

**Exhibit F. Neighborhood Strategy**

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ExhFNeighborhoodStrategy.pdf

## **EXHIBIT F-Neighborhood Strategy**

**F.1 Overall Neighborhood Transformation Strategy** will improve downtown Meriden and make Meriden's Transit Oriented District a safe, pedestrian friendly neighborhood of choice with connectivity to recreation, employment and education opportunities. The overall Neighborhood Transformation Strategy will address key challenges and needs in the neighborhood previously identified in the Transformation Plan, fully leverage ongoing projects and include specific, measurable outcomes.

Choice Neighborhood (CN) Transformation Plan has several key components aimed at improving quality of life in downtown Meriden. The key tenets of the plan include: improving the transportation system, expanding open space and recreational activities, implementing projects for downtown beautification, providing resources to residents and business owners looking to improve their property and/or to expand their small business, updating housing stock and commercial real estate, and expanding internet access in order to improve quality of live and enhancing economic opportunities.

**Transportation:** The Transformation Plan identified major deficiencies in the downtown roadway system that impede access to public transit and make traveling around the CN unsafe. The overall Neighborhood Transformation Strategy seeks to implement key roadway and sidewalk improvement projects to increase transit ridership, improve pedestrian safety, and provide safe and affordable transportation options in the CN. This includes implementing wayfinding signage and implementing \$6.7 million in key roadway, sidewalk and bicycle improvements in the CN. The improvements will address deficiencies of a poorly designed and outdated transportation system, increase access to the new commuter rail station scheduled to open in 2018, improve walkability, and change the perception of the neighborhood as one that is

in disrepair and unsafe. Projects to be completed include sidewalk improvement on West Main and Colony Street, construction of a bikeway and boulevard on Pratt Street, signal and crosswalk improvements at eight key intersections in the CN, and wayfinding signage.

**Expand Open Space and Recreation:** Meriden also has a comprehensive plan to improve Harbor Brook and create a 3.5 mile recreational trail system that bisects Meriden through the CN. The expansion of open space and the remediation of former brownfield sites will improve quality of life, increase access to public open space and decrease exposure to environmental contamination. The overall Neighborhood Transformation Strategy will restore Harbor Brook at the Mills housing complex following demolition and expand the Meriden Green at the site. (\$2 million for the demolition of the Mills and \$250,000 in post-demolition site remediation has been included in the Housing Plan.) The City has established a park maintenance fund will be funded by proceeds from the transfer of development rights of City owned properties in the CN, including 11 Crown Street and the three acres at the Meriden Green.

**Downtown beautification, brownfield remediation and blight removal:** A CN is a safe, lively and healthy neighborhood. Ongoing efforts have included; 1) Brownfield remediation and blight removal: from community cleanup days to the redevelopment of abandoned properties including the former Meriden Wallingford Hospital at 1 King Place, the removal of blight throughout the neighborhood is a key community concern; 2) Community art and façade improvement: a community goal is to support artists and building owners throughout downtown in their efforts to install creative art and murals on vacant spaces; 3) “Adopt a Garbage Can” and "Adopt a Planter": business and property owners have agreed to “adopt” a garbage can or planter box for placement near their property and will be responsible maintaining it throughout the year; 4)

community events Meriden Green including live music at the amphitheater and the Meriden Farmer's Market will help encourage people throughout the community to come downtown.

**Small business development:** A CN needs thriving businesses that provide jobs and services for residents both inside and outside of the CN. The overall Neighborhood Transformation Strategy seeks to foster mixed use development and small business start-up and growth while preserving community assets including the preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures. Increased mixed use development and small business startup and growth in the TOD will help blunt the negative economic and social factors present in the downtown area. The City recently worked with developers, local property owners and retailers to develop a commercial market analysis and plan for the TOD district using a \$100,000 grant from CT DECD. The plan outlines a vision for attracting new retail, arts and cultural institutions to downtown Meriden and the action steps to implement this vision. The plan also focuses on specific goals and strategies aimed at attracting a mix of commercial, retail and art related uses for up to 35,000 sf of new, rentable space included in the CN Housing plan. Small business technical support is provided by the City Department of Economic Development, the Small Business Development Center, the Midstate Chamber of Commerce and the Meriden Economic Development Corporation.

