley

Top 3:

Boat launch

Tram terminal
Hiking, biking and fishing

LOC

Ride the rails (unicycles?)

Partners:

Garden Club
United way - learning trail
Parks and Recreation
MG club/pedal power
Forest and Park Association
Safe streets
Jonah center
Carter group
Connecticut Valley Railway
State of Connecticut
Rushford
Federal government
Sponsorship of places/paths/parts
Middlesex historical Society
Portland Marina

River road /Jackson Corrugated

River road:

Active recreation
Marketplace
Arts
Connection to main street
Education

Jackson Corrugated:

Hotel/conference hall /event space
Arts and culture destination:
Studios
Exhibits

Recreation:

Water park (Fountain, Wading Pond)
Sports field
Boating
Market stalls
Biking
Walking
Running road races
Bocce

Volleyball
Tennis courts (Where?)
Historic vessel
Regatta
Ferris wheel
Ice skating (Seasonal)
Walk
Fishing pier
Bird watching
Observational stands/Telescopes
Zip line
Playground
Pedal cabs
Skinny cycling
Boating
Boat Launch
Small boat put in
Boardwalk
Waterski
Kayaks
Canoes

Commercial:

Residential
Hotel
Event venue
Convention center
Market area 4 Season
Adaptive Reuse
Working art studios
Dance / Music studios
Ballroom
Restaurant
Cooking facility
Event space
Rotating restaurants – Pop-up restaurants
Indoor market (and outdoors)
Upper residential above retail

Culture:

Music
Concert venue
Shipbuilding
Pier
Food festival
Art installation
Farmers market
Beer garden

Sliders
Small performance space

Seasonal:

Boat parade
Seasonal fairs
St. Paddy's Day
Oktoberfest
Ice rink with hot chocolate, market, fire pits, marshmallows, hot cider, etc.

Environmental:

Learning barge (a la Science barge)
Arboretum
Weekly cleanup
Wesleyan university community
Buckets with waste (?) / fishing line
Touch tanks, net scoop for marine life/maritime education
Found object art

Historic:

Sylvan/Feldsrat(?)
Ghost tours

Community Events:

Movies
Concerts
River rafting (?)
Flea / free-market

LQC

Sculpture center
Kayak rental
Wading post
Multiage park (Playscape)
Temporary building blocks
Temporary skate park(seasonal)

Access:

Signage
Connect to other existing trails
Train tracks
Pedy cabs

Partners:

Wesleyan
Kid City
Recreation Department
Local Restaurants (Food Trucks)

Central Connecticut Middlesex Cc
Boys and Girls Club
Pratt and Whitney
Clean Energy

Waste Treatment Plant

Recreation:

Games and sports (rock climbing, skating)
Area for lawn games – badminton, soccer, volleyball, etc.
Walking path
Playground
Water play
Creative splash art
Skating rink
Picnic area
Terraces
Plaza
Road race

Tank reuse:

Wave pool in long tanks
Fishing
Fish run
River education splash pad
Dive pool
Regular pool in smaller tank
Hydroponic grow tank
ice-skating / swimming
Permaculture demos
Botanical gardens (water lilies)
Aquaponics / aqua culture

Structure reuse:

Go higher: lookout terrace
Gathering space / Community room
Concert space/connect two tops (with the zip line)
Black box theater
Indoor recreational space
 Climbing gym – indoor and out
 Zipline between structures – climbing and trapeze classes
 Indoor skateboarding / BMX space/ roller rink
Indoor archery range
Bowling alley
Graffiti wall project with local teens

Space for teens "clubhouse"
Big screen movies/projection in and out
Big benches/swing benches/sculpture
Archimedes screws as installation art

Environmental:

Open up views to the river
Wetlands study
Arboretum to be linked to Wesleyan programs
Permaculture gardens linked to aquaponic tanks

Commercial:

Restaurant on top floor with views of the river
Boutiques
Banquet facility
Recreation facility in tanks and structure

Water Related:

Adaptive reuse of existing building ground floor for boat house
Marina / boat launch
Schooner permanently docked, maybe with restaurant in it

Culture:

Music venue / night club
Black box theater
Arts and crafts show space

Community activities - LQC:

Oddfellows circus
Regatta
farmers market
Beer garden
Food trucks
Yoga classes
Floating stage

Access:

Use the railroad
Trolley
Water taxi for special events

Partners:

Kid City
Wesleyan

Omo Site

Building reuse:

