

# Meriden, CT Blight and Brownfields Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative



## Neighborhood Meetings Summary Report

FINAL REPORT

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Prepared for:

City of Meriden  
Brownfields Program

Prepared by:



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#### Executive Summary

In 2009, the City of Meriden, CT received a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Assessment Grant. With the support of this grant, the City of Meriden and the Blight and Brownfields Committee devised a strategy to reach out to the neighborhoods surrounding the brownfields projects that had been the focus over four years of efforts- the Factory H area and the HUB site. Both projects are under revitalization with housing, open space and commercial development planned for the Factory H area and a new multi-modal transportation center and transit-oriented development planned for the former HUB site. This entire area is also subject to flood mitigation, a long-term project in Meriden to eliminate flooding that had decimated the downtown.

In an effort to reach out to the downtown urban neighborhoods, Meriden conducted a series of six neighborhood meetings which focused on issues related to brownfields and public health. Meriden has a long history of industrial development and subsequent environmental contamination. Capitalizing on the work of the City's active Brownfields and Blight Committee, the neighborhood meetings aimed to solicit citizen input on current conditions within the City in order to provide guidance on improving citizen health, through environmental cleanup, education and access to healthier choices while strengthening the neighborhoods.

The six neighborhood meetings, held in May and June 2010, solicited broad citizen input on four main topics that are part of a healthy and sustainable neighborhood:

- Environmental Conditions
- Economic Conditions
- Safety Conditions
- Health Conditions

The City and the Blight and Brownfields Committee worked in partnership with the Neighborhood Councils, the Meriden Chamber of Commerce and the Meriden Family Zone to reach out to residents and obtain their input on these key issues.

Some of the issues identified by residents and businesses were:

- Blight and brownfields
- Vacant Lots and foreclosed housing
- Waste management

- Transportation
- Storm water and flooding
- Absentee landlords
- Safety
- Communication of city policies and resources

Throughout the meetings, residents focused on the changing demographics of Meriden and current economic conditions. Communication among and between residents, landlords, the City, and businesses was identified as a key issue

The information collected during these meetings is summarized in the following report. The report provides future actions to capitalize on the momentum developed from these meetings.

While consultation will continue, the partners believe this first step accomplished the goal of incorporating residents into the revitalization process spearheaded through the brownfields redevelopment projects. Action items include:

- Targeting grants for further planning and revitalization efforts between the Factory H area and the HUB TOD site with the goal of incorporating the neighborhoods in the process. Grant applications to date include the 2010 USEPA Area-wide Planning grant and the 2010 USEPA Brownfields Grant.
- Working with the Neighborhood Councils and Connecticut Economic Development Fund to target key investments to improve the neighborhoods.
- Establishing the [www.localsynergy.net/meriden](http://www.localsynergy.net/meriden) portal where resources and information regarding the brownfields and neighborhood revitalization process will be communicated on an ongoing basis. As this is a multi-year process, the portal will serve as a repository of activities over the years. The portal is set up so it can be managed by the Blight and Brownfields Committee.
- Focusing on the Meriden Family Zone for additional workshops on specific issues in the neighborhood.

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## 1 Overview of the Meriden Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative

The City of Meriden's Blight and Brownfields Committee is committed to redevelopment planning for the greatest positive impact on surrounding neighborhoods and overall community health. The Committee is spearheading a Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative which included a series of six neighborhood meetings. These meetings took place in May and June 2010 in communities affected by brownfields. (The participating neighborhoods are highlighted on the [Meriden Downtown Neighborhoods Map](#).) The meetings held were:

May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – Lewis Avenue  
May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – Downtown Business District  
May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – Dutch Hill  
May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – Action 13  
May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – City Park  
June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 – Meriden Family Zone

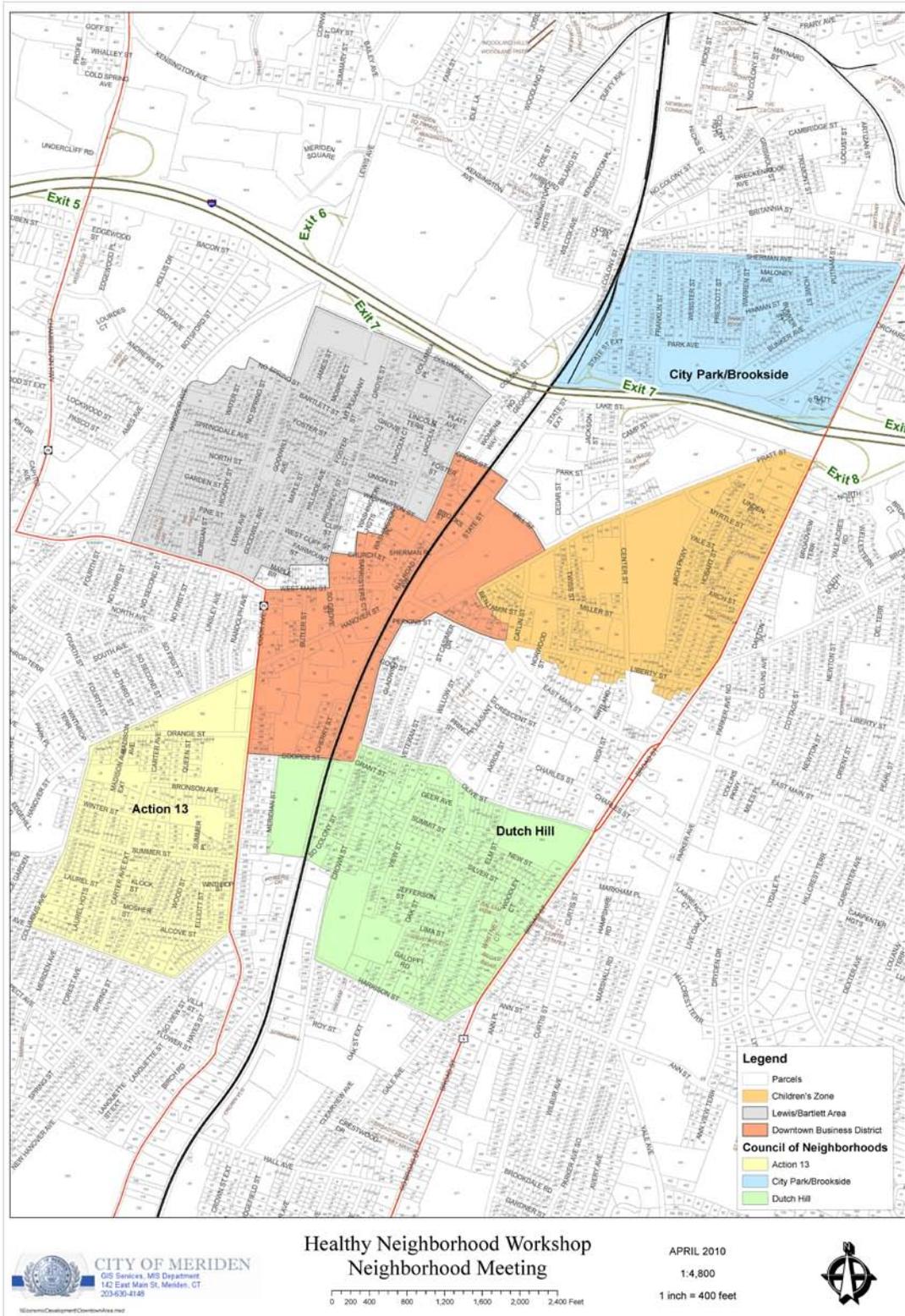
The neighborhood meetings engaged stakeholders and solicited input about their priorities for revitalizing their neighborhoods and improving overall community health. The meetings included a short presentation about previous brownfields work in Meriden, as well as information about remediation completed through U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grants. (See the [Brownfields Reuse Map](#) which illustrates previous brownfields work in the area.) Participants were informed that Factory H was purchased by the City and will likely be taken down with federal Housing and Urban Development Section 108 Loan Guarantee funds.

During the meetings, participants were guided in an interactive discussion focused on four key areas:

- Environment
- Economy
- Safety
- Health

Input from each meeting is summarized in this report, as well as suggested actions and activities to follow up on the community's feedback. The information collected at the meetings will guide future steps in the City's brownfields planning process, including defining the focus of a Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop (scheduled for Fall 2010), developing an inventory of underutilized sites and catalyzing community-driven projects to create community health benefits. Detailed notes from each meeting are located in the appendices.

### 1.1 Meriden Downtown Neighborhoods Map



1.2 *Brownfields Reuse Map*



## 2 Environmental Conditions

### 2.1 *Blight/Brownfields*

#### Properties and Areas of Concern

Participants at each of the meetings identified properties and areas in their neighborhoods that they consider blighted and/or brownfields. Characteristics of these properties included: needing repairs or aesthetic improvements, chipping paint, high grasses, litter, pet feces, unsafe sidewalks and streets. Common problem areas were vacant buildings due to foreclosure or vacant sites (some vacant sites are city-owned). The following were areas of concern identified at the meetings:

- Entry points into downtown
- Halfway house on Windsor Avenue
- Corner of Twiss and Miller Streets
- Catlin and Miller Streets (building across from library)
- Colony Street
- Grassy lot next to police station
- Miller Company streetscape
- Silver and Elm Streets
- Franklin Street
- Center and Liberty Streets (vacant lots)
- Liberty Street up to Broad Street
- Vacant sites on Hobart Street
- Spring and Summer Streets
- Columbus Avenue (past Spring and Summer Streets)

#### Revitalization Strategies

Participants identified many existing resources that could address the issues of blight and brownfields in Meriden, through both the City and community groups. For example, the City performs monthly code walks for interested citizens with the City Manager and department heads. (The time and location for the code walks are posted on the City's website—typically the first Friday of the month at 9:15 a.m. in the Planning Office in City Hall. Each month the walk covers different areas of the inner city.) Community police officers have the authority to identify properties that need attention; they can call the landlord or write up a “green sheet.”

