

Grand Avenue Special Services District Yale IEDL Project

Learnings from Park Street, Hartford commercial street corridor

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Park Street

Case Study



-  **Yale IEDL Project Overview**
-  **Grand Avenue**
-  **Park Street**
-  **Looking Forward + Next Steps**

Supporting Commercial Corridors

Main Street commercial corridors have traditionally been the economic backbone of neighborhoods across America, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the closure and movement of local businesses elsewhere.

Current Trends & Needs

Commercial corridors now look varied; local context has become paramount. Development efforts span a wider range of community types.

- Thoughtful, tailored approaches are needed ensure community trust, engagement, and improvement.

Commercial success and community success are intertwined. From beatification to affordable housing, commercial corridors rely on robust communities (and continued investment into their development).

- Coordination of efforts across community organizations, business owners, and government actors is now a necessity.



Yale IEDL Project overview



● Mini Case Study on Park Street

To highlight the **key activities**, **partnerships** and **milestones** contributed to the commercial corridors development.

Park Street can serve as an example to consider in future revitalization efforts of Grand Avenue and show

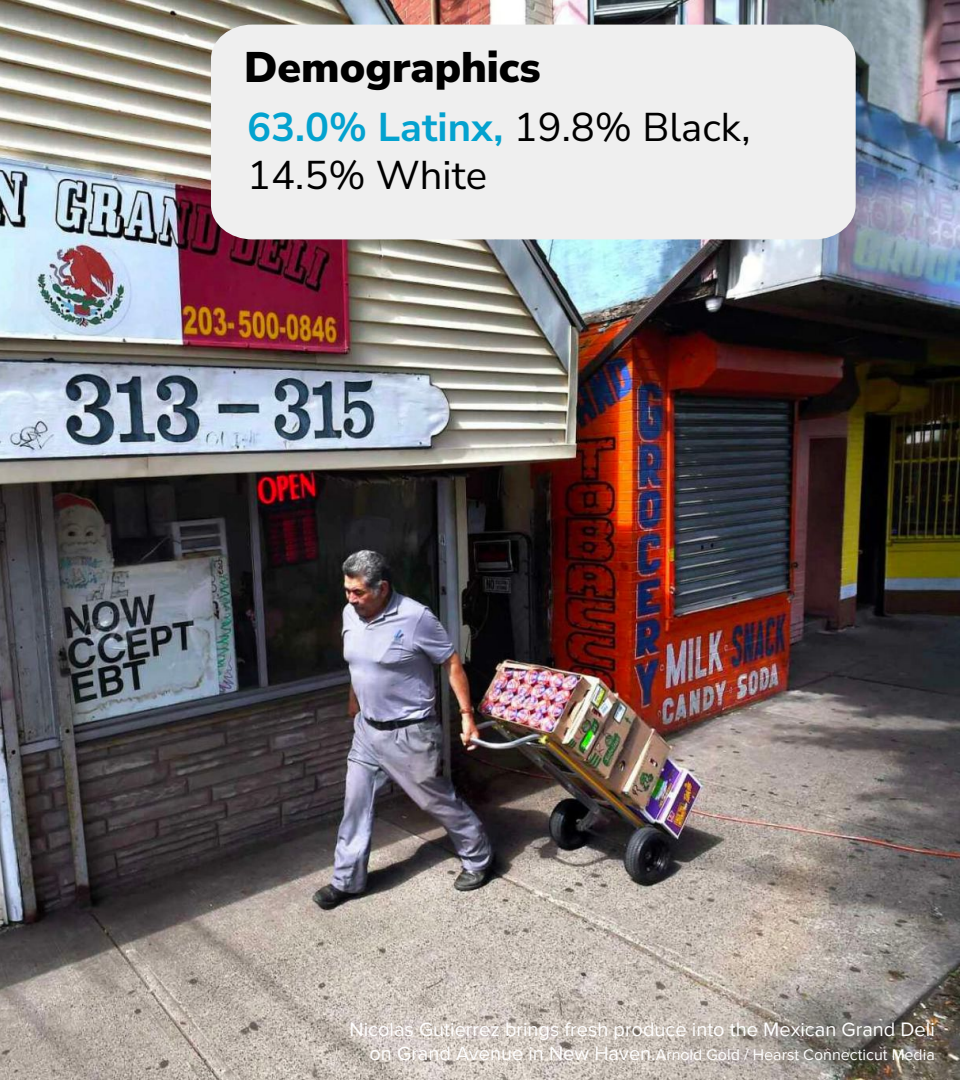
- 1) **What has worked well**
- 2) **What could have been done**