Theater /concert Hall/performance space/Gallery space
Market: small shops restaurants eateries restaurants bars cafés
Residential (if not cleaned up)
Covered amphitheater for music & performance
Lots of shops near multi age residential
Performance space with associated classrooms for drama/ dance /film
Residential - on stilts
Restore the building
Boutiques
Coffee shops
Artist studios and art shows
Gallery space
Quincy market on small-scale
Historic Museum
Limited number of offices
Eating opportunities

Courtyard reuse:

Park that has many uses especially artistic
Park with multiple recreational opportunities including sports playground and indoor Cultural performance space.
Small shops/food trucks/kiosks as well as lavatory facilities.
Public parking
Multiage fountains
Pond
Skating rink

LOC

Music/performance/eating
Clean up near buildings, get volunteers,
Recycle junk metal

Community events:

festivals+ performances. This site would anchor the waterfront proper with facilities and space that is less constrained by edge of river.

Cultural:

Performance space 200-300 people to be alive day and night, weekend and weekday

Environmental education:

B of building (+adult education Mt Community College)
Tie to Sumner Brook

Recreation:

Access to brook
Fishing and kayaks on Sumner Brook
Summer small boat launch
Kite flying contest on the river (windy along the river)

Access:

Improve Walnut Street access
Signage
Riverwalk and eventually rail
Public transportation such as a tram, also bikeway walkway and some car traffic would be needed.
Parking (landscaped)

Partners:

Oddfellow's
Green Street Theater
Shakespeare Co
City Parks and Recreation
Energy efficient transportation engineers
Biking and walking groups
City Creates
Public Works Dept

Peterson Site

Recreation And Water Related:

Small-scale sports (volleyball, basketball)
Pond for toy boats in summer / ice-skating in winter
Biking (using River Road)
Bike rental & repair
Kayaks and paddle boats rentals (Pick up and bring people back)
Marina slips (maybe need to dredge)
Restroom facility
Splash pad
Playground
Boat repair

Cultural:

Concert barge
Interactive public art (sculptures anchored on the water)

Commercial:

Beer garden
Food trucks
Bait shop
Boat storage

Environmental:

Use Sumner creek, create a trail
Trail along the river
Take advantage of views
Protect/enhance natural habitats

Community events:

Fireworks
Boat races, regatta
International bass fishing contest
Public kayaking/canoe
Concerts
Craft fairs
Outdoor theater

Short-term:

Environmental study of site
Cosmetic landscaping - cut grass, clear sightline along Brook
Sidewalk on existing bridge over brook
Soft launch for canoes kayaks
Benches and picnic tables
cleanup site make grassy area now
Picnic tables(hadoam meadows)
Benches
Volleyball (host tournaments)
Setup temporary stage and have a few pilot concerts
Lights
Signage

Long-term:

Public boat launch (deeper and faster water in this part of the river)
Cove with small boat marina, canoes, kayaks (shallower water)
Dredging / cleaning the brook
Multi-use river walk connecting Peterson site, Columbus Park and downtown over the brook
Parking and public access to site
Need room for 50+ trailers/vehicles, so qualifies as a potential boat launch

Access:

Entrance from Union Street
Bridge over Sumner Creek to Harbor Park
Water taxis

Partners:

Wesleyan
YMCA
Middletown arts commission

Show Mobile
Chorale/Symphony band/AA farm

Boathouses / Union St.

Lights and arch/gateway leading to the river at the end of Union Street
Skating rink in winter next to the boat houses

Union St

Open to riverfront
Improve look-highway, brick sidewalks on both sides of road
"Welcome to the riverfront"
Signage – additional, more prominence
Access – trolley, ADA, better crosswalks
Sumner Brook – bridge, reconfigure road
Foot bridge – closer to river point and connect paths
More activity on Union St
Connect YMCA to riverfront – sailing program, afterschool / vacation activities
More seating – chairs, benches around the boathouses
Grassy access – kayak launch and canoe

LQC:

Clean up,
Signage (replicate current city signage),
Seating
Chairs,
Play scape/Play area,
Water feature,
Programs and activities LQC

Community Events:

Music – move some concerts from green to riverfront
Art type activities
Yoga/other physical activities
Fishing- place to fish and spot to gut
Boat houses: convert to 1 large complex to serve multiple crew teams
2nd floor: revenue making area large enough to accommodate large groups for events, Deli
Possible restructuring – move new boathouse closer to water
Area south of boathouse: bike rental, picnic area, food trucks
Focus on walking vs accommodating cars
North or South: Water area – fountains and pool
Move Columbus Statue
Dev. Adaptive rowing program w/ Middlesex hospital a ramp will be needed
Kayak and canoe access