Current city policies also support the revitalization of neighborhoods. These include allowing only one unregistered, covered car per property. Enforcement could improve the appearance of properties throughout the City. In addition, the City has a policy that allows neighbors to obtain ownership of City-owned vacant lots. For example, a resident obtained permission to plant a garden on a city-owned lot on Twiss Street and the Beat the Street Community Garden on the corner of East Main Street and Pratt Street is thriving.

Resources for property improvement and maintenance assistance are provided through various community organizations. Area churches and the Chore Project for Elders provided by New Opportunities offer assistance with yard work and minor home repairs. Meriden's Neighborhood Preservation Program provides a variety of loans to qualified owners for housing rehabilitation and received funding in September 2010.



Meeting participants made many suggestions about other strategies for revitalizing and reusing blighted properties throughout Meriden. In general, neighborhood beautification through city efforts (like those on East Main Street) and volunteer efforts (such as City Park) were frequently cited. One person suggested that clean-up and beautification could be done as a neighborhood “party” with a cook-out celebration. Additional suggestions included interim community-enhancing site uses, such as parks, venues for events, more line-of-sight parking lots and community gardens. One participant stressed the need to balance structured reuse, such as community gardens, with the need for recreational space for youth. Affordable housing was suggested as a longer-term reuse strategy and participants expressed the need to preserve historic homes and buildings in Meriden. In order to prevent lead exposure on vacant sites and properties, interim suggestions included planting 2-4 feet of mulch on the side of the buildings for external chipping and daily wiping to prevent internal lead dust exposure.

A broader suggestion included developing a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) through HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. NRSA's bring together neighborhood residents, small business owners, and property owners, as well as larger community stakeholders to forge partnerships that help make neighborhoods more attractive to investment and foster growth of resident-based initiatives. NRSA's create active, representative neighborhood organizations to develop a collective consensus relative to prioritized community needs in the designated NRSA.

### Challenges

Aside from funding constraints, the greatest challenge participants identified to brownfields revitalization is the lack of cooperation from property owners, many of whom are absentee landlords. One participant suggested that a recent attempt to develop a façade program for blighted properties failed because of a public resistance to funding efforts that increase private property values. Both of these challenges reflect the importance of fostering public and private cooperation to maximize revitalization efforts.

### Suggested Actions:

- Create a GIS map of affected properties.
- Evaluate reuse and revitalization strategies in developing an area-wide redevelopment plan.

- Utilize activities and surveys at the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop to identify other blighted properties and strategies for revitalization.

## **2.2 Waste Management**

In addition to properties that need improvement, meeting participants identified excess trash as another major problem in downtown neighborhoods. Participants at multiple meetings reported feeling that their neighborhoods are unhealthy because of “garbage everywhere.” Sources ranged from residents leaving bulky waste on the street to trashcans overturned by stray animals. Other sources of trash affecting neighborhood health include residents allowing garbage to pile up on their properties and littering common areas, such as sidewalks and waterways (e.g., Sodom Brook).

### Resources

Some participants identified city waste management as a resource, while others felt that city waste management services needed to be more effective. While Meriden offers free bulky waste disposal opportunities at the transfer station, once in the spring and once in the fall, participants at the Lewis Avenue meeting expressed confusion about the schedule, and felt that information about the program wasn’t communicated effectively. At the Meriden Family Zone meeting, participants complained that people were leaving their garbage cans on the street during the week, despite regulations prohibiting this. Lastly, the Mayor’s clean-up day was mentioned as a fairly successful example of waste reduction.

A representative of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association (QWRA) that attended the Lewis Avenue meeting stated that waste management in waterways is their key focus of The QRWA and other community-based groups come together to clean their neighborhoods and other areas in a social atmosphere that fosters a connection to place.

### Suggested Actions:

- Create a Waste Management guide for city residents that offers a single resource for all waste needs and questions, including relevant local policies and contact information. Post the guide on the City’s website and distribute print versions.
- Increase and publicize enforcement of existing waste management policies.
- Work with public and private partners to improve waste prevention services, such as encouraging trash pickup contractors to pick up trash that may have been knocked over and enhanced enforcement by Animal Control services.

## **2.3 Absentee Landlords**

One of the greatest challenges contributing to blight and brownfields in downtown Meriden is the growing number of landlords who live outside of the City, and often out of state. City policy holds landlords responsible for the sanitation and maintenance of their properties, but many are negligent and difficult to track down, even if there are legal actions against them. Although the legal responsibility falls on the landlords, many live out-of-state and hire rental agencies to manage their properties. These companies may be based locally. The City issues certificates of compliance for all non-owner-occupied units and conducts inspections every two years. Monthly code walks assist the City in identifying problems caused by absentee landlords in the interim.

Complaints related to absentee landlords included:

- Lack of accountability for rental properties that have more people living in them than intended/approved
- Creating problems in the neighborhood
  - drug dealing
  - littering
  - run-down properties
  - excessive unregistered vehicles

Meeting participants recognized that many renters may not have the skills, resources or information to take care of their rental properties. Tenants who participated in the Meriden Family Zone meeting expressed hesitancy to even report issues of negligence for fear they will lose their homes. Councilwoman Santiago responded to tenants' concerns by advising them to obtain a booklet on tenants' rights, available at Legal Aid in both English and Spanish.

Suggested Actions:

- Identify and invite speakers for the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop that can address absentee/negligent landlords.
- Explore policies to promote local property ownership and/or increase penalties for negligent landlords.
- Work with the Council of Neighborhoods to create two initiatives:
  - A *Neighbor Share* program to engage more renters in neighborhood meetings and provide mentorship and access to shared equipment. Assist renters in learning how to care for their properties, encourage accountability and respect for the neighborhood, and provide information to empower renters.
  - Outreach to local property management companies to explore a proactive partnership that would encourage transparency and hold these intermediaries more accountable for property maintenance.

## **2.4 Walkability and Transportation**

### Pedestrian Infrastructure

Meriden was designed as a walk-to-work city; with neighborhoods in close proximity to the downtown. However, meeting participants expressed many challenges with the existing pedestrian infrastructure, which limits walkability in the inner-city. Sidewalk disrepair was one of the most frequent complaints, with the following identified as key areas:

- Sherman Avenue
- Warren Street
- Franklin Street
- Near the YMCA
- Olive Street
- Cherry Street
- Cooper Street
- Silver Street

One participant said “the city lacks a consistent policy on street paving and sidewalk maintenance... reflected in how streets that are on the list to be repaved one year are removed the next.” Budgetary constraints were also referenced as a limitation to sidewalk maintenance. Sidewalks are usually funded through city and state bond measures; however, the City does have ongoing sidewalk repair efforts. Upcoming efforts will soon be focused on Miller Street from Twiss Street to the library, including the library parking lot.

Other challenges to walkability included narrow lanes on two lane roads, intersections, vacant or blighted properties, garbage, poor lighting, and unleashed dogs.

Identified opportunity areas for improving walkability downtown included a planned walking trail that will connect redevelopment and well-lit walkovers across the train tracks.

### Traffic Concerns

There were three primary concerns related to traffic issues: one-way traffic on West Main Street, speeding on West Main Street, Hobart Street, Miller Street, and Sherman Avenue, and potholes.

### Parking

The need for line-of-site parking was stressed at the Downtown Business Association meeting. Participants said that parking is a barrier to customers, despite marketing efforts. The parking garage and free public parking lot on Church Street were cited as successful parking projects.

### Transit

Participants did not discuss transit as a major priority, but a few commented on bus and rail usage. One participant said “It’s hard to find bus stops in Meriden because there are no signs...the City should post signs and have rain coverage at stops to encourage more transit use.” Another participant suggested that bus lines to major points of interest should be expanded (i.e., the line running North/South on Broad Street). The meeting did touch on the potential for Meriden to become a stop along a new commuter rail corridor. Participants noted that this will increase transit use and should be connected to new transit-oriented development in the downtown.

### Suggested Actions:

- Publish a city-wide sidewalk priority list on an annual or bi-annual basis. Post information on how to report sidewalk repairs.
- Provide detailed parking maps on the City website, at local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, City Hall, and other locations throughout the City.

## **2.5 Water**

Downtown Meriden has a network of waterways that connect with the Quinnipiac River. Although these sites have the potential to provide natural habitat and beauty within the neighborhoods, there are many problems with the current state of this urban watershed. Flooding problems in Meriden have been one of the primary challenges to revitalizing the downtown and several residents stated that they contribute to a negative perception. The Action 13 neighborhood participants identified Gilman Park as an area that consistently floods.

