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A \$500 million vision is taking shape

Here's how a plan to build new neighborhood around The Bushnell could come together

By **Kenneth R. Gosselin**
Hartford Courant

HARTFORD — A \$500 million vision for shaping a new Hartford neighborhood from the barren landscape around The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts made its debut Wednesday night, including the potential for a high-rise apartment tower, public performance spaces and tree-lined streets.

The master plan for “Bushnell South” — outlined at a community meeting at The Bushnell — includes 1,200 residential units — both rented and owned — restaurants, shops and entertainment venues.

The design aims to turn a jumble of parking lots into a neighborhood over the next decade. Bush-

nell South would connect Bushnell Park and the center of downtown Hartford to the north with the hospital district, Park Street and Colt Park to the south.

“It could be the linchpin of an exciting arts and entertainment district for the city, which I think it needs, which could help it draw young people,” said Robert Patricelli, chairman of The Bushnell’s board of director’s real estate committee and a past board chairman.

Last fall, The Bushnell joined with the Capital Region Development Authority and Spinnaker Real Estate Partners of South Norwalk to pay for a plan for developing the area over the next decade.

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A rendering of what Hartford’s Bushnell South could look like a decade from now. GOODY CLANCY/CAPITAL REGION DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Merrill will not run for reelection

Secretary of State Denise Merrill, who has been at the forefront of expanding voting access, declared Wednesday that she will not run for reelection, creating a rare opening at the upper echelon of Connecticut politics. **CONNECTICUT, PAGE 1**

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Bushnell

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Patricelli, who spoke before the meeting Wednesday night at the Bushnell, said the city used to have more clubs and entertainment options, and the development could fill the gap.

"We think Capitol Avenue — with a lot of residential, certainly, as the lead momentum of the development — this could be a terrific neighborhood to live in," Patricelli said.

The Bushnell, which now anchors the area, sought a role in how the 91-year old cultural institution would fit into the redevelopment and how it might invest and earn income from future arts endeavors in the area.

CRDA has helped publicly finance more than 2,000 new apartments in and around downtown since 2013. Spinnaker Real Estate Partners of South Norwalk has purchased key properties in the area and has an option on another. Spinnaker intends to become a major future development force in Bushnell South.

In addition, the city, which has been collaborating on the project, sees not only the opportunity to build a vibrant neighborhood but getting a sorely-needed boost to its tax base.

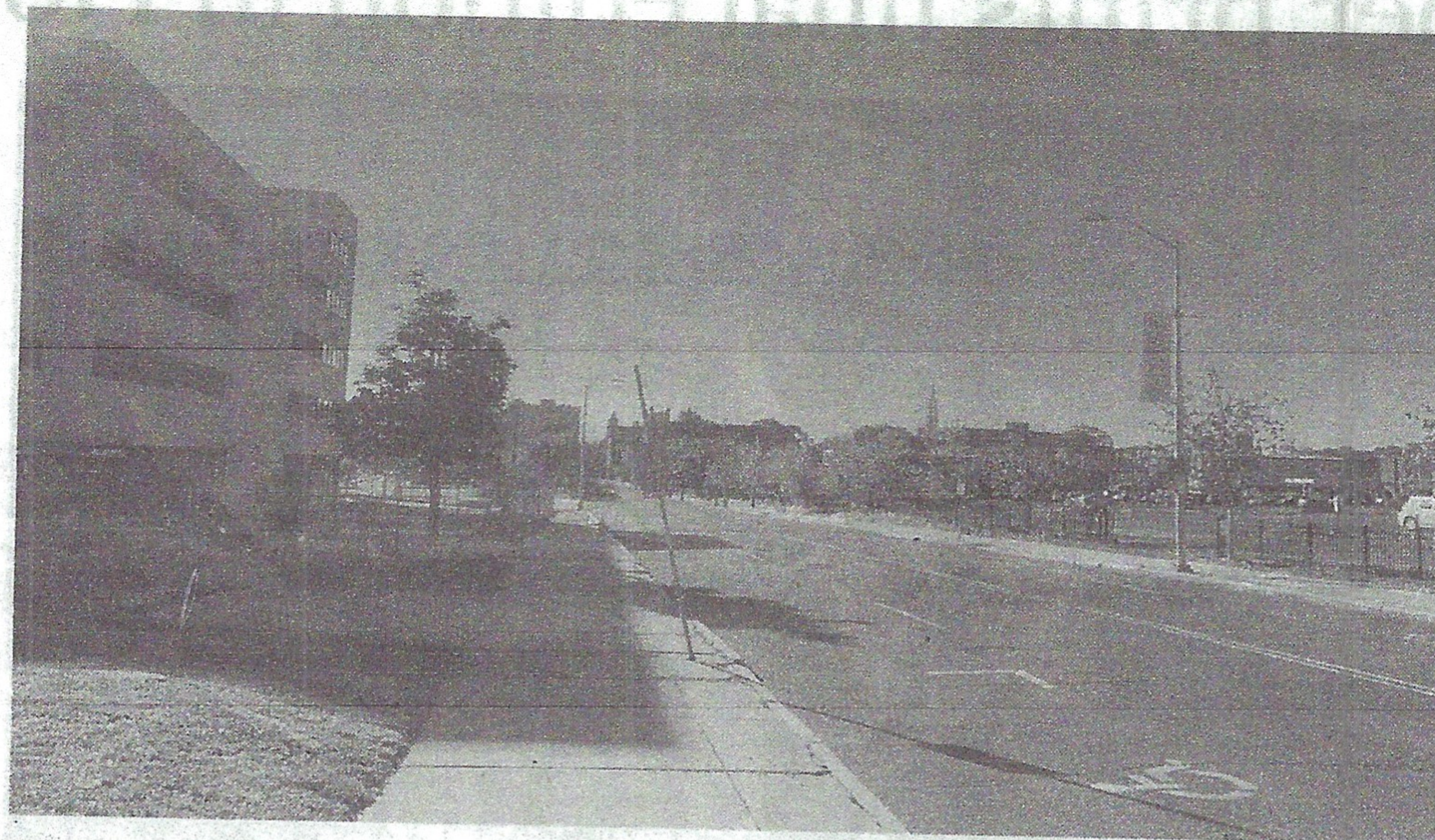
The vision is grand and one that has been talked about for decades. How quickly — and to what extent — the master plan turns into reality depends largely on financing and demand for downtown Hartford apartment rentals. So far, rentals, at least in newer buildings, appear to be recovering from a dip during the pandemic.