Grand Avenue, Fair Haven



Demographics

63.0% Latinx, 19.8% Black,
14.5% White



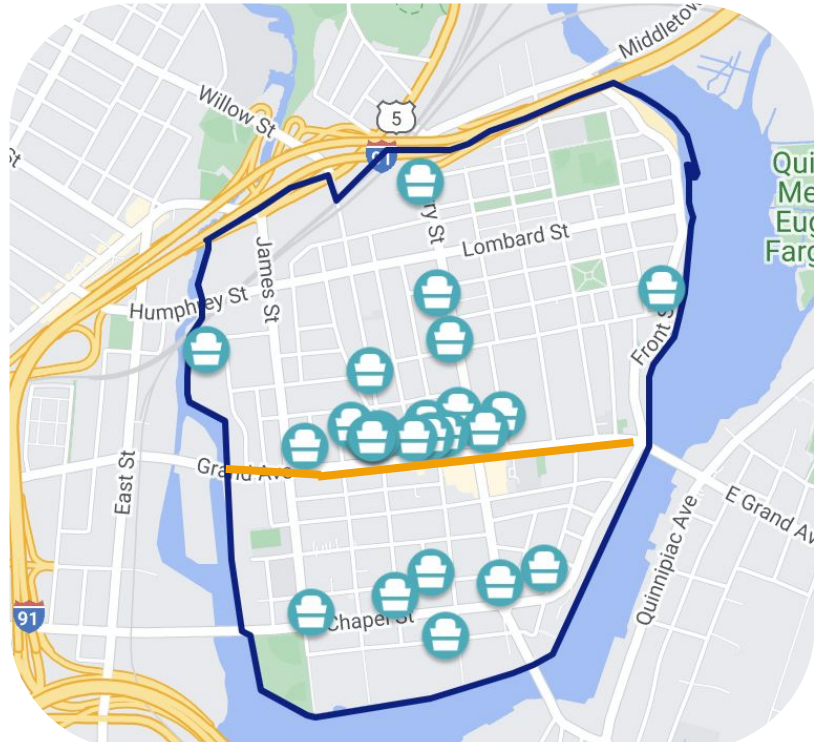
Nicolas Gutierrez brings fresh produce into the Mexican Grand Deli on Grand Avenue in New Haven. Arnold Gold / Hearst Connecticut Media

Grand Avenue

Grand Avenue is a commercial corridor located at the heart of the Fair Haven small neighborhood community. Since the 1960s, it has been home to a **significant Black and Latinx population**

Community Assets

- **Ethnically diverse community** has led to a rise of Latinx businesses
- Strong community based retail with nearly **90 businesses** on the corridor
- A diversity of **community based anchors** from banks to its schools, libraries and clinics.
- A strong architectural and historic identity
- Active transport corridor



Grand Avenue SSD

The Grand Avenue SSD was established in 2009 with a clear mission to support the merchants and businesses of the commercial corridor