Participants at the Downtown Business Association meeting felt that the City should celebrate the successes of the ongoing flood control program and inform citizens about the progress happening downtown.

Participants at the Lewis Avenue neighborhood meeting identified issues with erosion under buildings along Sodom Brook, as well as a connection between trash in the waterways, particularly near fast food restaurants. A representative from the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association attended the meeting and mentioned that the group has cleanup days to deal with the trash, but suggested enhanced city regulations on business access to the water. For example, require Burger King near Sodom Brook to construct a fence to prevent litter from going into the brook.

Suggested Actions:

- Identify and invite speakers to address the issue of erosion-control at the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop.
- Invite QRWA to have a booth at the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop and facilitate a clean-up activity.
- Create a website and increase publicity for stormwater implementation measures to provide information for local residents and potential investors.

### **3 Economic Conditions**

#### **3.1 Demographics**

Throughout each of the meetings, particular demographic groups were identified as priority populations for improving community health and planning redevelopment. The groups identified included: property-owners, renters, families, youth, seniors, workers, students, Latinos, African Americans, and low-income residents. Participants at the Downtown Business Association meeting expressed a need to have better demographic information in order to understand and meet the needs of the existing marketplace. At each of the meetings, participants recognized Meriden's diversity and that it poses both opportunities and challenges.

One participant at the Action 13 neighborhood meeting said Meriden should "take the best of its ethnicity and create tiny shops and restaurants that reflect this diversity to create a little niche that will make Meriden a destination...while also providing economic opportunities." The Downtown Business Association participants agreed that one of Meriden's assets is a diverse workforce that may not be fully utilized. Two groups identified as potential labor pools that would benefit from job training opportunities were students and youth.

The primary consumer markets identified as being underserved and/or opportunity areas were families, seniors and young professionals. Meeting participants stated that many workers in Meriden live in other cities because there is so little to do downtown. The people who *are* downtown after working hours tend to be parents who bring their children to activities, but have little to do while they are waiting. Seniors are a growing population in Meriden that would benefit from additional services downtown.

Many of the demographic factors that participants emphasized related directly to real estate and land use trends. There appears to be a polarization between property-owning residents and renters, many of whom are low-income and/or Spanish-speaking. Although neighborhood associations are open to everyone, including renters, the majority of the participants tend to be English-speaking homeowners. Owner-residents attribute much of the blight throughout the community to renters and absentee landlords and some owners advocated eliminating multi-family homes and decreasing density. However, renters may lack the resources or information necessary to effectively deal with degraded property issues. One participant at the Lewis Avenue neighborhood meeting said that African Americans have the “most urgent housing needs, yet they are not specifically addressed by the City.”

Latinos make up Meriden’s largest minority population and although many city services provide bilingual information, the meetings revealed a need to provide more services in Spanish. In particular, participants said that bilingual information should be available on parenting, renters’ rights, lead, waste disposal and neighborhood meetings. The Meriden Family Zone meeting participants raised concerns that “Hispanic culture may inhibit people from asking for help” and that undocumented residents feel particularly wary of reporting problems to the City.

Suggested Actions:

- Provide translations for expanded City Services.
- Provide information to Spanish-speaking residents about neighborhood associations.

**3.2 Communication**

At several of the meetings, participants identified the need for better communication in support of both residential and business needs. Participants asked for better information on cleanup days, erosion management, event venue usage (HUB site and Middlesex Community College courtyard), events, economic development funds, burn permits, tenant rights, and bilingual resource guides.

Councilwoman Santiago said that the City has a free resource guide available through social services, as well as its own cable channel and a library with free computers and newspapers that are great resources for local information. Dave Swedock, president of the Council of Neighborhoods presented a free resource guide that is available in English and provides contact information for resident services. Additional communication opportunities include event and community billboards and coordinated space rental.

Suggested Actions:

- Ensure that digital versions of resource guides are easily available online.
- Identify locations for and install billboards and community bulletin boards – include the construction of two artistically designed bulletin-board-kiosks at each of the gateways into town as a part of the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop (in partnership with one of the community volunteer groups).
- Identify and encourage efforts that welcome new residents (renters and owners) and provide information about how to access information, potentially through the neighborhood associations.

### 3.3 *Culture and Recreation*

Meriden is a city with many recreational opportunities, with 40 parks city-wide. Participants at the neighborhood meetings identified parks as one of the City's greatest assets and suggested that vacant sites could become park-like either long-term or as interim uses. A park at the end of Hobart Street was used as an example of such a project; the City takes care of mowing, while Carol Baily, an avid gardener in the neighborhood, plants and maintains flower gardens with the help of neighborhood youth. Ms. Baily is interested in generating resources and support to do additional beautification work in the Meriden Family Zone area, which was a widely supported idea at the Meriden Family Zone meeting. City Park was referenced as a desirable model because of the popular water features for children. Councilwoman Bartolomeo attended the City Park neighborhood meeting and shared that plans are underway to revitalize City Park and Brookside Park including bringing back basketball and volleyball courts to keep older youth off of the streets. Some of the important design elements participants mentioned for a multi-age recreational facility were: locating courts a healthy distance away from younger-age play areas, safety, lighting, and cameras for security. Participants at the Downtown Business Association meeting suggested that additional programming could be planned for inner-city parks like those at Hubbard Park to help attract more people downtown. Walking trails to connect the various downtown parks was another opportunity identified to bring beauty and connectivity to the City. The nearby Quinnipiac Trail offers an existing trail system which city trails could be connected to. Existing and proposed trails will support walking and biking for both recreation and transportation.

Meeting participants identified many community-based programs as existing assets for community health. The YMCA was celebrated at each of the meetings as a hub for activity in the downtown, and an opportunity area for engaging a large section of the community. The Boys and Girls Club and Parks and Recreation's free day camp options were identified as important resources to support families and provide engaging activities for local youth. "Beat the Street" was also referenced frequently, specifically in its work with teens to create a community garden in partnership with Kachia Cave, President of My City Kitchen. Middlesex Community College has a campus in downtown Meriden and was represented at the Downtown Business Association meeting as a resource for upward mobility, as well as disadvantaged populations such as single parents. The Senior Center was identified as an existing resource in downtown, though some people feel that it needs to be expanded to meet the needs of a growing senior population.

In addition to the existing cultural resources in Meriden, meeting participants identified various needs and opportunities for generating a more actively populated downtown. In general, people expressed that there needs to be more to do downtown to attract people. "Placemaking" by installing benches and picnic tables in common areas, such as the Middlesex Community College courtyard and upgraded vacant properties such as the HUB site, was suggested. It was also suggested there be better information available for people to encourage the use of vacant sites for events. Historically, various kinds of cultural events have been successful at attracting a good number of people downtown including: Art Walks, Brewfests, wine tastings and the Hoop-in-Downtown basketball tournament. The main limitation expressed in producing these kinds of community-building events was financial. The Sandman Gallery on West Main Street is an existing asset that has collaborated with local institutions to sponsor afternoon music. This is a potential model that could be leveraged for creating more regular downtown events.

### Suggested Actions:

- Create design guidelines for future park development.
- Develop guidelines for using vacant sites, potentially run through the City or a local non-profit.

### **3.4 Economic Conditions**

One of the most thoroughly discussed elements of community health at all six of the neighborhood meetings was an evaluation of the economic conditions in Meriden. Participants focused on challenges, assets, needs, and opportunities, with the general conclusion that the local economy has room to grow.

#### Challenges

A recurring theme of community discussions was the challenge of financing for downtown projects. This is due in large part to the City's market history, especially for dining and entertainment businesses. There is a perception that downtown Meriden will never improve because of its past stormwater and safety issues. Considering this perception, one participant expressed concern and confusion about why there had been a proposal a few years ago to build a big-box store on the current site of Columbus Park. Presented by one city councilor, this proposal never went forward with any seriousness, but indicates potentially misplaced investments and undervalued city resources. A participant at the Downtown Business Association noted that people struggle for financing for downtown projects because of an "overly cumbersome application process for small business owners." This participant felt this could be overcome by better information/outreach for small businesses on economic development funds.

In general, participants believe the City needs to do more to provide information about and generate new economic opportunities. It was suggested that the municipal government needs to invest grants/matching funds in redevelopment to prove there is a market. Another strategy for stimulating redevelopment and boosting business in downtown Meriden is to foster better community connectivity and synergy amongst existing businesses and organizations. A participant at the City Park meeting did not feel informed on what Meriden is doing to keep and attract jobs and businesses. Many suggested that job-training is an urgent need for youth in Meriden.