Early estimates for Bushnell South call for about \$400 million in private investment and another \$100 million in public, state taxpayer-backed loans. The availability of public funds for projects like Bushnell South has become less certain as the state cut back on its borrowing through the sale of bonds.

Clayton H. Fowler, Spinnaker's chairman and chief executive, said the public financing will be critical to the success of the project.

"The underlying rents and values in Hartford don't at this time support non-aided development," Fowler said, before Wednesday's meeting.

Fowler said the pandemic



The view east on Capitol Avenue in Hartford in the Bushnell South redevelopment area. A new, \$16 million parking garage is at left. **KENNETH R. GOSSELIN/HARTFORD COURANT**

Fowler said he doesn't see the attraction of living in a city the size of Hartford as having changed.

Here is a look at how a new Hartford neighborhood might replace the parking lots around the Bushnell.

Starting point

Bushnell South encompasses about 20 acres and is divided in half by Capitol Avenue. Some of the ground work for future development already is in place.

The state has completed a \$205 million renovation of the State Office Building and the creation of a new park on its east side. Two new parking garages, one on Buckingham Street for state employees and other on Capitol Avenue, just east of the Presbyterian church, will serve state workers, Bushnell patrons and future residents of the neighborhood.

Spinnaker will soon start conversion of 55 Elm St. on Pulaski Circle into 161 apartments in a \$63 million project that also includes a \$13.5 million CRDA low-cost loan.

In addition, two historic buildings near the corner of Trinity and Elm streets that formerly housed state workers are being sold by the state. They are considered part of Bushnell South and have been mentioned as candidates for housing.

Phase 1

The first phase would focus on a parking lot now controlled by CRDA, just east of the new park next to the State Office Building. CRDA would seek out a

between the new park and a new block of 372 apartments and townhouses.

New housing would be built by Spinnaker along West Street adjacent to 55 Elm and streetscape improvements would be made along Clinton Street. Both are designed to be extensions of Bushnell Park.

The first phase would use existing parking garages and surface lots.

"Part of the whole trick is using surface for as much parking as we can get away with as we build phases and putting off the parking garage question as long as we can," Michael W. Freimuth, CRDA's executive director, said, before Wednesday's meeting.

Phase 2

The start of Phase 2 would require the addition of two levels to the parking garage on Capitol Avenue and about 135 spaces.

Construction would focus on building residential buildings around the parking garage on both Capitol Avenue and West Street. The ownership of this area is divided between CRDA and Spinnaker.

This phase also could include row houses on Elm and Clinton streets to fill in vacant lots.

Another 112 residential units are possible in this phase.

Phase 3

To move ahead with Phase 3, a 650-space parking garage would need to be built on the interior of the existing parking lot for both

neighborhood. The housing was gradually demolished beginning in the 1940s to make way for parking lots to accommodate state workers commuting in from the suburbs.

An apartment tower is possible, capitalizing on views of the city, but it is still uncertain if it would be financially feasible.

Spinnaker now has an option to buy this parking lot, and it has an agreement giving The Bushnell a say in its redevelopment.

This phase also includes residential development on the south side of 55 Elm.

A total of 222 residential units could be created in this phase.

Phase 4

Phase 4 would add additional housing opposite Bushnell Park at the corner of Elm and West streets. A parking lot across Hudson Street near Pulaski Circle could mimic the "L" shape of the historic 55 Elm. Housing, office space, a hotel or retail space are possible at this site, now owned by Spinnaker.

A total of 234 units could be added in this phase.

Putting it all together

The completed development could one day transform the parking lots that now dominate into a vibrant city neighborhood on the edge of Bushnell Park and close to downtown.

Freimuth said the master plan now envisions four phases, but that could be