Current Issues

1. Crime and Security
2. Business Investment and Corridor Image
3. Retail Leakage

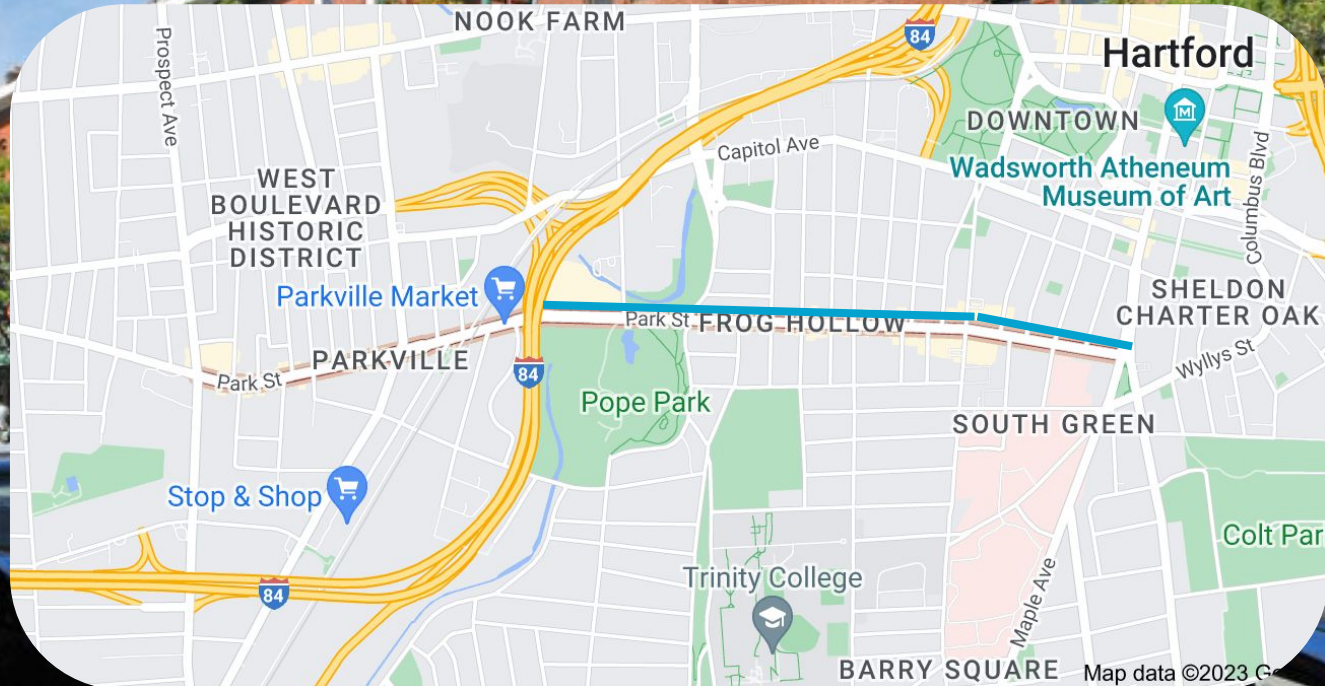
Park Street, Hartford



68%

Latinx population
(2020)

Park Street



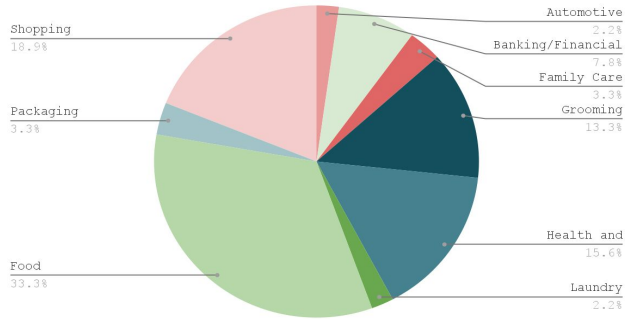
BARRY SQUARE Map data ©2023 G

Learning from Commercial Corridors

Both home to a **significant Latinx populations and ethnic diversity**

Grand Avenue

Grand Avenue Retail Makeup



Grand Avenue Special Services District (est. 2009)

Board Budget: US\$40K

Board Makeup

Present Issues

Corridor Image

Crime

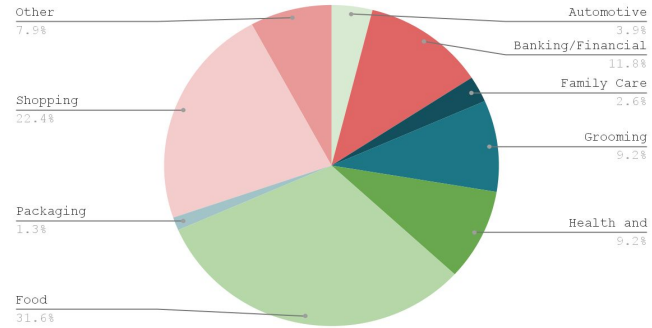
Safety

Investment

Resource Access

Park Street

Park Street Retail Makeup



Park Street Special Services District (est. 2002)

Board Budget: ?

