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## Hartford's Parkville neighborhood positioned for economic revival



HBJ PHOTO | MICHAEL PUFFER

Brittany and Justin Bedard, both 30, of Manchester, enjoy drinks at the Parkville Market.  
By [Michael Puffer](#)

Brittany and Justin Bedard sipped drinks at the bar inside the Parkville Market shortly after 2 p.m. on Valentine's Day, killing time before heading to an appointment at nearby Witchhouse Tattoo for romantic body art.

The Bedards, both 30, live in Manchester and run small businesses. Together and separately they've repeatedly visited Hartford's Parkville neighborhood to stop at the market, an alternative arts center, a brewery or to enjoy recreational ax throwing.

"I was just saying earlier, give this place another two or three years and this is going to be the place to be around here, with the amount of businesses coming in and the amount of options for people our age — late 20s and early 30s," Justin Bedard said.

Parkville is a working-class neighborhood whose factories were deserted decades ago.

Budding plans to redevelop the area as a center of arts, entertainment and technology were thrown into high gear in October as the state announced a new program offering up to \$50 million to create “innovation corridors.”

The city is now developing an ambitious \$250 million redevelopment blueprint for Parkville’s commercial core to leverage that money. And while officials are keeping the finer details of the plan under wraps until after its application is submitted March 4, the vision is no secret.

“We see a real opportunity to build on the organic momentum in Parkville and help create something that’s all too rare in Connecticut, which is an urban neighborhood that genuinely allows for living, working and playing; that has a range of income-diverse residential opportunities in proximity to vibrant arts and culture opportunities and great and diverse cuisine, that is also a center and a hub for innovation and job creation,” Mayor Luke Bronin said.



ZACHARY VASILE | HARTFORD BUSINESS JOURNAL

Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin at a recent press conference on Pratt Street.

Martin Guay, Stanley Black & Decker's vice president of business development, said one element of the plan would create advanced manufacturing training and demonstration centers. This would provide residents access to good jobs, and the state a much-needed workforce, he said.

The state's manufacturers could visit to learn the latest methods and technologies.

Guay said he met with Bronin three years ago, looking for an area that could serve as an advanced manufacturing incubator. Bronin, Guay said, pointed him to Parkville.



Martin Guay

Since then, Guay has helped draw together locals, businesspeople, nonprofits and other officials to chart a plan to reinvigorate Parkville. The pace picked up after the state announced the innovation corridor grant, Guay said.

“This is not an opportunistic submission,” Guay said. “It’s an opportunity to scale an existing vision.”

## Inevitable progress

The “innovation corridor” plans incorporate several projects already in the works by avid Parkville developer Carlos Mouta. That includes a \$4.6 million expansion of the Parkville Market, a 57-apartment development at 17 Bartholomew Ave., and a \$72.6 million conversion of an empty industrial hulk on Hamilton Street. That project will yield 189 apartments and 86,000 square feet of commercial space.

“Right now, for all the businesses that want to come, we don’t have enough space,” Mouta said. “I need three times the space.”

Whether or not the state money comes, Mouta views progress in Parkville as inevitable.

“Maybe what we can do in the next five years with the grant will take 15, but it’s going to happen,” Mouta said. “It’s already here.”

Mouta partnered with social services nonprofit Hands on Hartford for the 57-apartment development, 30% of which will be affordable.



Parkville developer Carlos Mouta.

Hands on Hartford moved its community service offices to Parkville five years ago, into a building at 55 Bartholomew Ave., that housed the “Spaghetti Warehouse” in the 1990s. The restaurant’s name is still emblazoned across the top of a dormant coal-fired, powerhouse that also sits on Hands on Hartford’s 1.5-acre lot.

The 22,000-square-foot power plant once served neighboring factory buildings. It has sat unused for 50 years as cracks in the masonry spread and gaps widened. Weed vines climb an exterior wall unchecked.

Plans for the innovation corridor would see it transformed, with six floors offering space for high-tech digital media training, coworking space, educational programs, a day care and, possibly, health services, said Barbara A. Shaw, executive director of Hands on Hartford.

Shaw said she believes renovation estimates run between \$14 million and \$16 million. Funding would come from the state, historic tax credits, private dollars and borrowing. A fundraising campaign could be in the mix.

“We serve several thousand folks through this center now,” Shaw said. “Our hope would be we see far fewer people needing those services because they’ve been able to get a career that has adequate pay and benefits and self-respect and stability for their families.”



HBJ PHOTO | MICHAEL PUFFER

Barbara A. Shaw, executive director of Hands on Hartford, outside a dormant coal-fired power plant that once powered factories in Hartford's Parkville neighborhood. Plans call for the plant to be renovated, offering space for technology training, a day care and other uses.

Shaw has seen the neighborhood evolve since Hands on Hartford bought its current headquarters in 2014. Back then, the location had its doubters, she recalled.

“There were some who thought we were imbalanced for buying in Parkville because this neighborhood was more deserted than now,” Shaw said. “We didn’t have a Parkville Market. We didn’t have a Know Good Market. We didn’t have a brewery. We didn’t have ax-throwing. We didn’t have reSET in the neighborhood. We didn’t have any of this vision at the time. But we were sure our investment here could matter.”

Contemporary arts nonprofit Real Art Ways also recently announced a \$14.7 million expansion and renovation of its newly-purchased, 83,000-square-foot building on Arbor Street, located close to Parkville Market.

## **Tech and higher-ed**

Several of the city's colleges and universities are ready to put their resources behind the innovation corridor.

Mark Boxer, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the University of Hartford, said his institution is collaborating with Trinity College and UConn.

Boxer envisions faculty participating in research in the Parkville technology incubator spaces, guiding startup businesses and sending students to participate in "experiential learning."

The door swings both ways, Boxer noted. Trainees from the neighborhood could access resources at the university campus as well, he said.

"If you look at the history of things like Silicon Valley or the Research Triangle, it's been government collaborating with private industry and academia that's been the secret sauce to the success of those places," Boxer said.

The city's ability to attract technology companies, Boxer said, has already been proven with recent arrivals and expansions of tech giant Infosys; IT and business consulting firm HCL; and IT services firm GalaxE.Solutions Inc.

“They have proven the case that Hartford can be attractive as an innovation corridor,” Boxer said. “Now with the successes to date, we are advancing into Parkville.”

Meantime, Capital Community College is interested in bringing an advanced manufacturing or training center to Parkville, City Economic Development Director Erin Howard told members of the City Council’s Planning, Economic Development & Housing Committee during a Feb. 2 meeting.

The state grant requires a four-to-one match, meaning the state’s \$50 million would require \$200 million invested in Parkville from other sources, according to Elizabeth “Liz” Torres, a member of Vita Nuova. Her redevelopment planning group was hired to help Hartford prepare its application.

The state has received 12 notices-of-intent to apply for the grant, according to Department of Economic and Community Development spokesman Jim Watson.

The “first phase” of work in Parkville will add 246 apartments and 333,000 square feet of commercial space, Torres said.

The development pace in Parkville is so great that the Capital Region Development Authority Board voted Jan. 20, to allow Executive Director Michael Freimuth to hire a consultant to manage Parkville projects.

If the state grant comes, Freimuth told his board, the neighborhood will probably get its own development corporation.