#### Assets

A number of the economic assets discussed at the meetings related to programs that provide education and subsidized financing for economic development. The Chamber of Commerce was highlighted as a resource that provides educational support through lunch seminars and SCORE small business mentorship program ([www.score.org](http://www.score.org)). The Connecticut Community Investment Corporation (CTCIC), a non-profit economic development lender, was cited as a potential resource for downtown businesses. One participant reported that local banks are not lending, but are "cash rich" and could assist local businesses that are "cash poor." Other more market-specific funding resources were brought up at various meetings. For example, at the Lewis Avenue meeting it was suggested that the City should investigate Community Development Block Grant funds through the HOME Investment Partnership Program in order to expand the supply of

affordable housing. Peggy Brennan, the Economic Development Director, reported that the City has received approximately \$1 Million in federal neighborhood stabilization funding to acquire foreclosed properties. The City is working with two non-profits in the community that will renovate and sell the properties. These organizations working are Affordable Housing Inc. ([www.cilhomes.org](http://www.cilhomes.org)) and Mutual Housing/Neighborworks New Horizons ([www.nwnh.net](http://www.nwnh.net)). There are limitations with this project; there is only enough funding to do a few properties at a time. The City has dispersed the funding throughout the City and has, to date, facilitated the purchase of the following properties:

- 36 Twiss Street
- 78 Lewis Avenue
- 62-64 Lewis Avenue
- 167 Hobart Street
- 78 Franklin Street
- 57 Britannia Street
- 41 Britannia Street

The City currently employs a grant writer who is working to raise money to purchase foreclosed properties. The Lions Club and Rotary Club were identified as funding sources for smaller-scale community projects, such as community gardens or other beautification efforts. There are three additional programs that support homeowners in maximizing their efficiency and minimizing energy costs: New Opportunities, CL&P and Operation Fuel.

The meetings generated many ideas about economic opportunities in Meriden, especially participants at the Downtown Business Association meeting. The Chamber of Commerce is working on new projects that will provide more economic opportunities, such as developing a more formal Downtown Association with the CT Main Street Center, creating a forum for local banks that want to lend money to local businesses and spearheading a campaign called *REAL Meriden* promoting recreation, entertainment, arts, and leisure (focusing on businesses like Girls Inc., Gallery 53, YMCA, etc.).

#### Needs and Opportunities

Economic opportunities that were discussed included developing restoration programs as work-force development programs, serving multiple community needs. This could be in partnership with the City's technical high school and area colleges. A representative from Middlesex Community College said that federal work-study funds can pay students to work for non-profits; currently Middlesex Community College students are using work-study funds to work at the YMCA.

Participants at other meetings suggested an initiative to help citizens buy properties. This could support local ownership and prevent the problems that often arise through absentee landlords. A focus area for city investment was the corridor between the HUB site and the Action 13 neighborhood. Participants felt there needs to be more of a sense of place, and "there needs to be a gathering center that people can feel that they are a part of...to create more community connectivity." The new proposed Meriden commuter rail stop is also another economic driver that provides a focus area for investment in the inner-city.

Two vacant buildings were identified that provide economic opportunities. One is the old hospital building that has been vacant for ten years. The City is working with the property owner; the owner needs additional potential tenants to secure funding. Potential tenants currently include an assisted living facility, backed by a doctors group. The property owner owes back taxes. At this time, the City prefers to work with the owner to get the building leased, so back taxes can be paid. However, the city will re-initiate foreclosure action if leasing plans do not move forward. The old Pyramid Technology building on the corner of Charles and Elm Streets is another property identified as being vacant for an extended period of time. The owner is based in New York, but is actively working with the Office of Economic Development to find a tenant. Potential tenants for the Pyramid building currently include a tahini manufacturer and a Jewish bakery.

Other requested businesses include: a movie theater, activities for children/youth, a nursing training facility, a round-the-clock cafeteria for seniors and assisted living for the growing senior population. Another idea was to support the development of “quick and dirty green jobs where existing manufacturers can take an existing product and make it a little bit more efficient—potentially turning the Crown Street corridor into an eco-industrial district.”

Suggested Actions:

- Streamline application process for small business owners.
- Create a section on the City website that provides information on funding property improvements.
- Publicize information on vacant commercial buildings in neighborhoods or development possibilities in neighborhood newsletters.

### **3.5 Food**

Participants felt that access to fresh, healthy produce is important for community health and nutrition, and that this is challenged by limited information and resources. For example, one participant felt that there is widely-held belief that poor people cannot afford a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) membership. CSAs provide direct access to local produce from area farmers, and despite misconceptions, this method of buying food is often cheaper and healthier than buying food from a grocery store.

While many sources of healthy food were identified as assets in Meriden, it was clear that there is a need for more vendors within walking distance of downtown. These could include health food stores, markets, bodegas, etc. Participants said that the Stop and Shop on the west side needs to be expanded to provide more healthy options. Also, restaurants and most other businesses downtown close by 5:30 p.m., meaning local residents cannot patronize these locations after work.

Existing resources for healthy food included:

- Young’s Farm
- Lyman’s Orchard in Middlefield
- Geremia Farms (CSA) in Wallingford

- Greenbackers
- Soup kitchen
- Food pantry
- Franciscan nuns (provide free food)
- Farmer's Market
- Community Garden
- Personal gardens
- Mexican Market on Columbia Street
- Grocery Stores (selection varies)

Several participants felt that the Farmer's Market is important because it provides important access to fresh, healthy produce not available in downtown except for a Mexican market on Columbia Street. The Farmer's Market takes place in the City's municipal parking lot on West Main Street in June and July, but many feel it is not well-established; there is only one farmer because of attendance. Participants at the Action 13 meeting said that the City needs to better promote the market by posting fliers and signs, and recruiting more farmers. It was suggested that from the farmer's perspective, it's difficult to take on market responsibilities; perhaps the Farmer's Market could adopt a cooperative model where managers coordinate the urban market.

Many of the participants reported having personal vegetable gardens because they prefer organic produce. As mentioned in the reuse strategies section, the majority of participants mentioned community gardens in the inner-city as a synergistic solution for community health by improving blight in neighborhoods, building relationships, engaging disenfranchised populations, and providing healthy food. The City currently has one active community garden, in partnership with Beat the Street and the TD Bank. The challenge expressed at the meetings to developing more community gardens was who will supervise and pay for water. This issue has contributed to the failure of previous attempts in downtown Meriden. One participant suggested using the community gardens in Wallingford at the Vietnam Memorial Park as a model. In Wallingford, residents can work their own plot on town property. A partnership with a local organization could help create champions for a community garden initiative.

#### Suggested Actions:

- Create a graphical map of existing food resources, including: stores, restaurants, farms, food banks, active gardens and available plots. (Potentially as an interactive activity at the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop.)
- Identify and invite sources of local healthy food to have booths and/or present at the Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop.
- Identify and invite speakers from an existing urban agriculture initiative such as Nuestras Raices in Holyoke, MA and/or Urban Oaks Farm in New Britain, CT.
- Complete a market analysis for food sources in downtown Meriden, in support of expanded permanent and seasonal markets.

## **4 Safety Conditions**

Participants at each of the meetings stressed safety as an important element of community health. Citizens expressed mixed sentiments about safety in Meriden; praise and relief about the progress that has been made through the community officer program and concern that key areas continue to pose risks and/or create a perception of downtown being unsafe.

### **4.1 Assets**

Participants felt that the City's crime rate decreased significantly since the police partnered with the Council of Neighborhoods in 2005. The partnership provided more proactive police efforts, crime prevention, and police visibility in the downtown. The success of this program is clearly valued by the community and its budget has continually been supported. Participants who said they feel safe in downtown cited the responsive and visible police presence as an important factor. Other elements that reinforced their sense of safety were well-lit streets and well-populated streets.

### **4.2 Challenges**

Participants at the Downtown Business Association meeting said they see Meriden as safe, but people continue to have a negative perception because of "down and out" walk around town, lack of maintenance, vacant properties, and pawn shops and check cashing businesses. Aside from these perceptions, some residents expressed concerns regarding problem areas or situations that continue to challenge their sense of safety. Participants at the Action 13 and Meriden Family Zone meetings said that the lighting in their neighborhoods is too dim making it feel unsafe to walk at night. Additionally, some participants reported feeling unsafe in certain areas where large groups of people congregate. The lower end of Twiss Street was identified as a major area of concern; this area has had reports of prostitution and drug raids that have been plaguing this neighborhood for nearly 50 years. Participants at the Lewis Avenue meeting felt that an excess of sober houses in Meriden brings a lot of "down and out" people in from all over state. Participants from several neighborhoods expressed a concern that drug dealers often move into rental properties—particularly those owned by absentee landlords—and create safety challenges for local residents. Someone from the Dutch Hill neighborhood complained about brush fires that seemed excessively large. This raised concerns that the system for the burn permits from the Fire Department was a safety concern (permits have a time range of up to two years). At multiple meetings, participants raised concerns about unattended youth after school/camp hours, from 4:00 p.m. onwards. Feral animals and dogs were mentioned as safety concerns that could be addressed by Animal Control.

### **4.3 Opportunities and Needs**

Participants suggested that additional downtown and neighborhood foot patrols would continue to bolster safety throughout the City. However, budget limitations may restrain this opportunity. One participant at the City Park meeting suggested that recruitment and/or training for community policing could empower locals, create entry-level jobs and increase the police presence. A suggestion from the Meriden Family Zone meeting was the establishment of an anonymous hotline in both English and Spanish for crime prevention. This would address hesitancy citizens may have to report crimes.

### **Suggested Actions:**

- Consider recruiting police officers from downtown neighborhoods.
- Identify/promote/develop resources to keep children off the streets.
- Identify/promote/develop an anonymous hotline for reporting safety concerns (e.g., illegal activity, animal control issues, lighting etc.).

## 5 Health Conditions

### Assets

The majority of issues discussed by meeting participants were indirectly related to human health and although participants identified needs and opportunities, it was clear that there is a strong infrastructure of health resources within the City.

