

READY TO GO

Bridgeport must work to its strengths in a mixed economy

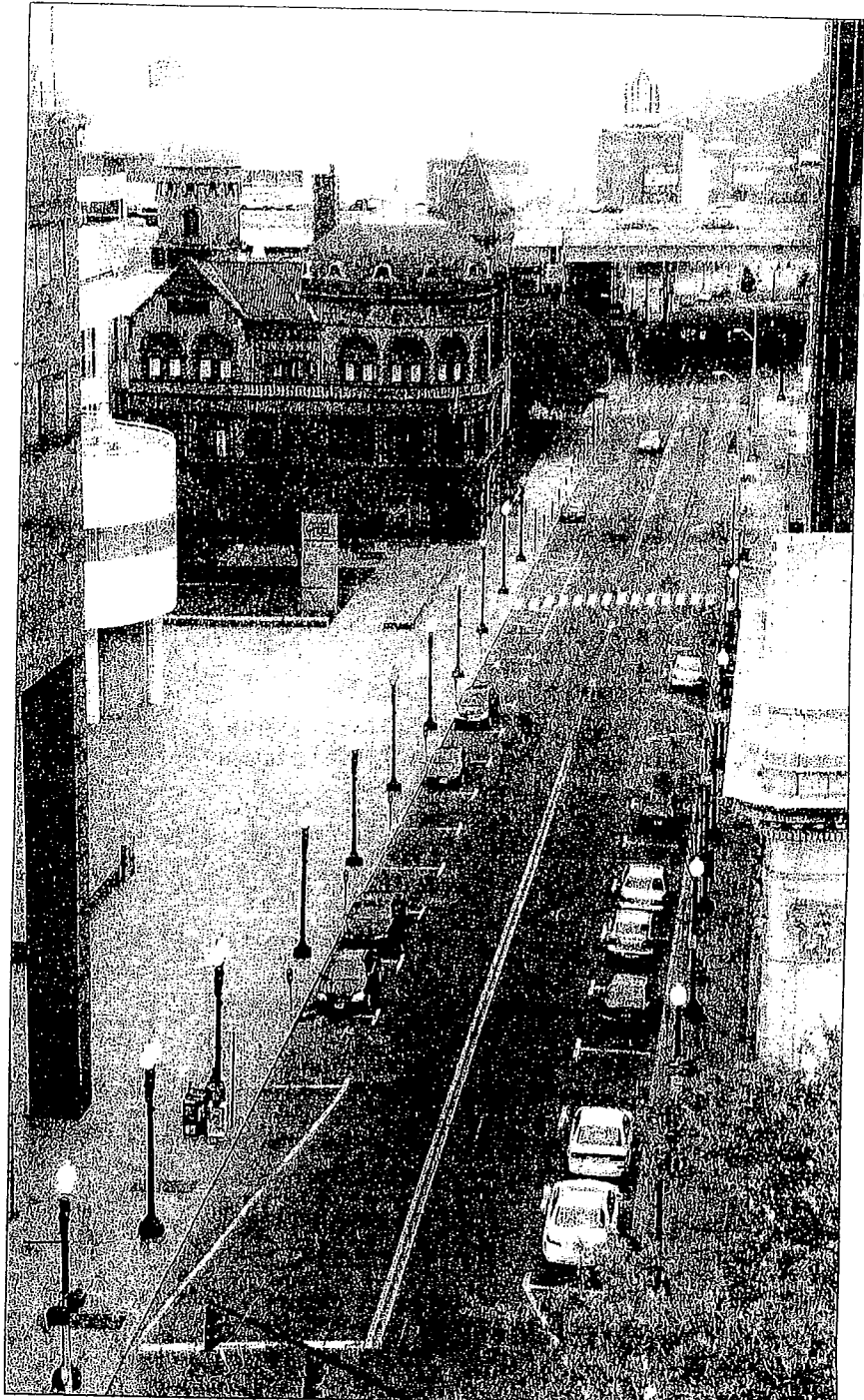
By DONALD EVERSLEY

As Bridgeport's new director of the Office of Planning and Economic Development, I would like to introduce myself and offer a few observations.

Bridgeport's economic development potential is huge. A great deal of attention has been paid to several large, high-priced projects, and rightfully so. Exciting mega-projects on the drawing board include Steel Point, Canyon Johnson near the Ball Park at Harbor Yard and the former Remington site at the end of Main Street. These projects will reshape Bridgeport's skyline and add dynamic new opportunities to live, work and shop in Bridgeport.

Even in the best of times, these are multiyear, multiphase initiatives with many moving parts inextricably tied to national trends in the credit, retail and housing markets. Shrinking capital markets and shaky lenders are providing serious challenges to these projects. Nevertheless, aggressive leadership will keep the ball moving down the field. It will take time, and we must be agile in our response to the shifting development realities, but with patience we can move toward shovels in the ground and cranes in the air.

While I am new in town and have quite a bit to learn, I would say that nearly all the essential ingredients are here. Bridgeport is in a unique position among neighboring Northeastern urban centers because so much groundwork has already been completed.



Connecticut Post file photo

The view of Main Street, as seen from one of the apartments in the Citytrust building in downtown Bridgeport, could change in coming years as development projects move forward. In the distance is the Barnum Museum and the Arena at Harbor Yard.

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Specifically, the city has done much of the needed plans and research, assembled significant major development parcels and is blessed with great transportation assets and a cost discount compared to the rest of Fairfield County.

While I will keep pressure on big-ticket development, equal emphasis must be given to business attraction, business expansion and the neighborhood-based development that will more quickly improve the everyday quality of life and economic opportunities for Bridgeport residents. Attracting small and midsize businesses, upgrading the city's housing stock and encouraging existing businesses to expand will make it easier for the mega-projects to become reality.

I am dedicated to making Bridgeport a better place to live, work and play for all of us. We must keep moving in a positive direction and continue to empower local people and attract dynamic and creative new residents, businesses and investors who will bring their own ideas and skills. For example, I think we should

continue to support what is already working in those still viable older industries (i.e., niche manufacturing, the marine industry, distribution, health care delivery) that provide a broad range of employment opportunities.

Bridgeport can also be competitive at courting new sectors like the "green collar" jobs in renewable energy and resource recovery, professional services and "creative economy" fields such as graphic design, software development, architecture and engineering.

I favor the "grassroots development" approach wherein we:

- maximize the resources and opportunities that we already have, as opposed to just chasing what we think we need;
- focus our planning, zoning and regulatory resources on improving the integrity and appearance of our streets, buildings and homes;
- provide tools and encouragement to entrepreneurs with energy and ideas; and
- strive for a clean, safe community

with pro-active, pro-business government practices.

A successful economic development effort needs the support of businesses, unions, education, public utilities, financial institutions and most of all our residents. We cannot afford for any stakeholder to sit on the sidelines. Bridgeport is a great city, but I challenge all of us to believe that we deserve to be an even better one — and to then go out and do something (even *one* thing) to fulfill that belief.

This is not just the power of positive thinking; it is the power of positive actions!

I want to work with all stakeholders and apply what I have learned in my last position in Providence, R.I., to grow Bridgeport for the prosperity of all.

Donald Eversley is Bridgeport's new Director of Planning and Economic Development. A native of New York City, he was most recently located in Providence, R.I., where he participated in the economic development resurgence of that city.