

Hartford Needs To Lighten Up

Hartford, New England's Rising Star, needs to shine more brightly.

The Connecticut Convention Center is now open, the Hilton Hotel has been transformed with a \$30 million interior face lift, the new Marriott will open within weeks, and almost 1,000 new apartments or condos are occupied or under construction. The Science Center will break ground later this year and other developments are moving along.

All of this development means thousands of new visitors and residents coming into downtown Hartford. As should go without saying, these people need to feel safe walking the streets at night.

For that to happen, downtown needs better lighting. Now, major sections of downtown are dark or shadowy. This doesn't encourage pedestrian activity, and it detracts from the splendor of many downtown buildings.

State Street, Central Row, and State House Square will be a gateway between the convention center and the rest of downtown. I walked it on two recent nights, and it was very poorly lit. Decorative streetlights in the area were not even turned on. If it were not for the façade lights on the Old State House, which turn off by midnight and light just two sides of the building, the whole area would be dark.

Main Street from Capitol Avenue to Asylum Street is well-lit for automobiles, but the street lights don't continuously illuminate the sidewalks, which creates dark spots and shadows between light fixtures. A bright light shines on Alexander Calder's Stegosaurus in Burr Mall, between City Hall and the Wadsworth Atheneum, but the remainder of the mall is dark.

Visitors leaving the Morgan Street garage confront areas of shadows if they walk up Morgan Street to Main Street, or if they walk along Market Street toward State Street.

People who come downtown by bus or train are also in the dark. Walk out of Union Station and the street and parking lots are cast in shadows. The corner of Spruce and Church street is in total darkness. On the Union Place side, there isn't a single light on the façade of the beautiful historic brownstone station building.

Other areas are similarly shadowed. Along Church Allen Street and High streets, and at the corner of Asylum and Ford, and there are large parking lots with no lighting that create large open fields of darkness. Trumbull Street between the Hilton and Main Street is dark, making the walk to the parking lots north of the highway uninviting. Even the parking lot for 55 On the Park, the former SNET building that is now apartments, is designed with no lighting.

Across the street, Bushnell Park, a beautiful park that could offer a romantic stroll or short walk to the Bushnell Theater, is poorly lit and uninviting. Yes, the walkways in the park are lined with lights, but they are so sparse that when standing at one end of the walkway it's difficult to see through to the other end.

Lighting plays a major role in people's perception of safety. A well-lit street feels alive and safe, while a poorly lit street cast in shadows and spots of darkness feels abandoned and threatening. Lack of

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lighting creates an environment that is more conducive to crime than a well-lit area. Poor lighting can no longer be acceptable in downtown Hartford.

The city needs to study the lighting patterns in public spaces downtown and develop a plan to improve it. Property owners, including the owners of parking lots, need to be part of the solution.

Office buildings can add new lights. Owners of the many beautiful historic buildings that exist throughout downtown should consider up-lighting the front facades of their buildings, both accentuating the historic architecture and providing additional lighting, as has been done at the former G. Fox building, 960 Main St. and the Old State House. The lighting should stay on late enough to allow for a safe walk after the restaurants and bars close.

Lighting needs to be designed to accommodate pedestrians, not just automobiles. That means that illumination from light fixtures needs to overlap to avoid creating shadows and dark spots between fixtures.

If we want the future of downtown to be bright, it's time we turned on the lights.

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