**Upgrade older housing stock and commercial real estate so that new residents and businesses have a place to call home in the CN:** A CN has a mix of residential and commercial structures that are well maintained and safe. Therefore, a key component of the overall Neighborhood Transformation Strategy is to ensure that code violations are addressed, buildings are safe and homeowners and business owners have the resources they need to maintain their properties and reside in the CN. Under the CN Implementation plan, the City will expand the City's Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP), Housing Code Enforcement

program, the InnerCity Sidewalk Program, and Meriden Match Program. These programs provide resources to assist homeowners and business owners to bring their properties up to code and restore their properties and reduce costs of owning a home or owning a business in the CN.

**Bridging the digital divide:** A CN is one where residents have access to high speed, affordable internet service to access educational and economic gateways, health information and improved quality of life. The Meriden Housing Authority (MHA) in collaboration with the City and other local stakeholders, is participating in the HUD ConnectHome Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to open the door to internet access for all those who live or work in the city center. A key goal of this effort is to have free or reduced cost Wi-Fi at all CN supporting Housing developments and to have free Wi-Fi service at the Meriden Green and Meriden Transit Center. The Beat the Street Community Center, Meriden Boys and Girls Club, Meriden Public Library, and Meriden Children First provide access to computer centers, computers and training for children, youth and adults.

## **F.2 CCI Plan**

Neighborhood Transformation Strategy 1 & CCI Project #1: Implementation of the TOD Roadway Improvements and Wayfinding Signage in the CN.

\$6.4 million in local, state and federal programs are available for roadway improvement projects in the CN. As the roadway system changes, new sidewalks and public transit service is available, and as pedestrian travel increases in the CN, wayfinding signage is key to helping current and new residents navigate through their neighborhood. Wayfinding signage that incorporates the new transportation and traffic improvements is a key component of helping residents learn their surrounding and their environment, including where key buildings, public transit, public open space, and parking areas are located. The City will allocate \$60,000 in

CN/CCI funds to implement the wayfinding and signage component of the TOD Multimodal Improvement Plan. The project will finalize and install the signage recommended in the TOD Multimodal Roadway Improvement Plan (Summary available at <http://www.meriden2020.com/FileRepository/DownloadFile.aspx?FileID=10>), helping residents to navigate the local roadway network and take the most expedient routes to key locations. The project will reinforce the Housing component of the Transformation Plan by providing pedestrians and bicycles clear and safe routes from new and existing housing developments to transit and will promote the People plan by promoting healthy habits including increased walking and improved public safety by clearly making safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists. By establishing clear routes, the perception of safety and the number of “feet on the street” along well traveled routes should improve.

**CCI #1 Outcomes:** Installation of 10 Wayfinding signs in CN neighborhoods in accordance with recommendations of TOD Roadway Improvement Plan within five years.

Budget

Strategy	Description	CCI Plan	CCI Budget	Funds Leveraged
CCI #1	TOD Multi Modal Improvement	Wayfinding to reflect improvement to sidewalk and roadway network in CN.	\$60,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$2.8 million City</li> <li>• \$3.2 million City</li> <li>• \$870,000 CT</li> </ul>

Neighborhood Transformation Strategy/CCI # 2: Incentives for Commercial and Retail

Development in the CN, including "Meriden Match" Façade Improvement program and Gap financing for the fit out of commercial spaces and adaptive reuse of historic properties..

Prior studies and analysis including the CN Transformation Plan, a Market Analysis completed in 2017 (Attachment 32), and a year-long planning effort working with the CT Main Street Center/Come Home to Downtown Program, as well as follow up meetings with lending institutions, property appraisers, property owners, and others, confirmed that commercial façade improvement, adaptive reuse projects and the renovation of existing structures and commercial fit out, particularly for start-ups, are difficult to finance. This is due to the fact that rental rates in the CN are much lower compared to rental rates outside the CN and in the region as a whole. Further, construction and adaptive reuse costs are high and cannot be justified given current market rates and reasonable return on investment scenarios. At the same time, the lease up of first floor commercial space in the new mixed use developments and implementation of adaptive reuse projects in downtown Meriden are key goals and an important part of the downtown transformation. In 2013, the City adopted a TOD zoning ordinance requiring commercial uses on the first floor of new developments. The first major project governed by the new TOD zoning regulation was the 24 Colony Street mixed use development that includes 63 residential units and 11,000 sf of commercial retail space on the first floor. The second major project scheduled for Meriden Commons 1, located at 161-177 State Street, a 2016 LIHTC recipient that will include 75 rental units and 5,500 square feet of retail space. In total, the new developments will add 20,000 square feet of commercial/retail space to downtown, which already has over 1 million square feet of retail space, over one quarter of which vacant and in disrepair according to prior City studies.