Several participants mentioned the Health Department, which employs a health educator (Leah Crown), organizes walks and provides free screenings, among other services. Suggestions at the City Park meeting included holding health screenings at a park, with food donated from local businesses. Currently the Health Department distributes information through schools and websites, but the resources may not reach the entire community. For example, there is a lead abatement program located on the first floor of the Health Department that few of the participants were aware of as a resource for testing for lead exposure.

MidState Medical Center, the YMCA, Chamber of Commerce, Children's First Initiative, and the Record Journal were identified as important assets for human health in Meriden. The Chamber of Commerce has a Health and Wellness Council that holds an expo in October. The expo engages City and community leaders in education and prevention of childhood obesity, lead poisoning, asthma, as well as providing information about health care options. The Record Journal provides health information by listing workshops held at the hospital, the library and other venues. The Children's First Initiative has created a "Meriden Blueprint" focused on family health, education and early childcare. The initiative engages 50 local organizations in quarterly meetings to facilitate the coordination of data collection/planning related to these three issues.

### Challenges

People identified accurate information and access to resources as the primary challenges to human health in Meriden. When asked if people walk in downtown Meriden, many participants said that walkability issues, such as feeling unsafe, prevent people from walking. Another challenge mentioned was smoking. Approximately 30-40% of students at Middlesex Community College smoke close to the buildings, creating indirect health impacts for second-hand smokers. People expressed the need to educate parents and caregivers about nutrition and lead poisoning prevention. Downtown Meriden has an older housing stock and many buildings may have asbestos and lead contamination. This issue should be raised to ensure awareness among citizens, but it does not need to be a source of fear. Lastly, one participant at the Lewis Avenue meeting expressed that the Meriden Health Department needs a glucometer to screen for diabetes as a part of its health screenings program.

### Suggested Actions:

- Encourage the Health Department to purchase diabetes-related supplies.

**Neighborhood Meetings Summary Report**

- Create and distribute fliers on asbestos and lead poisoning and provide information on City resources for testing.
- Coordinate efforts between the various health-related organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, Health Department, YMCA, MidState Medical Center).
- Launch an anti-smoking campaign at Middlesex Community College, in partnership with the Health Department.

## **6 Recommendations for Healthy Neighborhoods Workshop**

### **6.1 Audience and Objectives**

### **6.2 Speaker, Panel and Forum Topics**

#### Topics for Community Workshop (chart)

- Speaker+Booth: Erosion management
- Speaker+Booth: Celebrating successes of flood-control efforts
- Forum: Strategies for holding property management companies accountable
- Panel+Booths: Guidance for how to apply for funding to renovate properties/start businesses etc. (such as stimulus funds, or neighborhood preservation funds)
- Forum: Building relationships between owner-residents and renters
- Speaker+Booth: Telling the story of Nuestras Raices in the context of engaging youth, building community connectivity, green job training, brownfields redevelopment etc. (and/or Urban Oaks Farm in New Britain, CT)

### **6.3 Interactive Activities**

- Litter on Hobart Street—Want to have a neighborhood cleanup party to pick up garbage in front of their homes and have a cook-out party at the end
- Action: Intersection (or entryway) “repairs,” similar to Portland, OR, using art to bring communities together, displaying a vision, creating information kiosks, planting gardens, installing benches etc.
- Action: A walking tour to identify challenges/opportunities and document them

### **6.4 Booths and Presenters**

- New Opportunities Chores program and energy efficiency
- Energy efficiency program through CL&P (RAP program)
- Operation Fuel
- Yard work volunteers from churches and Chores program
- “Beat the Street” community garden in partnership with Kashia Cave, President of My City Kitchen
- Local food companies with food samples (food to buy?)
- Health screenings from the Health Department/Hospital
- Children’s First Initiative (kids section with crafts?)
- Parks Department
- Youth-related organizations (Beat the Street; New Opportunities)
- YMCA
- Middlesex Community College
- Dance/arts groups representing cultural diversity

### **6.5 *Venue and Logistics***

- Housing authority has sponsorship from a local radio station, Hot 93.7, for an event with free food on 7/14 at the HUB
- Community resource fair in the Middlesex Community College courtyard on 8/24
- Lions Club and Rotary Club are always interested in funding community projects

## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix A: Lewis Avenue Meeting Notes

#### Summary of Input:

The participants at the Lewis Avenue neighborhood meeting on May 4, 2010 provided input about many of the city's assets, challenges, needs and opportunities related to improving community health in Meriden. Many of the assets identified relate to public programs, volunteer organizations, economic assistance resources and parks. The challenges seemed to relate primarily to economic limitations of residents and the city, and the effects these limitations have on other factors such as pollution, crime and community disconnection. These challenges speak directly to the needs for better access to information, resources and support, bolstered regulations and enforcement, and improved environments with an emphasis on alternative transportation and reducing density in the inner-city. The opportunities identified relate to existing and potential economic opportunities and government initiatives that can meet the city's needs and help to solve the existing challenges. The participants expressed interest in a future workshop that would provide more information about existing assets and opportunities, and two city events were identified that could provide a potential for collaborating.

#### Meeting Notes by Category:

##### Communication

Asset	Cable channel
Asset	Library- free computers and newspaper
Asset	Resource guide: available through social services
Need	Better communication about: clean up days, erosion management,

##### Economy

Asset	New Opportunities: chores program and energy efficiency
Asset	Energy efficiency program through CL&P (RAP program)
Asset	Operation Fuel
Opportunity	Recycling things by putting free signs next to the street

**Environment**

Asset	Two free "bulky waste" clean-up days at the transfer station sponsored by the city
Asset	40 parks city-wide; particularly Hubbard and Columbus Park
Asset	Historic homes
Asset	Mayor's clean-up
Asset	Quinnipiac River Watershed Group-- clean-up days
Asset	Quinnipiac Trail
Asset	Yard work volunteers from churches and Chores program
Challenge	Destruction of historic homes and buildings
Challenge	Trash in street for months after renters move out
Challenge	Trash in waterways (Sodom Brook) particularly near fast food restaurants
Challenge	Threat of destroying Columbus Park for a box store etc.
Challenge	Erosion under buildings (by Sodom Brook)
Challenge	Who will supervise and pay for water at community gardens? (this issue is actually the reason the previous community gardens were shut down)
Need	Support for low income urban residents to dispose of waste
Need	Eliminate 3+4 family homes and decrease density to single-family homes
Need	Regulate business access around waterways to prevent litter
Need	Burger King near brook needs fencing to prevent litter
Opportunity	HUD "Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy" areas
Opportunity	Neighborhood preservation funds (loans) returning in September
Opportunity	City ordinance requires vacant multi-family homes to transition to single-family (unless owner obtains a variance)
Opportunity	Reducing density in inner-city by blocking multi-family developments
Opportunity	Neighbors can obtain ownership of vacant land through the city (one resident obtained space on Twiss and Pratt Streets for a private garden)
Opportunity	Potential stop along new rail corridor
Opportunity	Inner city families tend to be large and can utilize single family homes converted from multi-family homes (which have many bedrooms)

**Food**

Asset	Restaurants
Asset	Geremia Farms (CSA)
Asset	Greenbackers
Asset	Soup kitchen
Asset	Food pantry
Asset	Franciscan nuns give away free food
Challenge	Farmer's Market is gone
Challenge	Belief that poorer people can't afford to buy shares of a CSA
Need	Community gardens in the inner-city
Need	Grocery expansion on West Side

**Health**

Need	Meriden Health Dept. needs a glucometer to screen for diabetes
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**Housing**

Need	Blacks in Meriden have most urgent housing needs, yet are not specifically addressed by the city
Opportunity	CDBG H.O.M.E. program

**Safety**

Asset	Excellent proactive police dept.
Challenge	Excess of sober houses bringing people in from all over state-- need to take out profitability of these operations
Challenge	Dealing drugs in rental properties
Challenge	Widening lanes on two lane roads causes pedestrian "unfriendly" environment
Challenge	Absentee landlords
Challenge	Unattended youth are causing most recent safety issues including vandalism, littering, endangerment, drugs
Need	Need more community police officers and areas (outer city)--budget issue
Need	Halfway house on Windsor Avenue needs repairs

**Transportation**

Need	Bus systems to major drop-offs such as expanding line running N/S on Broad Street
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**Events**

Opportunity	July 14 Fair @ HUB Site w/ social service agencies and housing authority with free food and information
Opportunity	Back-pack give-away in August

## **7.2 Appendix B: Downtown Business Association Meeting Notes**

### **Summary of Input:**

The participants at the Downtown Business District meeting on May 13, 2010 provided input about many of the city's assets, challenges, needs and opportunities related to improving community health in Meriden. Priority focus areas are highlighted in yellow below.

The assets identified include people and programs throughout the city that are contributing to redevelopment efforts. Many of the city's assets are currently underutilized, and participants identified that better communication, outreach and management could increase the benefits of existing infrastructure with minimal costs.

The challenges focused on limiting misperceptions about the city's safety, environmental conditions and economic potential, as well as obstacles to getting funding for redevelopment. Stemming from these challenges is the need to change the current misperceptions through celebration of existing efforts, and investment and greater participation from the city and other organizations to prove the market viability of downtown development. For example, improving the city-owned property on Colony Street that is currently a "hole" in the urbanscape by simple landscaping. Other needs include improving buildings along the entry-points to downtown, and creating community bulletin boards in places such as the YMCA.