Sidewalks on south side need brick everywhere
Parking an issue for regattas, need shuttles, trolley, focus on walking
Bike paths and bike rentals
Food trucks in summer
Problem by restaurant – no clear walking path, reconnect

Commercial/Access:

Union St access – attractive / signage.
Increase activities, connect w/ YMCA
Face lift for businesses along Union Street
Small building used to be an Oyster Warehouse (should be preserved)

Recreation

Trail,
Picnic Area,
Foot bridge,
Fishing
Boating (various options)
Play

Cultural

Art Classes,
Yoga classes,
Outdoor performance space

Harbor Park

Recreation

Playground for younger kids with squirt fountain
Connect walking path
Giant chess
Table games – chess, dominoes, majong, cards
Informal game area for basketball, horseshoes, volleyball, skateboarding

Water uses

Boat rental
Dock for transient boats (by pavilion)
Teach kids how to build boats
Rowing for kids

Education

Educational boat - Tall ship or educational play boat with hands-on experience
maybe tied with Kid City pirate ship
Historic pictures of ocean trade on waterfront / rum trade: historic boats + rum +
pirates + fun event sponsored by Bacardi?
Historic re-enactment 17th-century village with help from the historical society

Commercial

Food concession at pavilion
Food truck with nice seating areas – tables, umbrellas, lights
Bike and game rentals at pavilion
Paddle boat rentals (?)
Vecchitto's in the park

Access

Improve walk - make it continuous multi-use trail that is not broken up to the bridge, Get people onto the bridge and over to Portland, walk to Portland was like a "right of passage"
Tunnel art: light projections, interactive motion activated rotating art, sound art, school art and mural projects
Provide access to Cromwell, to Wilcox Island, to Portland
Water taxis for access to Rushford Center area
Bike taxis/pedicabs
Sound and noise barrier between RT 9 and park for safety and noise pollution – plan trees as a buffer from the highway
Make it the great gateway to "one of 10 'last great places'" in Middletown

Community events

Crafts and arts fair (one step up from flea market)
Portable ice skating rink
Christmas light show (like Hubbard park in Hartford)
Boat parade
Laser show
Outdoor movies
Barge with music (floating stage)
Grade the slope from the highway in terraces for seating to view large events like 4th of July, the regatta, new events

Seasonal

Ice skating in Winter
Marshmallows with fire pits to roast them (portable)
Harvest festival in Fall
Connect to events on Main Street
extend events to water but improve Union Street for pedestrians
Christmas market
- Hot chocolate, hot cider
A beach with sand volleyball court and deck chairs/Adirondack chairs

LQC

Winter Festival - link to holiday on Main with marching band to ice rink

Middletown, Connecticut Riverfront

Focus Groups, July-August 2013

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

General

- The riverfront has been forgotten due to poor access, lack of visibility and not enough reasons to go there. Even Wesleyan students rarely go there, unless they are rowing. There is a big stigma and fear factor associated with the river that residents need to get over. It is used by many residents, however, who enjoy fishing there, or just sitting and enjoying the views of the river.
- Now there is a confluence of positive factors that make this a very good time to rethink Middletown's relationship to the river: decommissioning of the waste treatment plant, the CDOT changes to Route 9 and access roads, and the tunnel access has been improved.
- The riverfront should be a place for the entire community to go: "a warm place in the heart of Middletown."
- People need to become accustomed to going to the riverfront and looking at the river.
- Identity is very important; people identify themselves with where they live, with place. We have to come up with a unique identity for the riverfront.
- People like to go to the river because it is quiet and peaceful; we want to make sure to have quiet and peaceful areas
- We want to encourage a healthy lifestyle for youth
- If we are trying to attract families to the riverfront, it needs to feel safe
- Make it safe for the most vulnerable, like the elderly it will show everyone is safe
- The riverfront has to be closely linked to Main Street; it has to complete the downtown

Location

- The riverfront is centrally located, adjacent to a vibrant downtown with destination restaurants, a popular Farmers Market and downtown programs.
- To the south lies state land (Connecticut Valley Hospital). Most of the buildings close to the river are not in use. State has not determined future of site.
- Wilcox Island lies to the north (located in three towns): a footbridge connects to the Island from Middletown and, although it is in the flood plain, it could have more uses on it.
- The Sewage Treatment Plant is to be shut down and replaced by a new one in Cromwell. The plant has a great location on the river and would

be a great viewing place to see the lit-up bridge. The plant's buildings can be re-purposed.