Proactive public-private partnerships are essential attracting new business to the new and existing commercial space inside the CN. Without financial incentives, it is unlikely that new commercial space and vacant historic buildings located in the TOD District will lease up until

property values and rental rates increase significantly (more than two fold). Therefore the CN Neighborhood Strategy and CCI #2 proposes a two-fold project to expand an existing program for commercial façade improvements in the CN target area and create a second program that provides fit out costs for larger commercial spaces in both new and existing structures. The funds will be used to incentivize new business development throughout the CN.

CCI 2.1: Expansion of the "Meriden Match" program.

In 2017, the City of Meriden launched its "Meriden Match" program, a forgivable loan program being administered by the City using Community Development Block Grant funds. Funds are available on a competitive basis to small, minority and women-owned businesses and property owners located within the CN via forgivable loan fund to be administered by the project partners, including the City, Meriden Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO), Connecticut Small Business Development Center, and Midstate Chamber of Commerce. Forgivable loans will be available for activities related to the improvement of commercial structures and businesses, such as: 1) Façade improvements including street-facing building elevation; 2) Improvements to building signage; and 3) Replacement or renovation of existing windows, storefront or other building glazing, and other activities. The project partners have developed the loan application process, will select loan applicants and provide pre-loan technical assistance. Small businesses will participate by: 1) Verifying that they are a small, minority or women owned business located in the CN; 2) Providing a general description of the proposed project and written justification of the funds requested (\$20,000 per project); 3) Work with City to meet federal procurement requirements and by providing at least three estimates from licensed contractors or general contractor including breakdown of all costs including labor, materials, permit fees, etc. to complete project improvements; 4) Provide a project schedule; 5) Provide verification from the



City that the business or property owner is up-to-date on all taxes, liens or other outstanding amounts; 6) Complete a loan application; and 7) Implement the proposed improvements in accordance with all federal requirements (procurement, environmental reviews, and labor requirements). The project will help reinforce the Housing plan by improving the quality of life in downtown Meriden for residents and visitors alike. A façade improvement program will help small business growth and employment in the CN area, and improving the worn and tired storefronts will improve the quality of life in downtown Meriden, encourage foot traffic can make the downtown storefronts appear safe and appealing. Meriden seeks \$750,000 in CN funds to implement this program over five years.

CCI 2.2: Gap Financing for Economic Development Project in CN, including fit out costs for new businesses.

The project will assist commercial property owners seeking to renovate and lease vacant commercial space to new businesses while downtown is in the early stages of its projected transformation. Meriden seeks \$1,600,000 in CN funding to fit out commercial spaces and adaptively reuse historic properties in the TOD. A competitive application process will be established with a maximum of \$250,000 per project. One such project that could take advantage of this funding program is the 21 Colony Street mixed used development project. The City is currently working with the Connecticut Main Street Center and the Local Initiative Support Corporation to plan for the reuse of 21 Colony Street located in the heart of the TOD District. The plan includes converting an underutilized, vacant, historic structure to a mixed use residential/commercial development site. 21 Colony Street is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource to the Colony Street/West Main Street National Historic District. The building was converted to commercial use in the 1920's and is currently

vacant. The project will result in the first of its kind in Meriden public private partnership to adaptively reuse a vacant, historic building in the TOD District that leverages private funds, historic tax credits, and market rate and affordable housing. The project could be a model for other property owners throughout the City and along the Hartford rail line. 70 property owners along West Main and Colony Streets have been identified that could participate in either CCI 2.1 or CCI 2.2 over five years.