The city has many opportunities for meeting existing needs, and would be greatly benefited by generating greater connectivity amongst existing organizations, businesses and city efforts. One possible partnership that was discussed was having Middlesex Community College and/or the technical high school students implement building restoration through skill-training programs; federal work-study funds could be used to pay students to do this work if it were through a non-profit organization. Another opportunity that was identified was utilizing the Hub site for more events that would create something for people to do and attract more attention to downtown.

Participants were unclear about how a Community Health Workshop would best serve their needs. One question that came up was who the primary audience of the workshop would be. It was suggested that different audiences would want different information, and that there might be some challenge in attracting people to the event. This group felt that more people would come if it was less of a "meeting" or "workshop" and more of a cultural event like the Art Walk, Beerfest etc. that tends to generate a lot of participation. It was suggested that the event could be held in the Middlesex Community College courtyard. (Meeting participant Tami Christopher would be the contact person for following up on this possibility—see contact info at the end of this document.)

Meeting Notes by Category:

**Culture**

Asset	Meriden is a melting pot of cultures, has a lot of diversity
Asset	Community resource fair in the MXCC courtyard 8/24
Asset	Housing authority has sponsorship from the 93.7 radio station for an event with free food on 7/14 at the HUB
Asset	Brew-fest and wine-tastings are well attended
Asset	Sandman Gallery has music from 12-2 that they have gotten local institutions to sponsor
Challenge	Young professionals who live in downtown Meriden have nothing to do
Need	Better communication about how to use event venues like the HUB site and MXCC courtyard-- as well as a better posting of events
Opportunity	Hoop-in-Downtown basketball tournament used to happen on closed streets and was a good way for the community to come together and build connections with downtown
Opportunity	Art walks have been a successful way to get people down-town, but they are currently limited by a lack of funding

**Economy**

Asset	Diverse work-force in downtown Meriden
Asset	Connecticut Community Investment Corp, CTF
Asset	SCORE provides small business mentorship through the Chamber
Asset	Education through the chamber; lunch seminars etc.
Challenge	Government regulation stifles small business
Challenge	An attempt to create a façade program to restore blighted properties failed because of a public resistance to funding efforts that will increase private property values
Challenge	Local businesses are cash-poor
Challenge	Most restaurants/destinations downtown close by 5:30 p.m.
Challenge	Most workers don't live downtown, so most leave at night
Challenge	Very challenging to get financing for projects downtown because of market history-- particularly businesses in a new dining and entertainment district
Challenge	Very challenging to get financing for projects downtown because of overly cumbersome application process for small business owners

Need	Municipal government needs to invest grants/matching funds in redevelopment to prove that there is a market
Need	Better information/outreach for small businesses to know how to qualify for economic development funds
Need	Better community connectivity building synergy amongst existing businesses and organizations
Need	Identify who the target market is for downtown redevelopment; report/promote demographics better
Need	More food vendors within walking distance (i.e., health food stores, markets, bodegas etc.)
Opportunity	Celebrate success of the ongoing flood control program to inform people about the progress happening down-town, 'sell' the future goal, and attract private investors
Opportunity	City works with developers helping to restore down-town by subsidizing building improvements through reduced rates
Opportunity	Chamber is working on starting a downtown association through Main Street CT Center
Opportunity	Federal work-study funds can pay students to work for non-profits; for example MXCC is working with the Y
Opportunity	The chamber is creating a forum for local banks that want to lend money to local businesses
Opportunity	Banks are cash-rich
Opportunity	A campaign for REAL Meriden; Recreation, Entertainment, Arts, Leisure-- businesses like Girls Inc., Gallery 53, YMCA
Opportunity	Community bulletin boards in places like the Y to post menus from local restaurants etc. to attract people to stay in town longer
Opportunity	Parents are a target market as they are often in town while their children are doing activities
Challenge	Parking is a barrier to customers despite marketing
Opportunity	Creating restoration programs as work-force development programs that serve multiple community needs-- possibly in partnership with technical high school and colleges
Opportunity	Planning transit oriented development in preparation for the train

**Environment**

Asset	The City/Parking Commission built a parking garage and free public parking lot on Church Street with improved lighting
Asset	Community garden in partnership with the bank
Asset	The city owns part of W. Main Street which has made a positive impact in revitalizing downtown
Challenge	Past stormwater issues give the perception that down-town Meriden will never improve
Challenge	Private property owners do not always cooperate with efforts to restore their properties
Need	Improved sidewalks, repair potholes, grates on trees
Need	Line-of site parking; park-like parking lots-- potentially on capped brownfields
Need	More free handicap parking down-town
Need	Entry-points into down-town need aesthetic improvement b/c they are all run-down and add to the perception of it being 'unsafe'
Need	Need well-lit/maintained walkovers across the train tracks to support walkability
Need	Benches/picnic tables for the MXCC courtyard
Need	Colony Street needs more attention
Opportunity	Grassy lot next to police station is owned by the city and currently underutilized-- it creates a 'hole' that creates a psychological wall... landscaping/place-making could make a big difference
Opportunity	Utilizing HUB site in the interim; creating a park-like setting, having events that attract people (i.e., circus, car show 8/8 etc.)
Opportunity	Create a parks program like at Hubbard Park for down-town-- encourage downtown workers to walk to HUB site etc.
Opportunity	Most downtown properties are locally-owned

**Health**

Asset	Health and Wellness Council through the Chamber has an expo in October and engages city and community leaders in educating and preventing childhood obesity, lead poisoning, asthma, as well as information about health care options
Asset	YMCA
Challenge	Downtown Meriden has older housing stock that may have asbestos and lead contamination
Challenge	People don't walk because there is nothing to walk to and a perception that it isn't safe
Challenge	30-40 percent of students at MXCC smoke, and there is no good spot for this so they smoke too close to the building
Need	Better information for tenants about lead: what properties are affected, how to prevent exposure etc.
Need	Educating care-givers and parents about nutrition

**Safety**

Asset	Low crime rate due to proactive police efforts, crime prevention, and police visibility in the downtown
Challenge	Perception of being unsafe due to "down and outs" walking around town, lack of maintenance, vacant properties, and businesses such as pawn shops and check cashing
Need	More foot patrols
Need	Slow traffic down in town

**7.3 Appendix C: Dutch Hill Meeting Notes**

Meeting Summary

The Dutch Hill Neighborhood Meeting on May 19, 2010 had fifteen participants from the surrounding community, most of whom were home-owners and seniors. The primary needs identified by the participants were sidewalk maintenance and better enforcement of city policies that prevent blight. The primary challenge identified was the problem of absentee property owners and the subsequent problems with vacant sites that are blighted or renters that do not respect their neighbors.

<b>Environment</b>		
<b>Assets</b>	Walking Trail	Walking trail planned for the future is an asset in that it offers a lot of potential—potential to connect up the redevelopment areas and creating a new center of activity in the downtown. (“paper streets”--?)

	Community Police Officers	Community police officer walking through neighborhood has the authority to identify properties that need attention. They can call the landlord, or write up a “green sheet”. Once a couple of properties are addressed, the rest usually follow suit.
	Code walks	Anyone can walk with the city manager and department heads to express their concerns at monthly code walks. The time and location for the code walks is posted on the city's website. It is usually the first Friday of every month starting at 9:15 at city hall, and each month the walk covers a different area of the city.
<b>Opportunities</b>	City policy re: Unregistered cars	The city has a policy that allows only one unregistered car per property as long as it is covered. Enforcement of this policy could improve the appearance of some properties that currently have more than one unregistered vehicle and/or are not covering such vehicle(s).
<b>Challenges</b>	Lack of respect for neighbors	Some residents (participants identified renters in particular) do not have respect for their neighbors/neighborhoods, as reflected in actions like throwing garbage in other people’s yards etc.
	Blight due to absentee landlords	Absentee landlords let properties get run-down (i.e., cars everywhere, collapsing garage etc.) Absentee property owners have rental agencies who work with them, but these agencies are currently not ensuring that the properties are well-maintained.
<b>Food</b>		
<b>Assets</b>	Local sources for healthy organic food	Some people have personal vegetable gardens because they don’t like chemicals on food at stores. They prefer to grow their own “organically”.
		High Hill Orchard (in Middlefield) and Lyman’s Orchard (in Wallingford) grow primarily organic produce and are a source for healthy local food.