Board Makeup

- Angel L. Sierra, President (board since 2002, business & property owner)
- Luis Rodriguez, Commissioner (board since 2003, owns El Comerio)
- Stanley Gutt, Commissioner (board since 2002, property owner)
- Reina Lopez, Commissioner (board since 2002, property owner)
- Roberto Muñiz, Commissioner (business owner, board for a few years)
- Carlos Valinho, Commissioner (board since 2002, property owner;)
- Diane Wiemer, Commissioner (board since 2002, property owner)
- Bernie Diego, Treasurer (board since 2002, owns Peerless Travel)

Present Issues

Crime

Resource Access

Investment

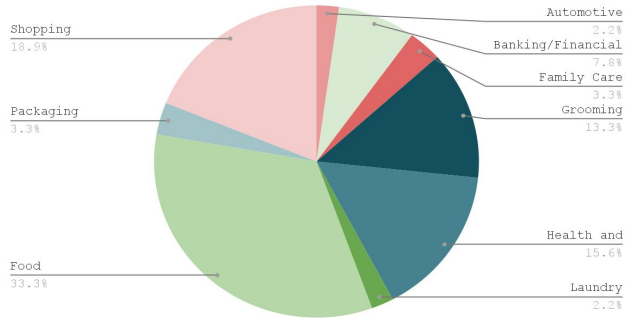
Learning from Commercial Corridors

Grand Avenue

Both home to a **significant Latinx populations and ethnic diversity**

63.0% Latinx (2020)

Grand Avenue Retail Makeup

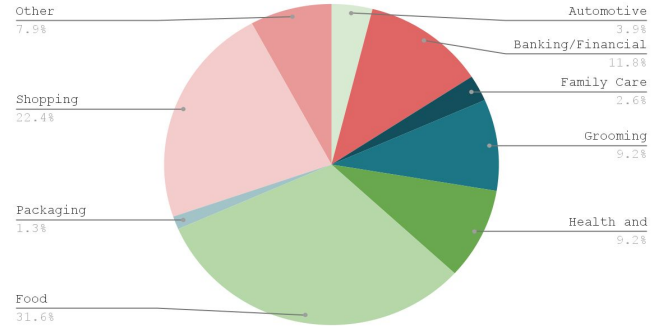


Grand Avenue Special Services District (est. 2009)

Park Street

68.0% Latinx (2020)

Park Street Retail Makeup



Park Street Special Services District (est. 2002)

Present Issues

Corridor Image

Crime

Safety

Investment

Resource Access

Present Issues

Crime

Safety

Resource Access

Investment

Historical Overview

Secondary Research

Dissertation

Annual City Reports

Newspaper Articles

Revitalization Plans



Key Policies

1990s: Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART) focused on **housing redevelopment**

1991: Broad-Park Development Corporation (BDPC) for housing and **commercial development**

1992: Spanish American Merchants Association

incorporated into CT

1995: Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (SINA) Plan and efforts with SAMA and BDPC for **housing**, **commercial projects**, **antigang violence and youth leadership**.

1997: Learning Corridor

1998: Neighborhood Revitalization Committee Plan worked to improve deteriorated communities

1999: SINA partners with Hartford Hospital, Institute for Living and Trinity College for revitalization efforts and creation of the **learning corridor**

2000: Connecticut Historic **Homes Rehabilitation** Tax Credit Program

2002: Parkville identified as a key player for **market and real estate development**

2002: Special Services District for business development, retail and **housing; Park Squire housing investment**

2003: Park Street Streetscape project; regulation allowances for **housing in industrial buildings; National historic buildings tax credits**

2000s: SINA and BDPC focus on **affordable Housing** and the building of El Mercado

2005 : 10 year Frog Hollow NRZ committee plan

DECD federal **HOME dollars** Investment

City of Hartford state grant into parking meters, facade improvement, video cameras

2007: Billings Forge Community Work of the Melville Charitable Trust focus on **restaurants**.

Park Street (1990 - 2010) Historical Overview

The main focus of this period was to make “**housing as a stabilizing force**” for the local economy

1990

2000

2010

Park Street (1990 - 2010)

Historical
Overview

Key Policies

The main focus of this period was to make **“housing as a stabilizing force”** for the local economy

1) **18 out of 33 policies** and **initiatives** targeted housing development, improvement or restoration

Main Themes

Housing

Business
Development

Streetscape and
Facade
Improvement

Anti-gang
Violence and
Crime

Key Stakeholders

Who was instrumental at the time?