Budget

Strategy	Description	CCI Plan	CCI Budget	Funds Leveraged
CCI #2.1 & 2.2	TOD Development	Gap Financing for Econ Dev projects, Façade Improvement	\$1,435,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$50,000 MEDCO</li> <li>• \$150,000 City CDBG "Meriden Match" FY 2017</li> <li>• \$1.5 million CDBG resources over 5 years</li> </ul>

**CCI #2 Outcomes:** Four new businesses to fill out significant vacant spaces in downtown (4 projects over five years at maximum \$250,000 per project and project administration) and Improve 20 commercial facades in the CN over five years (20 projects at \$20,000 per project and project administration).

Neighborhood Transformation Strategy/CCI #3: Downtown Beautification and Blight Removal. CCI #3 builds on prior efforts by expanding the downtown beautification and blight removal activities in the CN over five years. First, the CCI#3 will support the development of a

comprehensive downtown arts program that provides funding to local artists to place art in public spaces throughout the CN area and to develop an arts and music plan for the Meriden Green.

The project also will recommend a long term management and operating plan and identify an organization that can continue to fund, manage and implement community arts programming in the CN area and at the new Meriden Green well after the grant funds are utilized. The plan will be developed in collaboration with the Meriden arts community. The project will also expand the adopt a garbage can, adopt a planter, and community arts programming by providing additional funds to small businesses, nonprofit organizations and arts groups to implement additional downtown beautification projects totaling \$50,000 per year over a five year period . The City will engage the arts community in this process by establishing an advisory committee comprised of individuals from the Meriden arts community that will participate in the development of the plan. Further, the City will find opportunities for public art displays and music events at the new park and amphitheater at the Meriden Green. Proposals for downtown beautification projects will be coordinated by the City in accordance with all applicable federal requirements. The goal of the project is to encourage Meriden residents from a variety of economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds to come to downtown Meriden and take part in the redevelopment of downtown through their participation in arts, cultural and community events designed for all.

The City will also continue its Anti-Blight efforts by completing brownfield remediation at the former Meriden-Wallingford hospital site with a \$2 million grant provided by the CT Department of Economic and Community Development and by completing community wide brownfield planning and assessments under a FY 2015 USEPA Brownfield Assessment grant. Activities will be coordinated with the City's Blight and Brownfields Committee, formed to 2002 to actively engage with CN residents about anti-blight and brownfield remediation activities in

the community (see the City's blight and brownfields webpage for more information at <http://www.meridenbiz.com/brownfields/blight-and-brownfields-committee/>). The project will reinforce the Housing component of the Transformation Plan by improving the quality of life in downtown Meriden for residents and visitors alike. The project will enhance the neighborhood by enlivening vacant and blighted spaces with community art and commercial activity, thereby attracting private investment and increasing economic competitiveness of the CN.

**Budget**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>CCI Plan</b>	<b>CCI Budget</b>	<b>Funds Leveraged</b>
<b>CCI #3</b>	Downtown Beautification and blight removal	Community Arts, 1 King Pl cleanup	\$250,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$100,000 USEPA Brownfields Assessment</li> <li>• \$2 million 1 King Pl cleanup DECD.</li> <li>• \$1.25 million to park maintenance fund from development at Meriden Green</li> <li>• \$495,000 to park maintenance fund from development at 11 Crown St.</li> </ul>

**CCI #3 Outcomes:** 5 community arts projects (5 projects per year at \$10,000 per year and project administration), including the completion of a community arts plan for the CN.

Neighborhood Transformation Strategy/CCI #4: Improve Housing Stock and Reduce Cost to Homeowners through NPP, Sidewalk Improvement Programs (CDBG).

The City has in place a housing rehabilitation program that uses CDBG funds to rehabilitate single and multi-family housing units in specific low income target. The objective of the Meriden Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) is the recovery of the downtown neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation. Using a portion of its CDBG funds and CCI funds, the City will provide below market interest rate loans to low and moderate income property owners (living within designated “Neighborhood Strategy Areas”) for housing rehabilitation. A CCI allocation of \$900,000 will allow the City to complete approximately 35 loans to low and moderate income residents over five years. The project will reinforce the Housing component of the Neighborhood Transformation Plan by improving the quality of life in downtown Meriden for residents by reducing the cost of home ownership through the placement of low cost loans to assist with home repairs and maintenance. The project will enhance the neighborhood by improving existing structures and bring them to par with the new construction planned. The project will help the neighborhoods appear safe and appealing and has the potential to increase home values in the CN.