<b>Economy</b>		
<b>Assets</b>	Pyramid Technology Building	The old Pyramid Technology building on the corner of Charles and Elm Streets has been vacant for a long-time. The owner is based in New York. Economic development is talking to the owner on a regular basis helping him find a tenant. Potential tenants include a Tahini manufacturer and Jewish bakery.
	Inclusivity	Neighborhood associations are open to everyone even business owners.
	Funding for renovating foreclosures	The city received \$1M in federal funding to acquire foreclosed properties. The city is working with a non-profit that will renovate and sell them etc., but can only do 4 or 5 houses at a time.  Elaine Schmidt, CIL Affordable Housing Inc. <a href="http://www.cilhomes.org">www.cilhomes.org</a> 36 Twiss Street, 78 Lewis Avenue, 62-64 Lewis Avenue, 167 Hobart Street  Julie Savin, Mutual Housing/dba Neighborworks New Horizons <a href="http://www.nwnh.net">www.nwnh.net</a> 78 Franklin, 57 Britannia, 41 Britannia
<b>Challenges</b>	Blight from foreclosures	There are a lot of foreclosed properties in the neighborhood that can sometimes appear blighted if the banks that own them are not taking care of them.
<b>Safety</b>		
<b>Needs</b>	Road and Sidewalk maintenance	Meriden lacks a consistent policy on street paving and sidewalk. Four or five years ago there was a major project to repair Olive Street and stopped at Elm Street, the city “forgot about it” and never finished. They now say that it will be 4 or 5 more years before it will be worked on. Inconsistency is reflected in how streets that are on the list to be repaved one year are removed the next. Silver Street sidewalks are a nightmare.
		Cherry and Cooper Streets corner sidewalk was busted up during a construction project, and has yet to be repaired despite it being a bus stop for neighborhood children.
<b>Challenges</b>	People burning brush in the neighborhood	Someone was burning brush all the time, and the fire was as high as the garage. The Fire Dept. was notified, but they now approve/permit burns for up to two years. This is a safety concern for trees etc. Residents don’t know how to find out if someone has a permit.

**7.4 Appendix D: Action 13 Meeting Notes**

**Summary**

There were twelve participants at the May 20 Action 13 Neighborhood Meeting. The participants expressed many challenges that currently face their community including both environmental

and safety factors that limit walkability. They attributed these challenges to issues resulting from absentee landlords as well as the disconnection of the neighborhood due to Brownfields and problematic transportation patterns. Councilman Gordon was in attendance at the meeting, and he and Michael Taylor (the meeting facilitator) talked about funding that the city has been allocated to address both Brownfields and stormwater issues throughout the city; the remaining challenge being the time that implementation requires. In contrast to the challenges that were expressed, participants identified many opportunities for improving community health particularly related to economic development and place-making. A recurring priority from participants was the need to connect the Factory H Site and the HUB site through a comprehensive plan that includes downtown. Some specific economic opportunities expressed related to: emphasizing and marketing ethnic businesses, bolstering the city's Farmer's Market, creating businesses related to healthcare and seniors, and creating an eco-district for green businesses.

## **Culture**

### Assets

- The Immanuel Lutheran Church is the only institution in neighborhood. It is a voting venue and hosts community events, but otherwise “there’s a whole lot of nothing”.

## **Economy**

### Opportunities

- Reuse of the hospital facility provides hope to revitalize the neighborhood
- Create a sense of place. Something should happen between the HUB and Action 13. There needs to be a gathering center that people can feel that they are a part of. Healthcare could be the connection point—perhaps assisted living. In general reuse should create more community connectivity.
- Economic opportunities: would be a nursing training facility to create jobs and jobs training. Quick and dirty green jobs where existing manufacturers can take an existing product and make it a little bit more efficient-- turn Crown Street corridor into an eco-industrial district to create training and jobs in the city.
- Booming senior population. The senior center is in this area but needs to be redone. It needs a full time cafeteria because seniors often don't eat if they can't eat at the senior center.
- Take the best of our ethnicity and create tiny shops/restaurants that reflect this diversity to create a little niche that will make Meriden a destination along the transit corridor, while also providing economic opportunities... “A Little New York”
- Hospital has pending leases, and the owner is currently waiting for a few more potential tenants to sign up in order to be able to get funding. Potential tenants include an assisted living facility backed by a doctors group. The city has a foreclosure action against the property owner who owes back taxes. The city does not want to own the building, but would like to see it leased.
- Farmer's Market in the municipal parking lot in June and July is hanging on by a thread. It is down to only one farmer because no one attends. The city needs to do better promoting such as posting fliers and signs. The Farmer's Market is important in that it

provides important access to fresh, healthy produce that is not available in downtown except for a Mexican market on Columbia Street. Need to get more farmers to participate as well. From the farmer's perspective it's hard for them to be taking care of their own farm duties—a good model is to have a cooperative sort of model where there are managers who coordinate the urban market side of things. Also, the Farmer's Market doesn't have to be on a weekend—it can be any day of the week. Need to do a market study evaluating: who are the farmers, what else is happening during that time, who are the customers?? Community garden (good models down in Wallingford at Vietnam Memorial park—any residents can go work their own plot on town property) that is open for residents to tend could facilitate community connections, better access to healthy foods, looking for local organization to champion that—who can provide the institutional support (Middletown people pay rent to have their own plot)

### Challenges

- Downtown property owners were not notified about the meetings... three downtown business owners --- the chamber didn't even invite its own members... Mike says we'll have another meeting for the downtown folks (Scott Hayes marketing manager for home healthcare)

### Environment

#### Opportunities

- Next to Cook Avenue pawn shop they are going to start flood control--next is Columbus Avenue
- City engineer would be a resource to know more about implementation
- We have gotten in-kind resources through the EPA and the state to remediate some of the properties. Factory H will likely be taken down with HUD money.
- Infrastructure such as sidewalk improvement is usually a city or state bond issue
- The concepts of livable cities... partnership for sustainable communities... Meriden could be a pilot location
- Councilman Keith Gordon is going to email the city manager about landscaping 116 Cook to deal with the weeds etc.

### Challenges

- There is garbage everywhere that creates a really unhealthy atmosphere that isn't conducive to walking.
- It's hard to find bus stops in Meriden because there are no signs. To encourage more transit use, the city should post signs and have rain coverage at stops.
- Neighbors said that the Gilman neighborhood park next to Harbor Brook floods. It is concave so there's no way that it can be drained. This could be fixed by raising the contours in the center and scaling the water back down for drainage. The flood control plan is going to eventually create a softball field with other stormwater management features.
- Summer Place always floods and people drive their cars off the cliff.

- Main Street being one way kills business, causes accidents, promotes people driving faster, prevents people from stopping and shopping downtown

## Safety

### Challenges

- Don't feel safe walking around the neighborhood; wouldn't walk on Cook Avenue. Homeowners would not walk off of her own property
- Columbus Avenue down is a nice area but once you get to Spring and Summer Streets the sidewalks aren't as walkable and the buildings are run down where there are many absentee landlords.
- Mean dogs that may not be chained challenge sense of safety.
- House where an overwhelming number of people congregate is intimidating/ threatening. The number of tenants may not be approved by landlord, but is a challenge that is hard to deal with. "There's a difference between good renters and bad renters. "
- The lighting in the neighborhood needs to be improved to increase safety. Currently the lights are very dim as though only every other light is lit.
- Intersections and uncared for properties create serious hazards that don't encourage walkability. One resident at the meeting has hurt herself many times. The city is not very pedestrian friendly—the infrastructure is there, neighborhoods are close together and it should be walkable but the issue is really maintenance. Even in front of and across from the YMCA it is not walkable, it's done with asphalt and it is not well-maintained and it is an eye-sore.

## 7.5 Appendix E: City Park Meeting Notes

### Meeting Summary

There were 15 participants at the City Park Neighborhood Meeting on May 24, 2010. The participants reiterated the sentiment about how the partnership between Community Police Officers and the Council of Neighborhoods had made a tremendous impact in improving safety and community health. Another prominent theme throughout the meeting that was consistent with all other meetings was the concern about absentee landlords and the resulting blight and disconnected renter population. An opportunity that was mentioned was that a lot of properties are currently for sale, and the city has begun a program to purchase and restore properties in priority areas. Another challenge that was identified was the issue of unsupervised youth (particularly teens) and the lack of things for them to do; possible solutions to this included creating job-training programs and bringing in businesses that would both employ and entertain youth (such as a movie theater). Councilwoman Bartolomeo was in attendance at the meeting, and she shared information on city programs to restore community health—especially future plans to upgrade local parks to have more safety features and facilities for older youth such as basketball courts. The participants also identified MidState Medical Center and the Meriden Health Department as valuable assets in the community, and felt that they would be good participants for the future Community Health Workshop.