- The former Peterson Industrial Site, a former oil storage facility, is available, owned by the city, and is next to the Sewage Treatment Plant.
- The Connecticut River is wider in this area and creates a cove area next to the Peterson site.
- The OMO and Jackson Corrugated sites (industrial sites) will be redeveloped and they are adjacent to the River Road.
- Middletown lies on a bend in the river (Mattabesett means bend in the river) which was an important site to Native Americans. It was also known as the Sleeping Giant, hence Sleeping Giant State Park. It has always been a good point to access the river.
- Sumner Brook creates a peninsula and a quieter area of water which could be cleaned up and dredged, and accessed from the OMO site.
- The area to be redeveloped offers many points with nice river views and good locations for views of the bridge.
- The City's well-heads and filtration plant are located along River Road. The City gets 70% of its water from this aquifer. River Road was closed to traffic after 2001 to protect the well-heads.
- Maromas Area zoned industrial

Connections

- Route 9.
 - The Riverfront is visible from Route 9, with easy access from the highway. However Route 9 blocks access from the downtown to the riverfront. It is both a physical and emotional boundary and has resulted in citizens of Middletown forgetting that they have a waterfront.
 - While there are one (two?) traffic signals on the stretch of Route 9 that goes through Middletown, this is the only section with signals. Route 9 is primarily a limited-access highway with fast-moving traffic and it often gets backed up in Middletown. CDOT has often discussed with Middletown how to remove the signals and speed up the traffic.
 - Lowering Route 9, or burying it, has been discussed, but is not feasible because of flooding and the expense.
 - Could Route 9 become a boulevard with on-grade access (for vehicles and pedestrians) to the riverfront? It has never been viewed as a destination and traffic flow has been viewed as more important than river access up until now.
- CDOT is working on a plan to improve the on-ramp of Route 17 onto Route 9. Currently, motorists must stop before entering traffic and many accidents occur because of the difficulty of entering the lane of moving traffic. New plans include improvements to Union Street, the underpass and the road access to the riverfront, as well as the removal of the on ramp in front of the Canoe Club.

- Tunnel. Access to the tunnel has been improved with the new ramp and provides direct access from the parking lot next to City Hall. Yet the tunnel is perceived as dark, unpleasant and smelly, and it is often locked when people want to use it.
- Access to the riverfront, whether by car, foot or bike, is not clear, especially from the downtown. The riverfront should be more pedestrian friendly.
- Rail Line:
 - The infrequently-used freight railroad line operated by the Valley Railroad that runs along the river is a great opportunity.
 - The Essex Steam Train, a tourist destination, could be extended to Middletown with a station in the downtown.
 - The right-of-way for the rail line is not wide enough to have both trains and a trail.
 - At-grade crossings are a safety issue.
- Access to Harbor Park is difficult because of the ramp onto Route 9.
- The north end of Middletown is cut off from the riverfront to an even greater extent than the downtown or the south side. This project should help to tie the various parts of the city together which are quite disjointed now.
- River Road is currently closed to traffic. There has been significant erosion of the edge of the road where it is close to the river. It could be reopened for bicycles and pedestrians only.
- City water wellheads near the intersection of Silver Street & River Road require that the area be off-limits.
- Glastonbury CT. features an historic ferry, which is the oldest continuously running ferry in the country. Has to be subsidized by the state, however.
- Parking:
 - Tourism is car-centered, so there has to be easy parking on the riverfront.
 - For large events, like the 4th of July and the Regattas, people could park in town and come by trolley. Everyone does not have to be accommodated on the riverfront.
 - A new parking structure is planned next near the courthouse and Riverview Plaza and could provide parking for the riverfront and especially for large events.
- The City is planning to build a new parking garage and it has the potential to be more than that: it could also anchor a bridge over Route 9
- Daily commuting on bikes is not popular (only about 1% of the population). It's not easy to get to downtown by bike.
- We need to think of the river as means of transportation again
- "Bring the river to the city, not the other way around." Sumner Brook could be restored and, with a walking trail, extend further into the city.
- Union Street can become a green artery, featuring way-finding signage, good sidewalks and bike lanes. It should be a welcoming gateway to the riverfront.

Community

- Middletown is 30% minority, with strong multi-cultural character and rich cultural history. The diversity of Middletown should be represented both in our community engagement efforts and in the activities planned for the waterfront.
- Lively arts and cultural scene.
- Current users of the riverfront include people who like to fish, kayak, or just sit quietly and enjoy the views of the river.
- Transients often camp by the river.
- There is an active senior population and a new senior housing development is opening not far from the riverfront. A Senior Center is only about 2 miles away.
- There are few events or programs on the riverfront now and no one feels a sense of ownership. The riverfront can be an opportunity for collaborations and partnerships.
- Community gathering spaces on the riverfront should be for all the people of Middletown
- Celebrate Middletown as a welcoming and open city, with a distinctive historical culture
- Provide low income urban kids an access to water, summer programs, swimming lessons
- Middletown tends to be politically divided and not always on the same page. Can we create a plan that appeals to everyone?