Budget

Strategy	Description	CCI Plan	CCI Budget	Funds Leveraged
CCI #4	Repair and Maintain existing housing stock	NPP	\$900,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$240,000 CDBG 2017</li> </ul>

**CCI #4 Outcomes:** 35 Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) low-mod income home improvement loans in CN over five years (\$25,000 per project) and project administration.

**Neighborhood Transformation Strategy/CCI #5:** Narrow the digital divide in our community by installing free Wi-Fi in downtown, including at the new Meriden Green and Meriden Transit Center.

The City and MHA are committed to narrowing the broadband digital divide in our community, including: 1) documenting and submitting data on existing gaps in broadband connectivity within the distinct neighborhoods and demographic groups of Meriden; 2) participating in future stakeholder conversations; and 3) identifying opportunities to increase free or reduced Wi-Fi service in new housing development projects and in public spaces. CCI funds will be used to add free Wi-Fi to the Meriden Green and Transit Center area. We are requesting \$40,000 in federal funds that will leverage prior Neighborhood Investments, including the \$14 million Meriden Green and \$20 million Meriden Transit Center. The project will reinforce the Housing component of the Neighborhood Transformation Plan by providing opportunities for residents to link to the internet for information about jobs, transportation and education. The project will enhance the neighborhood, improve the quality of life and increase economic opportunities for CN residents.

Budget

Strategy	Description	CCI Plan	CCI Budget	Funds Leveraged
CCI#5	Bridge the Digital Divide	Wi-Fi downtown and at MTC	\$45,000	Meriden Green and Meriden Transit Center construction

**CCI #5 Outcomes:** Free Wi-fi installed and operational at Meriden Green and Meriden Transit Center by year 5.

TOTAL CCI Budget = \$2,690,000

CCI Leverage Resources = \$4,235,000

### **F.3 Public Safety**

Since its inception in 2004, Meriden's community policing initiative – known as the Neighborhood Initiative Unit (“NIU”) – has grown to include 12 officers. The NIU was revived in 2004 to address increased crime and gang activity, particularly in the downtown neighborhoods. Effective, results-oriented community policing is built into the core mission of the Meriden Police Department:

*The mission of the Meriden Police Department is to protect life, safeguard property, and enforce the law in an ethical, compassionate, and constitutional manner while providing community-based, problem-solving police services in an effort to reduce crime, the fear of crime, and enhance the quality of life for all citizens.*

The NIU has adopted a variety of crime prevention measures including increased foot, bicycle and vehicular street patrols, enforcement of criminal statutes, attention to quality of life crimes, and enforcement of motor vehicle violations, that resulted in a 33 % decline in Part I Violent Crimes from 2004 to 2014. The Part I violent crime rate for the area within the Meriden CN boundary is on average 1.9 times higher than the City-wide average for the past three years.

Part I Crime data from 2014 to 2016 is as follows:

<b>PART I VIOLENT CRIME</b>	<b>2014</b>		<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>	
	City	CNI Area	City	CNI Area	City	CNI Area
<b>Aggravated Assault</b>	77	40	59	43	93	34
<b>Homicide</b>	0	0	1	1	2	2

<b>PART I VIOLENT CRIME</b>	2014		2015		2016	
<b>Sexual Assault</b>	136	8	118	43	161	70
<b>Robbery</b>	72	32	94	41	52	35
<b>TOTAL CRIMES</b>	285	80	272	128	308	141
<b>POPULATION</b>	60,868	12,720	60,868	12,720	60,868	12,720
<b>CRIME PER 1,000 residents</b>	4.682263	6.289308	4.468686	10.06289	5.060130	11.08491
<b>CNI = X TIMES CITY</b>	1.34		2.25		2.19	

Additionally, the Meriden Police Department employs the following evidenced-based and predictive policing efforts that utilize data collection and crime mapping to reduce crime in targeted neighborhoods:

- Methods of predicting crime – through the use of “hot spot” mapping, crime analysis, compstat, data mapping, and crime mapping.
- Methods of predicting offenders – through the use of intelligence collected by uniformed and non-uniformed officers, and information provided by probation and parole offices and information collected through the neighborhood contacts. This information can be compiled and reviewed, allowing preventative measures and programs to deter the behavior.
- Methods of predicting perpetrator identities – through the use of arrest histories and crime data, criminal recidivist behaviors can be predicted and hopefully deterred.