## Safety

### Assets

- The police always come on time
- Some people feel safe walking at night because there are so many people walking on the street
- Lighting is good
- Five years ago neighborhood associations worked to create community officers... since that's happened the safety in the neighborhoods has been dramatically improved... budget voted to maintain current levels of community policing

### Opportunities

- Question about whether there is recruitment from the neighborhoods or training for residents (get answer)
- Community officers could walk the neighborhoods more
- There is visibility for the police at night—as a homeowner you need to speak out when you see something that's wrong

### Challenges

- Won't walk at night b/c there are too many people hanging in the streets, and it doesn't feel safe
- Unsupervised children in the street-- Biggest concern is unattended youth after school/camp hours from 4:00 p.m. into the night
- Sherman Avenue is dangerous because of people speeding because it is so close to the highway and people may not heed stop signs, one-way streets
- Sidewalks are terrible on Sherman and Warren Avenues
- Franklin Street is missing sidewalk in some places, just has rocks
- Concern that teenagers might not have jobs and be in the streets

## Culture

### Assets

- Boys and Girls Club
- Parks and Recreation has free day camp options
- Beat the Street

### Needs

- City needs more programs that would be interesting to teenagers—job training programs

### Opportunities

- Plans are happening to revitalize City Park and Brookside Park (about a year away from fundraising etc.) bring back some basketball and volleyball courts to keep older youth off of the streets, but a healthy distance away from the younger age play areas... Idea to ask

youth about what they would like to see—from what they've heard from that demographic so far basketball is number one, but a mother would want there to be security... safety/lighting/cameras would be included in the planning for these parks (Councilwoman Bartolomeo)

### Challenges

- It's not ok to drop your kids off at the mall... it is not the purpose of the place—it's for retail... if something goes wrong the mall will have to be in lock-down
- There may be a lot of parents who don't speak English well—should provide outreach for this demographic

### Economy

#### Needs

- Heard ShopRite is moving down to Wallingford... Wonder what the city is doing to keep jobs/to keep/attract business in the city—again thinking about youth jobs etc.
- What are they doing with the old hospital that has been vacant for ten years
- Took movie theater away, took away place/activity for youth – business owner decided to move... the city/mayor is working on recruiting another movie theater back into the city, may locate at the mall... may not be ideal because right now the mall has become a teenage hang out
- See a lot of for sale signs... does the city have any initiative to help residents stay/keep homes or help local people to buy the homes rather than having residents—city used neighborhood stabilization (federal stimulus) funds—purchased 7 homes (example on Franklin Avenue, Lewis Avenue, Twiss Street) had them renovated, had to be purchased as owner-occupied ensured through classes on affording mortgages. At this point 2 have been sold; the last 2 are just about to be improved on Lewis Avenue. There are limits to those kinds of programs, but it is something that the city is focused on. The city has a grants person. This is one of her primary focuses.

#### Opportunities

- Neighborhood Preservation goes through the city dept. loan program through the city (forbearance loan) don't have to repay it until you sell the home... had to suspend the program while implementing the federal program. \*\*Put it in the newspaper to educate people about this opportunity—other types of outreach opportunities. Councilwoman Bartolomeo would be willing to help people learn how to do the application process. The program is for something like siding that needs to be replaced. They are promoted during the code walks to provide a proactive option for people who are going to receive citations etc. for disrepair. (Peter Miller is the contact person at the city)
- You can always call Councilwoman Bartolomeo for any kind of health problem like trash/mattresses things that would attract rodents; abandoned cars can be towed; any multi-family home has to have working fire-escapes can also be addressed. Process may take a few months because of a citation process, and late fees etc. Not having tops on the garbage cans also cause problems. People cannot have black bags of garbage in their backyards.

## Challenges

- Silver and Elm Streets are beginning to fall into disrepair, seems like properties are becoming vacant
- Franklin Street used to be beautiful clean/ now owners are absent and rent it to people on Section 8 and the houses become run-down. The renters don't keep them clean. The yards are nasty, they don't care. Just about all of the neighbors are gone. A lot of the owners don't live anywhere near the area--- they are from NJ/NY. It's very hard for the city to track them down, even if there are legal actions.
- One of the purposes of the monthly code walks is to address these issues resulting from absentee landlords... it's challenging because it takes a year to make the rounds of all of the streets.
- Neighbors had barrels etc. behind their garage. The garbage is piled up so badly that the neighbors are actually paying to put up a fence.
- Meriden has rent control --- someone wonders if this is why there are so many large families
- House next to 90 Franklin Avenue has a dangerous front porch... isn't healthy/safe to live in

## Health

### Assets

- The city used to send out reports about air quality
- MidState Medical Center is a good hospital—could be involved in the community-wide workshop, they probably have more info about the kinds of health issues that they see
- Health Dept. has a health educator who does a lot related to human health... on the city websites etc.—organizes walks, provides free screenings... don't know how much they are utilized but they are there (Leah Crown)—health dept could also be a resource at the community-wide workshop—they currently get info out through schools and websites so there may not be a way to get info out to other residents
- Newspaper provides a lot of good information—lists workshops held at the hospital or the library—calendar section lists events—arthritis program, diabetic information... it does seem that they are underutilized
- Have a free health screening in the park in the neighborhood (and/or as part of the community-wide workshop)—they did this in the park and Subway donated the food
- Children's First Initiative—Meriden Blueprint has 3 different committees health, education, early childcare—50 different organizations meet quarterly to facilitate the coordination of data collection/planning related to these 3 issues—build continuity and referrals amongst services--June 2 meeting at 9 am—quarterly meeting at the health dept. for Children's First

## 7.6 *Appendix F: Meriden Family Zone Meeting Notes*

### **Meeting Summary**

The Meriden Family Zone meeting included about ten local residents including homeowners, renters and outreach workers from Meriden Children's First Initiative. Portions of the meeting were videotaped, and there were translators present to facilitate a bilingual dialog between both Spanish and English speaking participants and facilitators.

### **Community Engagement**

#### Challenges/Needs

- Arch Parkway neighborhood did not have a meeting
- Residents on Twiss Street do not come to association meetings because the association meeting is all in English
- Too few of the city services are provided in Spanish
- A lot of fear about reporting on problems because of it coming back to affect them and families feel like having a secure about their homes is more important than the risks associated with talking about the problems—especially if they are undocumented
- Hispanic culture may inhibit people from asking for help

#### Opportunities/Assets

- Neighborhood Association meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wed. of every month in the Library-- Diane (president) distributes fliers throughout the neighborhood and brings food
- Legal aid has a booklet on tenants rights in both languages
- Councilwoman Santiago gave advice to a renter about their rights and responsibilities so that he will continue to pay his rent: "Write a certified letter to have health dept. report and 30 days until citation..."
- Focus on families that are committed to helping improve the neighborhoods—people who would volunteer with gardening etc.
- Community officer Rodriguez is Spanish speaking and can represent people's concerns to the Health Dept. etc.
- Lions and Rotary Clubs are always interested in funding community projects

### **Environment**

#### Challenges/Needs

- Beautification- planters throughout the neighborhoods (like on East Main Street)
- Stream needs to be cleaned-- tons of trash, erosion (have people take pictures and send them to us)
- Need clean place on Twiss Street for children to play
- Twiss/Miller Streets corner is not good for public park space because people have destroyed littered site with needles etc. over the 10 years of neighborhood association meetings
- Sidewalks are in disrepair

- Twiss Street – renter who has a roof that needs repair
- Tenants are afraid to complain about lead etc. for fear of repercussions with landlords
- One woman has a floor that is rotting because of a water leak; the landlord is not being responsible he's not correcting the source of the problem. The woman has been diagnosed with asthma, she asked if she could replace the rugs and he said no. She doesn't feel safe telling someone about the problems because she's afraid that the landlords are going to make her move, and she feels like she has nowhere else to go.
- Catlin and Miller Streets – Catlin Street building across from library is being used for offices etc. has rusty bars and peeling paint... the parking lot needs maintenance too. This is a key eyesore in the neighborhood that needs to be addressed.
- Library parking lot has holes, streets have holes
- Noise pollution on Hobart Street—issues with residents blaring music at all hours of the day.
- Litter on Hobart Street --- want to have a neighborhood clean up party to pick up garbage in front of their homes/... have a cook-out party at the end
- Sanitation and maintenance needs to be done by landlords—what standards/programs does the city have to respond to these issues?
- City trash doesn't pick up trash that's on the ground because cats knock over the cans
- Dog feces all over the corner of Twiss/Miller Streets makes it an unhealthy place for children to play etc.
- Garbage in the neighborhood is attracting the cats and rodents
- People are leaving their trash out all week even though there is a regulation that says they can only have trash out for one day
- Cars speed up to 75 mph on Hobart and Miller Streets which is very dangerous and there need to be traffic calming strategies to make it safer for the children etc. who play in the neighborhood
- Liberty Street from Hobart Street corner is very dangerous because there are cars parked all the way to the edge which limits visibility tremendously –may be related to the garage that's across the street
- Miller Company streetscape is blighted with high grasses, litter etc.
- Challenge in creating community gardens without limiting recreational space for children—how to create space for both?

#### Opportunities/Assets

- Lead abatement program is on the first floor of the Health Dept. they test and then follow up about how to get rid of it
- Park on end of Hobart Street has swing sets and the City is taking care of it—mowing etc.—Carol Baily (the house of flowers) planted gardens and is maintaining it but wants help/resources to keep it going – working for four years, has kids helping her... over time
- Parks with water features for the summer like at City Park—is something that residents requested for the corner of Twiss/Miller Streets

- This neighborhood includes Health Dept, Library, City Hall, Board of Ed—this is a key place where visitors get a sense of the health and safety of the city and it is in the city's best interest to focus on revitalizing this area to be a better reflection of an up-and-coming Meriden
- Solution to external paint chipping is 2-4 feet of mulch on the side of the building and internal lead dust exposure issues can be prevented by daily wiping
- New Britain reuses vacant sites with affordable housing which can help to increase surrounding property values
- One or two blighted properties on Hobart Street could be community gardens—they are city owned
- Create a GIS map of all vacant lots
  - Center and Liberty Streets—vacant lots
  - Liberty Street up to Broad Street

## **Safety**

### Opportunities/Assets

- Twiss Street—Officer Rodriguez is doing a great job connecting with people

### Challenges/Needs

- Issues on the lower end of Twiss Street—prostitution, drug raids
- Twiss Street is not walkable because it is dark, scary etc. (has been that way since the 60s)
- There are a lot of feral cats on Twiss Street—animal control needs to take care of them
- Crime prevention—we need an anonymous hotline