1990

2000

2010

Frog Hollow
Neighborhood Revitalization Zone

Broad Park Development
Corporation

HART
Hartford Areas Rally Together



SOUTHSIDE INSTITUTIONS
NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE



SAMA SPANISH AMERICAN
MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION



Trinity College
HARTFORD · CONNECTICUT



VECINOS UNIDOS



Park Street (1990 - 2010)

Historical Overview

Impact

Merchants

- Business facades improved
- No real focus on workforce development, job creation or selling to local residents

Latinx Community

- Marginalization and displacement of Latinx communities due to market rate housing dominance
- Many households were denigrated to poor housing, no institutional support for education or medical services

Crime

- Gang violence and crime prevalent
- Housing development and streetscape projects stemmed off some crime
- More affluent still feared shopping Park Street

Early 2000s

\$4,600

Latinx community per capita income

\$13,500

Non-Latinx community per capita income

57%

Parkville households earned more than \$25,000

53

Homicides with 17 being gang related (1994)

Park Street (2010 - 2023) Historical Overview

The period has seen an **expanded focus on the built environment** - streetscapes, facades, historic preservation, & housing are top of mind.

Key Activities

2010: Hartford Courant profiles Park Street as a bustling corridor with “retail vibrancy downtown longs for”

2011: Frog Hollow NRZ Plan released, **focusing on housing and streetscapes**

2013: CT housing authority approves cache of federal tax credits, including **~\$760k for rental units in 6 historic Frog Hollow buildings**

2015: CTfastrak commuter bus stations open on Park Street, on Parkville side

2016: 5-Year Strategic Plan prepared by SINA, LISC, and the Mutual Housing Association of Greater Hartford; **focus on affordable housing & employment**

2017: NRZ approves state plan to demolish Lyric Theater and build library

2020-2021: Lyric Theater demolished, new public library opened

2022: **\$1.5M U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services Grant for homeownership** split between Frog Hollow & nearby neighborhood; SINA instrumental here

2023: Frog Hollow NRZ Strategic Plan draft available for feedback

2010

2017

2023

Park Street (2010 - 2023)

Historical
Overview

Key Policies

The main focus of this period was **an expanded focus on the built environment** - streetscapes, facades, historic preservation, & housing have been top of mind.

The biggest change in the neighborhood? The demolishing of the Lyric Theater to build the **\$12.5M Park Street Public Library**

Main Themes

Renovation &
Historic
Preservation
Efforts

Streetscape &
Facade
Improvement

Park Street (2010 - 2023) Historical Overview

Impact

Merchants

- Business facades & streetscape improved
- Pandemic accelerated turnover and vacancy, less general foot traffic

Community Members

- Continued neighborhood population decline
- Minimal investment in livelihoods & wellbeing

Crime

- Gang violence diminished; crime still an issue, especially open drug use

Nearby Efforts

Parkville (contains western portion of Park St.)

- Large cross-sector investments being made into a thriving business park + arts initiatives

Downtown (borders Park St. to the east)

- Investment in safety and employment through Ambassadors program

2018-2020

34%

Poverty status
(24% for Hartford,
10% for CT)

7%

Homeownership
(24% in Hartford)

97.4%

Residents working
outside of Frog Hollow
(stagnant since 2002)

Merchant Interviews

Key
Takeaways

Primary Research



Interview 1

Hardware Store

Interview 2

Phone Repair

Interview 3

Jewelry Store

Interviews

During a visit to Park Street the Yale IEDL Team had the opportunity to speak with merchants on the corridor and hear from them

- 1) What has changed on the corridor in the last few decades?
- 2) Who has been instrumental in their success?
- 3) What could be still be improved in terms of support and resources for local business?

Main Themes

Community
Level

Social
Level

City
Level

Crime

Merchant Interviews

Key Takeaways

Building Community Culture

Community Festivals

What we learned

Park Street was a hub for Latinx Festivals. Slowly coming back with the DominGO open street festival

Room for Growth

Room to bring back the energy and community showcases of lost festivals and center on anchor food enclaves like *El Mercado*

Community Building and Public Spaces

What we learned

Local strategies to celebrate culture used to happen informally (e.g spit roasts). Love Your Block Initiative has revitalized some community building

Room for Growth

Some of the informal efforts by individual merchants have disappeared

Street Specific Strategies that stood out

Community Level

Centering the cultural identity of the street and bringing in local and outside residents