Existing or Former Events

Currently:

- 4th of July Celebration with fireworks launched from a barge in the river
- The Head of the Connecticut rowing regatta (did not take place this year) with up to 7000 people is second only in attendance to the Head of the Charles. Rowing Association needs more volunteers to carry it off successfully.
- Bass fishing tournament Sept 13, 4000~7000 participate
- Home-made raft race
- The Farmers Market at north end of downtown
- Oddfellows' Children's Circus brings out a 1000 people, but held in parking lot
- Midnight on Main: a First Night event for New Year's Eve
- Summer concert series on the South Green
- Senior picnic and boat ride

Formerly:

- Four Winds and Amistad (historic ships) docked in Middletown
- Big barge events with a stage and an orchestra

- Formerly was a carnival on the riverfront
- Walk Middletown Project
- Market that attracted 3,000- 4,000 people.
- African American arts festival

Historic

- The Middletown riverfront is an important heritage site that was once the largest maritime port in Connecticut and once had fourteen piers.
- Clipper ships were once built here, and that industry, along with the opium, agricultural and rum market made Middletown very wealthy. It also had a slave market.
- Industry once included ivory mills for piano keys, typewriters, bicycles.
- Middletown has always had large ethnic populations: Chinese, Hindu, Italian, Greek , etc. Many groups have been here since the 1600's.
- Middletown was always a place to go drinking, now it is a destination for food, the arts and education.
- The Riverfront Commission could co-sponsor historic walks with the Historical Society before the workshops.
- Trails along the river could have interpretive information about the history of the maritime sites.
- There are already old pylons in the river for a pier at the bottom of Ferry Street where the ferry came in.
- We need to preserve the footprints of the sewage treatment plant buildings.

Commercial Activity

- The Canoe Club is the only restaurant on the riverfront and it has an outdoor terrace overlooking the river and often features music. When the river floods the downstairs also floods. The city owns the property and the restaurant still has 22 years on its lease.
- The Jackson Corrugated site is out of the floodplain and has beautiful views. It would be a great site for a restaurant, a terrace, a plaza. A developer has an option to buy it to build residential.

Environment

- The OMO site is an EPA superfund site that has PCB's, but will get cleaned up in the next few years. The buildings can remain as they are because they are not in the contaminated area. The site is owned by a developer who would like to build a mix of uses there.
- The smell from the sewage treatment plant has discouraged activity in the area.

- Flooding is an issue because most of the site is in the 100 year flood plain. Flood water has come as far inland as Main Street in the past.
- There is great potential for ecological and sustainability programs on the riverfront.
- There should be a great celebration for the sewage plant decommissioning with environmental programming etc.
- Keep the public improvements close to nature, all outdoors
- Reclaim the brook and clean it up to create a friendly water area.
- The river's shoreline should be restored to reduce erosion and storm water run-off, provide habitat and improve water quality.
- The large, privately-owned wetland south of River Road has to be protected.
- There has been severe erosion of the shoreline in several places on River Road, including near Eastern Drive (where part of River Road was lost and where the Army Corps did stabilization in 1984) and at the well-heads, where DEEP and the River Steward are assisting the City.
- Middletown has acquired lots of property all over the city for open space.
- Federal Dept. Fish and Wildlife are interested in the project and could create an interpretive center.
- There is concern about the flood plain and especially with sea levels rising and increase in storm events.
- The lower section of the Connecticut River was named one of the 40 "last great places" by the Nature Conservancy because of the quality of its wildlife and wetlands.

Recreation

- Walking and Biking.
 - There are many trails for walking and biking in the area, but they don't connect and there are many dangerous intersections.
 - The riverfront could help to link the trails and bring attention to the hiking trail network.
 - The trail guide is being updated
- There is now no real park for events in Middletown or that would be good for kids.
- Hartford's Bushnell Park with the boathouse is desolate: it's a long stretch, nothing happens there except for fireworks and it's scary.
- The riverfront should focus on health and recreation with green trails.
- Sumner Brook can play an important role, with a recreational trail that leads all the way to Middlesex Hospital.
- Wilcox Island used to be a vibrant park, there's a footbridge leading there
- The existing rail is a 3% grade: one could easily bike all the way to Essex if there were a rail trail on it.