- Methods for predicting victims of crime – through the use of information sharing and intelligence gathering, the Meriden Police Department can use the information collected to offer crime prevention techniques to potential victims

The needs assessment conducted during the CNs Transformation planning process revealed that the desires of the community track nearly identically with the police department’s NIU strategy for downtown community policing and public safety: 1) Safety issues are a primary reason for not living downtown; 2) More police presence needed; and 3) Partnerships are key – City should work together with businesses. The CN Implementation grant will continue these strategies with a goal to make the CN area safe for its residents.

### **F.3.1 Public Safety Strategy**

The CN Transformation Plan outlines several goals and strategies related to making downtown Meriden safe for residents. The following public safety strategies will directly impact making the neighborhood feel and be safe for downtown residents and strengthening the relationship between community and police:

- Organize a team of highly respected neighborhood ambassadors to engage the police more meaningfully, facilitated by an outside consultant.
- Leverage existing programs that support positive community-police relations.
- C4R (Cops, Clergy and Community) Program in the CN.
- Increase funding for the City’s Youth Service Bureau’s Juvenile Assistance & Diversion Board (JAD)

These strategies will be continued during the five year CN Implementation Grant. Together with the Meriden Council of Neighborhoods, the Meriden Police Department will forge partnerships with community groups, business interests, other law enforcement professionals, and local

government entities that have had a measurable impact on violent crime reduction. Recognizing the need for effective communication with the community it serves, the police department and NIU conduct regular community outreach designed to educate residents and business owners about crime prevention techniques. The department maintains two websites and a Facebook page intended to engage the community. The Council of Neighborhoods is a valuable partner in efforts to reduce crime, as it connects the police department to community leaders and provides an additional avenue to disseminate information, meeting notices and important news.

In addition to an increased crime prevention presence in targeted neighborhoods, the NIU and police department run programming to promote community-centered relationships and foster a sense of trust with the neighborhoods they patrol. The NIU coordinates and participates in neighborhood watch programs, bicycle registration programs, business security assessments, child safety programs, closed home/business check programs, an annual turkey drive, an annual toy drive, and an annual coat drive, among other initiatives.

The Meriden Police Department, including the NIU and Major Crime Intelligence Unit, recently convened a meeting of law enforcement agencies to address a recent uptick in gang-related activity and Part I Violent Crimes. Representatives from the CT State Police, Drug Enforcement Agency, FBI, Department of Justice, Department of Corrections, Middletown Police Department, New Britain Police Department, and New Haven Police Department, among others, met to proactively coordinate gang issues and share information and intelligence. NIU officers, including School Resource Officers tasked with patrolling the City's public schools, also attended a recent gang training course at the Police Academy in order to better identify possible gang activity as they encounter it in the field. Additional public safety strategies targeted at gangs and Part I Violent Crimes include informative partnerships with the Meriden Board of

Education, the local Boy's and Girl's Club, Beat the Street Boxing Club, YMCA, Westfield Mall security staff, and Mid-State Medical Center to help identify potential gang members, as well as the re-establishment of the Citizen's Police Academy. Citizen's Police Academies have been successful in numerous large cities and allow the Meriden Police Department an opportunity to provide information about the Police Department in addition to serving as a possible recruitment tool to encourage Meriden residents to pursue a career in law enforcement and public safety. Partners in our ongoing public safety strategies include the State police, DEA, State Attorney's office, probation/parole/corrections, MHA (regarding improper use of Section 8 certificates), City Housing/health/building/fire marshal offices, C4R participants, and the Meriden Council of Neighborhoods.