Festivals

Food

Culture

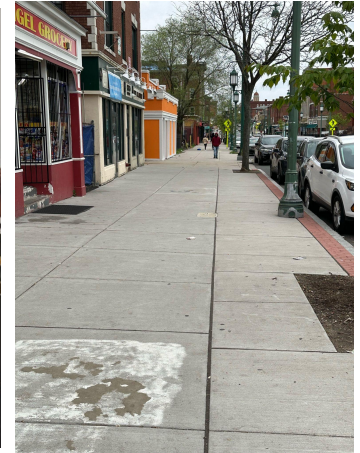


City Level

Grant Support

Sidewalks

Street Lamps



Merchant Interviews

Key Takeaways

Dealing with Crime

Individual Investments and Security Measures

What we learned

Merchants invest into cameras, railings, bullet proof windows and strong security with some federal support

Room for Growth

Drugs and loitering are still and issues and there is room for restorative youth programs, as well as patrol efforts by local police

Community Reliance to fend off Crime

What we learned

Some merchants form coalitions to ensure corridor safety and not have railings to detract customers. Some improve store front aesthetic but keep railings.

Room for Growth

Police are quite absent on the corridor. There is also variation in the levels of safety merchants feel.

Street Specific Strategies that stood out

Social Level

Investing into the image of the corridor and the culture

Art Lot Box

Murals

Community Playground

Library



Crime

Ensuring safety but still drawing in customers

Window Bars

Monitoring

Police





Institutional Interviews

Key Takeaways

Secondary Research

Interview 1

Academic

Interview 2

Community Organization

Interview 3

Private Company

Interviews

Both online and during a visit to Park Street, the Yale IEDL Team had the opportunity to speak with individuals who had lived in, worked in, and/or studied the Frog Hollow area and its adjacent neighborhoods.

- 1) What has changed on the corridor in the last few decades?
- 2) Who has been instrumental in creating change in Frog Hollow?
- 3) How are surrounding communities changing in comparison?

Main Themes

Community
Level

Social
Level

City
Level



Institutional Interviews

Key Takeaways

Community actors took more of a backseat given the vibrant activity of the SSD/merchant association during the 2000s. With less of an overarching role now, the SSD could benefit from an updated vision and connection to other neighborhood actors.

What we learned

A once active and highly visible SSD is still operational, but activities and broader engagements are **unclear**.

Room for Growth

Catalyze new period of growth through **communication** and **transparency**; develop ties with all merchants.

Neighboring districts are taking distinct approaches to revitalization and formulating larger-scale strategies.

What we learned

Frog Hollow used to have more development activity; its **neighbors are now ahead** in vision and connectedness.

Room for Growth

Co-learn and work closely with neighboring areas; create “**activation strategies**” to tap into their relative strengths.





Looking Forward

What Grand Avenue Can Learn

Overall Lessons Learned

What can any
SSD learn from
these findings?

Street-specific strategies alone are not enough

1

Accounting for the broader local context matters

- **A one-size-fits-all approach misses the different capacities and assets communities have.** There are critical differences in tax base, active community organizations, history of merchants, local networks, etc.

2

Fostering a community of active support for all merchants matters

- **An engaged SSD which makes resources available** and known to all merchants makes a difference. This can include:
 - Help with applying for loans & other financial programs
 - Providing merchants with business training for finances, operations, marketing, etc.
 - Street improvements - cleaning, graffiti removal, unifying the look of facades, pedestrian amenities

Overall Lessons Learned

What can any SSD learn from these findings?