- River Road could be a fabulous trail and a loop if you can get the road open through NRG
- There should be a progression of destinations along the riverfront with different character
- Let people bring their dogs.
- There could be easy access to the Portland Brownstone Adventure Park by boat.

Water Recreation

- Rowing. Rowing has long been an important activity on the Middletown riverfront. The Wesleyan Boathouse is shared with the Dept. of Parks and Recreation rowing program, with about 50 participants, and the High School, with about 100 rowers, also has a boathouse. Other schools are interested in building boathouses for rowing programs in Middletown.
- The “Head of the Connecticut,” an annual regatta that was held for years at Harbor Park until recently, needs to be reorganized and safety needs to be foremost in its planning. It could leverage a number of other activities at the waterfront to accompany it, such as food and picnics, children’s and family activities.
- Small boat access:
 - A canoe and paddle boat rental fell through because the vendor couldn’t afford the insurance. The river here is too fast and strong.
 - Poor quality of the water prohibits swimming and sometimes boating.
 - People do swim in the river, but it’s not great for swimming due to the unpredictable character and the strong currents.
 - The navigational channel is narrow and is close to the Middletown side.
 - Sumner Brook could be accessed from the OMO Site for small boat launching.
 - The river is tidal which also makes boating more difficult.
 - Safety on the water is a huge issue when considering any boating programs.
- A marina in the river or in the brook would have to be dredged on a regular basis because of the silting.
- If boating activity increases, how do we pay for policing the river?
- Motorized boating, and especially the loud boats, can diminish the natural beauty plus very few of the prospective users have boats.
- In addition to expanding boating opportunities, there is a need for boat storage and an equipment maintenance area.
- Many Middletown residents would like to have a boat launch for motorized boats. Closest boat launches are in Haddam, Rocky Hill and East Hartford.

River Use and Marine Tourism

- There was interest in bringing a steamboat replica, called the Becky Thatcher, to Middletown but it fell through.
- Transient boaters will have the opportunity to dock in Harbor Park as the City is building a floating dock that will run parallel to the bulkhead.
- There was once a pier for a ferry at the base of Ferry Street, but now you don't have the depth for a pier there because of silting: the silt is very deep you sink up to your knees
- The bulkhead in Harbor Park is overdue for maintenance—there are some structural issues and it is difficult to tie up to it.
- The City is building a floating dock for transient boating parallel to the bulkhead.
- The Lady Catherine, a commercial river cruise boat for large groups, docks at Harbor Park. Booking cost is about \$5,000 per cruise.
- Private boat give rides from the Canoe Club's dock every weekend

Culture

- An arts showcase program was held at the river years ago.
- Arts commission has placed sculpture on the riverfront as part of a public art program.
- Great place for arts activities
- The Buttonwood Tree – a cultural arts and entertainment organization – has no home. The director, John Bell, would like to grow it and wants to do more fundraising.
- Performances and outdoor movies are not possible in Harbor Park because of noise from Route 9. Sound issues may not be an issue at the sewage treatment plant
- While many arts groups would love to have a Cultural Arts Center, they don't have the critical mass of arts organizations or the money yet for an arts center. "We don't want to build something we can't support."
- Need an outdoor performance venue - flexible, access to power and sound are important.
- Art-science collaboration – maybe one of the buildings is an incubator space for artists and makers and bio businesses
- Get a few artists at the table for these conversations.

Management

- Safety issues: Because of strong current, bend in the river, the river is unpredictable. There have been drowning when people have

attempted to swim. The marine patrol, operated by the Fire Department's Search and Rescue Patrol, that is docked now at Peterson Field is used mostly for large events and rowing competitions.

- No unity in management and authority. Who should manage it and how should this team should be formed?
- Provide infrastructure and utilities in place for large events and then other organizations can put on the events. "You provide the stage, others put on the play."
- This shouldn't be an inside job, experts and finances should be coming from the outside, e.g. state monies.
- Look for short-term ideas at the workshops that could start to happen right away.
- Bonding for capital projects is not a problem because Middletown is in good shape financially.

Coordination with Local Governments

- Middletown does not have the critical mass of people to make the waterfront work. It must be a regional destination.
- Middletown must work and coordinate with neighboring municipalities in planning its riverfront.
- Use the river and trails to connecting to other towns, historical areas and other destinations.
- Middletown has to take the lead, however, in planning its waterfront, creating its own brand and leading its own grass-roots effort.
- Connecticut Council of Governments (CCOG):
- The River COG is an official state agency that connects 17 towns along the Connecticut River.

