

**Meriden City Center Initiative Advisory Group
Brief Summary and Action Items from CCAG meeting, March 2nd, 2005**

The meeting convened at 6:05 pm as the facilitator, Stacie Smith, welcomed the attendees, overviewed the agenda, and reviewed the brief summary from the previous meeting. Members were invited to make additions or changes, though none were raised. It was noted that there would be time during the second half of the meeting for members to speak further about the topics covered by the Advisory Group so far: A Sense of Place, Market Factors and Private Investment, and Flood Control. The CCAG members then introduced themselves.

A presentation was given by Phil Ashton, Chairman Flood Control Implementation Agency. Mr. Ashton spoke of the significant chronic flooding in Downtown Meriden since 1860's, caused by overflows by Harbor Brook. Notable recent floods included a "35 year storm" in 1992, which wrought \$17 million in damages, and a "25 year storm" in 1996, leaving \$6 million in damages. He noted that the city experiences, on average, \$2 million a year in losses caused by flooding from Harbor Brook.

In 1992, the city formed the Flood Control Implementation Agency (FCIA) to report on the scope on the problem and identify solutions. Their study revealed several factors needed redress:

1. Hydraulically inadequate bridges, which act as dams during heavy flow;
2. A channel for the brook that is too narrow and shallow, and;
3. Insufficient up-stream storage to slow the flow into downtown.

To give a picture of the scope of the problem, Mr. Ashton explained that peak flow (for the "100 year storm") required a flow capacity of 4000 cubic feet/second, and the current conduit channels flow at 2200 cf/sec.

Mr. Ashton spoke of some of the reforms currently underway, including money raised for bridge reconstruction and taking down the Hub. They are also looking into the options for expanding upstream storage, and both widening and deepening the channel, starting downstream and working up. A letter from the Flood Control Implementation Agency from January 2005 (see centercityinitiative.org for a copy) laid out the agenda and costs of a Flood Control plan that would keep a 100-year flood entirely within the banks of the stream. The cost estimate for this plan is approximately \$30 million, of which \$7 has been committed to date.

Mr. Ashton also mentioned the goal of incorporating flood control into other city projects, and gaining other City benefits from Flood Control efforts. For example, building a Linear Trail from Wallingford to Baldwins Pond would benefit flood control as well as offer social benefits and environmental improvements.

Relating the FCIA plan to the Meriden City Center Initiative, Mr. Ashton assured the group that the details for the area are flexible as long as they accommodate the technical needs for effective flood control, and that he was working with BL Companies to ensure that plans for the city center met flood control requirements.

Advisory group members asked questions about the presentation, summarized below:

- Why would the process of deepening and widening the stream start down stream, rather than downtown, where the problem is? Mr. Ashton replied that this is for technical and scientific reasons – you need to start downstream in order for the impacts to be beneficial.
- Could the retention areas be made bigger to allow for an income and recreation producing activity like boating? Mr. Ashton replied that this is not out of the question, but such a size is far more than that required, and suggested model boats as more likely.
- FCIA’s plan for the Hub area looks significantly different than BL’s plans – how do you explain this? Mr. Ashton explained that the details of the plan were not the main point, but rather that the flood control needs are met. BL companies added that they are committed to a plan that implements the technical requirements of flood control.
- Out of the \$30 million needed for the flood control improvements, how much is unfunded, and what are the sources and realistic timeframe for gaining the resources and implementing solutions? Mr. Ashton replied that there is a net funding need of \$23.7 million, assuming a design in which the Mills is no long there (the requirements increase by \$3 million if the Mills remains). This does not include a reserve of \$2 million from the city, which is being held a possible matching funds. The realistic timeframe is 8-10 years. Current priorities include \$2 million for factor H, \$1.6 million for the Center Street Bridge, and \$1 million for channel work from Hanover to the bridges. There is also work being done to acquire upstream storage, though we are not a liberty to discuss all the negotiations.
- A member commented that the city has historically made decisions that improve the tax base and harm the environment, which in part led to the reduction of upstream storage. Mr. Ashton affirmed that FCIA is working with the city to ensure regulations are mindful of impacts on flood control, and Mr. Caruso added that the city has had a “Zero Run-Off” policy for several years now.
- Given the 8-10 year timeline, what can be done downtown now? Mr. Ashton replied that the ideas being developed for the Center City Initiative now will likely fit the flood control timeline by the time they are ready to be implemented.

After a break, the facilitator reviewed some of the main ideas and suggestions raised in the past two meetings as well as today’s presentation, and opened the floor to additional questions, comments, and discussion from the CCAG, on topics including Flood Control, Market Factors, and a Sense of Place. Members of the CCAG had the following comments and questions:

- The Linear Trail is a great idea that benefits flood control as well as a sense of place, and is very important to pursue.
- I experienced \$132,000 in damages on my business during the 1992 flood – flood control is essential. On market factors, we want to avoid over saturating the retail market in our downtown plan.
- Is the Hub being knocked down for flood control, and if so, how can we imagine rebuilding there? Mr. Ashton replied that there is not a specific use being proposed for the Hub site, but it is being seen by both FCIA and CCI in the context of a larger area of land that is impacted by the needed improvements. The details beyond those needs are still flexible.
- Retail includes a lot of uses, so be open to a vision of retail that is good for the community. Keep in mind the potential impact of technological changes like on-line

shopping. Consider an example of being known for a clustering of similar businesses (i.e., used book store) to attract shoppers.

- Sharing comments from constituents: one parent commented that she would like to see an arts learning center, for both fine and performing arts, maybe combining youth with Seniors. She also suggests an Imax theatre. Another mentioned an interest in using this initiative to make downtown Meriden more upscale, and was against fast food or low scale retail options. Another suggestion was for outlets.
- There is a 5-10 year process to prepare the infrastructure of downtown for the economic opportunities being discussed. Are these efforts being coordinated? Mr. Ashton and BL companies explained that these efforts are definitely being coordinated, and that the goal of the CCI planning is to have a plan that the city can use to make both case-by-case and longer-term decisions about the downtown area, to work toward the vision people have for the area.
- Arts and entertainment, including nice restaurants, is definitely seen as desirable by my constituents. Maybe a small convention center?
- I want to reiterate the need for meeting a diversity of economic interests. Downtown Meriden needs both high end and lower income uses, and a good balance, so that all citizens feel that they belong.
- We need to make sure to integrate whatever we do on this site with the rest of downtown and surrounding areas.
- Will we be doing the “Gap Analysis” of the region, as suggested by the panelist at the last meeting? MERG responded that this is not part of the plan at the moment, and would be fairly preliminary if done at the moment, but would likely be done later on.
- The Housing authority supports taking the Mills down in order to provide a better housing solution for its residents. It would also be good for flood control. There will be a hearing on April 13 to discuss Mills, at 9 pm at the Meriden Board of Education meeting room. All are encouraged to attend.
- What is the expected timing for taking down the Hub? MERG and Ms. Brennon replied that this should occur within a year or so, and explained that there is a great deal of burdensome bureaucracy to work through.

There was time for public comment, and then the next meeting, on the topic of Transportation Improvements, was described. BL companies will present on their current research on the needs and options available. The next meeting will be held at the Meriden Public Library on March 30.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45.