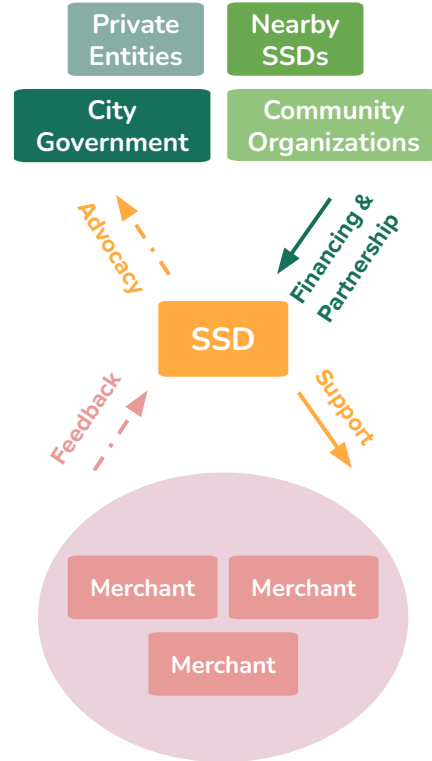
3

Street-specific strategies alone are not enough

Co-learning with merchants and external stakeholders matters

- An SSD aware of its linkages can harness them for learning & change.
- **Support & Advocacy:** By actively supporting merchants, SSDs can understand their needs, elicit feedback, change offerings, and advocate for resources to fill gaps.
- **Partnerships:** Merchant success and community success are intertwined; partnering with community stakeholders paves the way for policy change and neighborhood vision.

A Model for SSD Activity



Ongoing Questions

Grand Avenue is now in a reactivation phase. What are important questions and opportunities to consider?



- 1. How expansive do you want your role to be?** What are the goals of the Grand Ave SSD? What is its resource capacity to meet those goals?
- 2. Who else is vying for Fair Haven?** What is the potential for collaboration and synergy in corridor vision?
- 3. What are potential avenues for further research?** What details of the policies are important to know? Why were certain foci chosen for a time period?
- 4. What are other regional partnership plans that have been done?** Are there existing partnerships to tap into or model

Thank You!


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Potential New Haven Partners

What can any
SSD learn from
these findings?



- **An SSD aware of its linkages can harness them for learning & change.**
- **Support & Advocacy:** By actively supporting merchants, SSDs can understand their needs, elicit feedback, change offerings, and advocate for resources to fill gaps.
- **Partnerships:** Merchant success and community success are intertwined; partnering with community stakeholders paves the way for policy change and neighborhood vision.

Interview 1

Hardware Store

What has worked?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Huge sense of family
- Latinx Festivals used to happen (Puerto Rican Day Festival)

SOCIAL LEVEL

Beautification/Facade Improvement

- Fixed store fronts, sidewalks, pavers cleaning early mornings

Small Business Development

- Awareness meetings for new programs, benefits or loans to explain and help merchants qualify
- Computer classes

CRIME

- Graffiti team respond to vandalism within 24 hours
- Street lamps and cameras inside and outside
- Rolled down gates and bullet proof windows to look like San Juan using federal \$

What is still an issue?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Festivals have moved to Bushnell Park
- Much lower foot traffic due perceptions of safety on the street

SOCIAL LEVEL

Beautification/Facade Improvement

- No recent efforts

CRIME

- Used to have community service workers to walk the streets
- Mi Casa used to have youth programs
- Strong negative perception of the Street in terms of crime in the media

Interview 2

Phone repair

What has worked?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- DominGO open street festival occurs every year

SOCIAL LEVEL

Beautification/Facade Improvement

- Some cleaning and business front changes.

Small Business Development

- Very little assistance from business nonprofit programs
- Loan programs have strict upfront cost barriers nearing \$30,000

CRIME

- Have security rails on the storefront for safety and cameras
- Mi Casa youth programs

What is still an issue?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Used to have Park Street Festivals but had to pay to use your front area for vending

SOCIAL LEVEL

Beautification/Facade Improvement

- Not for free so resorted to cleaning on their own
- Loan programs have strict upfront costs of \$30,000 which is not accessible to all merchants

CRIME

- Used to have community service workers to walk the streets
- Strong negative perception of the Street in the media
- Break in do happen but they have window rails

CITY LEVEL

- Not many good investments. Too many of the same store on the corridor
- High taxes

Interview 3

Jewelry Store

What has worked?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Jamaican Day Parade
- Love Your Block Initiative
- Joggers from hospital frequent the store

SOCIAL LEVEL

Beautification/Facade Improvement

- Fixed store fronts, sidewalks, pavers cleaning early mornings

Small Business Development

- Access loan programs
- Some degrees of police assistance

CRIME

- Youth programs
- Store doesn't have many break ins and takes out watches everyday; Don't have window rails
- Store owners help each other out if there is no police
- Stores help homeless when they can

What is still an issue?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Used to have a spit roast day in front of Bohio cafe

SOCIAL LEVEL

Beautification/Facade Improvement

- No recent efforts

Small Business Development

- Large grants are mostly taken by larger businesses

CRIME

- Drug abuse by youth
- Mental health is an issue still
- Homeless in the Catholic Church have no place to go after