Relationship to Wesleyan

- Wesleyan uses a lot of the river for education purposes, especially the environmental and geology (earth science) departments, can do more with better access
- Student activities, fairs, a park
- Parents come to see their kids in school. Need more places to go.

IDEAS

Connections

Route 9 Barrier

- History of Middletown is connected to the river. Route 9 highway cut it off, but people want better access and take advantage of the riverfront and reconnect to heritage
- Pedestrian bridge over Route 9 from the new parking garage near Riverview Plaza.
- Bury it or cover it over (flooding issue)
- Use bridge as an asset like the High Line

Public Transportation

- Free community transit buses, south to north connection.
- Reroute existing public bus line to the riverfront. Introduce electric buses.
- Passenger train on the old railroad tracks, either an extension of the Essex Steam Train or a future commuter line along the CT river. The location for a train stop exists by the Portland Bridge, but could be much closer to downtown.

Trails

- A multi-use trail all the way along the riverfront or a circular route around the riverfront for walking, jogging and biking. Exercise stations along trail.
- Bike path that riders could bike down and return by train or ferry. (Essex Steam Train)
- 20 mile bike loop around the city that includes the riverfront and could connect to the Mattabesset Trail, Randolph Road and the Middlesex Community College.
- Connect bike trails to Wesleyan Hills trail, South Farm area trails and West Lake Trail which are all frequently used.
- Recreational biking route towards Maranus State Park
- Union Street could be a walking, biking and jogging street with a uniform lighting bringing people to the waterfront
- A nature trail along Sumner Brook could connect to Middlesex Hospital.

Connection to Downtown

- A trolley to bring people from the parking lots in the downtown to limit the parking on the waterfront. Could be hop-on/ hop-off. The trolley barn still exists and could become a trolley barn again. We could dig up the trolley track on Main Street or could be rubber wheeled. Try the trolley as an experiment around the events for the 4th of July.
- Dig out Ferry Street and make a canal up to Main Street
- Can have a progression with the river coming up to Main Street
- Light rail from Main Street to the riverfront
- Improve Union Street as bike and pedestrian corridor, and reduce it to 2 lanes.

Connection to Wesleyan

- Wesleyan would like to address Williams street as a problem but also create a connection
- A cable car from the river up to Wesleyan

Environment

- Nature Center: a high/low-tech facility for environmental education
- The science barge (like the one on the Hudson River) on the CT River
- Winter: people can watch the herds of deer cross the frozen river – wild nature observation decks?
- Demonstration gardens with youth involvement.
- Create a more natural shoreline on the CT River: rather than bulkhead and riprap, could armor it and replant.
- Restore the habitat and vegetation along Sumner Brook. Maintain the vegetative buffers but get rid of invasive plants. The Connecticut Botanical Society could help with this effort. It could “botanize” the area.
- A thorough Natural Resource Inventory is needed along the riverfront and Sumner Brook.
- Restore the wetland and use for educational opportunities. (Should city acquire it?)
- There is interest in gardening, and community gardens student garden produce is sold at the farmers market in summer, and goes into the dining hall during the school year.
- Decrease impervious surfaces and control run-off.
- Take students out onto the river to explore the wildlife.

Recreation

Children:

- Spray fountain
- Playground with a river theme - water play
- Access for disabled kids
- Summer camp for kids
- Youth programming could be oriented to arts and culture
- Kite flying
- Day camp (e.g. Camp Ingersoll in Portland)

Sports:

- Climbing walls
- Volleyball
- Skateboarding, maybe junior
- Baseball, basketball, football, soccer
- Kite flying
- Tai chi on a pier

- Bocce & miniature golf on the river
- Biking trail can be continuous all along the river with a change to boats or steam train
- Golf course at CVH

Tourist infrastructure:

- Tourist information point
- Funky little tourist map
- Tourist triathlon, multiple experience for people

Amenities:

- Picnic areas
- Promenade along the river
- Improve lighting (soften the lighting on the boardwalk at night)
- Ferris wheel
- Recreational pier
- A nice bathroom facility; replace the old one
- Nicer trash cans
- Improve restrooms
- More seating
- Wifi
- Fountain
- Flower garden
- Light the Ariggoni Bridge
- Dog Park
- Water sculpture (Singapore)
- Ferris Wheel

Winter ideas

- Indoor activities
- Ice-skating rink
- Cross-country skiing trails
- Snow shoeing along the water

River Use

Boating:

- A barge/ floating building/ pontoon boat
- Barge cafes
- Marine tourism
- Tour boat
- Paddle boats
- Kayaks and canoes
- Jet skis
- Historic ships for excursions

- Cruise all night on the riverfront
- Boat rental
- Docking space/ Floating docks
- Boat launches – for motorized boats and non-motorized boats
- A new, good sized community boathouse – large, with banquet facilities. There are at least four crews already there and could have more.
- Marina located on river or in a cove created in Sumner Brook
- Seaport-type idea – tall ships, have the Amistad come back
- There could be boat access to the Brownstone Adventure Park from the Middletown waterfront
- Need boat storage

Water Recreation:

- Beach
- Swimming area near the south end, or where Sumner Brook comes out
- Outdoor pool or floating pool
- Pier with a cover with swings (e.g. Charleston Pier)
- Harbor district with its own personality, separate but connected to the main street
- Fishing area or pier.
- Sponsor more activities to tie into the Bass Tournament and hold more fishing events
- Get the regatta back up and running and offer more activities that tie into the downtown
- Beach for a variety of uses

Cultural Uses

- Public library in the park
- Cultural Center that is open to the river with lots of different programs– theater, HS plays, library programs for older kids in the summer (e.g. backyard scientist program at the river as opposed to the library courtyard.)
- Piazza for community gatherings

Events:

- Smaller events there – art and food festivals, water fire, etc.
- Outdoor movies
- Outdoor music
- Outdoor circus
- Folk festival
- Outdoor theater program
- Shakespeare at the Riverfront instead of in the park
- More events for seniors (and improve access for seniors)

Amenities:

- A music shell
- Seating for the fireworks
- Stadium seating, bleachers for people to watch the races
- Amphitheater

Art:

- An art center on the river with indoor gallery space, a plaza and performance space for 300 seats
- An arts and crafts fair on the water at Harbor Park
- Water-themed art
- Projection art
- Sidewalk art festival
- Performing arts center – a signature, eco-friendly building

Historic

- History info about Middletown, the frigates, the first settlers, the Native Americans
- The riverfront's heritage should be celebrated with a museum or make it a docking point for historic ships, as in Mystic and Essex. Could look at whole region.
- The museum could be incorporated into a civic or cultural center with the library. Historical society could also use more exhibit space, some of the art in city hall is very valuable

Commercial

- Food retail
- Food trucks
- Food truck rallies
- Old style taffy, ice cream on the boardwalk
- Farmers market
- A beer garden with mostly outdoor seating
- Vendors selling flags, balloons
- Vendors renting canoes or paddle boats
- Maybe put a bigger pavilion for the vendors, although that can be risky.
- Plaza with vendors and activities, near the Canoe Club, start at Harbor Park and lead the way south
- Food vendors – get them in for the big events and then have them stay on a regular basis
- Agricultural area

Development

- Housing on the OMO site, and on the Jackson corrugated Industrial
- Incubator space for artists, makers, artisans

Economic Development Opportunities

- Use trails as economic development catalyst. Many examples of towns that attract tourists to ride or walk trails and also stop to shop and dine.
- Promote tourism; provide tourist information
- Go after more grants
- Downtown: for every \$1 spent by people from Middletown, \$3 are spent by people from outside

Examples

- Guilford Art Center and art fair
- Providence riverfront
- Paris Plage
- Portland OR interactive fountains
- Portsmouth, NH
- Brownstone Park in Portland: adventure and water park
- Zip lines: Monkey Trunks in New Hampshire and Hillsdale NY, Tree Tops
- Charleston, SC riverfront – has a great splash fountain for kids
- New Haven beach area
- Brooklyn Flea
- Tai Chi lessons from Friends of the Hammanshasset Park
- Bangor, Maine festival
- Pontoon boat in Essex is their eco-museum
- The Frying Pan, bar and café on a boat in the Hudson River
- Parks along the Rhine River in Germany
- Pontoon boat at Essex gives eco-tours
- Stanley Park in Vancouver
- Boathouse on Hartford riverfront
- Pedestrian bridge across river in Omaha
- Worcester, MA Quinsigmett
- High Line

Information

- Wilcox Island used to have an amusement park back in the day
- Wilcox Island used to be a center of activity – always flooded, but there were boats to take people there and a suspended bridge
- Carousel could only be movable, because of flooding

Possible partners

- Wesleyan University
- Wesleyan Student committee
- Middlesex Community college

- Mercy High School : explore science programming on the river if there is a place to bring the HS kids to, would love to partner with the colleges to help run the programs
- YMCA
- Portland
- Canoe Club
- The Chamber of Commerce

