

City of Danbury

2023 Plan of Conservation and Development

Oversight Committee Meeting #15

2/15/22



CITY OF DANBURY
Plan of Conservation and Development

RKG
ASSOCIATES INC

FHI
studio

Agenda

1. Review of focus group meeting findings
2. Review AHP virtual workshop findings
3. Discuss key themes emerging from discovery phase and public engagement.
4. Review project schedule
5. Next steps

Community Engagement To Date

- Pop-Up Events (engaged over 200 people)
- Online Survey (over 1,200 participants)
- In-Person and Virtual Workshops (almost 100 attendees)
- Focus Group Meetings (Over 50 participants)

CITY OF DANBURY
Plan of Conservation and Development

Danbury POCD Public Workshop Summaries

FHI Studio conducted two workshops on behalf of the City of Danbury and in support of the Plan of Conservation and Development update. The first workshop was held in-person on Thursday, December 2nd, 2021, at the Palace Theater in Danbury and the second workshop was held virtually via Zoom on Thursday, December 9th, 2021.

December 2nd Public Workshop

On behalf of the Town of Danbury, FHI Studio conducted two workshops on behalf of the City of Danbury and in support of the Plan of Conservation and Development update. The first workshop was held in-person on Thursday, December 2nd, 2021, at the Palace Theater in Danbury and the second workshop was held virtually via Zoom on Thursday, December 9th, 2021.

The following outreach methods were used to promote the workshop and encourage participation:

- Event listing on the project web (danburypo.cd.com)
- Distribution of workshop flyers
- Placement of lawn signs advert throughout the City
- Coverage by local press
- Facebook and Twitter postings
- Distribution via City email list
- Email blasts to those who enter information at project website

The workshop was formatted as follows:

1. Workshop introduction
2. Presentation of plan findings to participants
3. Breakout sessions
4. Reporting back on breakout sessions

CITY OF DANBURY
Plan of Conservation and Development

Danbury POCD Focus Group Summaries

FHI Studio conducted six focus group format meetings via Zoom on the following topics:

- Housing and Neighborhoods (1/18 at 5:00 pm)
- Economic Development (1/18 at 6:30 pm)
- City Services and Facilities (1/26 at 5:00 pm)
- Transportation and Infrastructure (1/26 at 6:30 pm)
- Cultural and Historic Resources (1/27 at 5:00 pm)
- Open Space and Environmental Resources (1/27 at 6:30 pm)

Each meeting comprised of approximately ten invited guests in addition to the project team. Meetings were open to the public for listening.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Discussion

- Schools are over capacity
- Will new housing developments be built?
- Academy at the Matrix will be a model for other schools?
- Affordable senior housing is needed in Danbury.
- Smaller units such as micro housing market.
- Density is the best solution for Danbury.
- Affordable housing is difficult to build.
- State had not been subsidizing affordable housing in that direction, making it difficult to build.
- High density housing in real estate is not the answer.
- Need to protect value of historic properties.
- Density has to be delivered in a way that is not disruptive to the community.
- Danbury has plenty of real estate in the city.
- Housing development is challenging in Danbury.
- Affordable housing needs in Danbury is a "victim of its own success".
- Danbury needs to manage its growth.
- No one answer to affordable housing.
- Cost of construction is current barrier.
- Developers need incentives.
- Downtown is well poised for growth.
- Could be like a little Norwalk.
- The Maybrook line could be a game changer.
- Relax zoning regulations to encourage development.

Q1 Do you...? (select all that apply)

Answered: 1,162 Skipped: 3

ANSWER CHOICES	PERCENTAGE	RESPONSES
None of the above	0.26%	3
Live in Danbury	89.93%	1,045
Work in Danbury	32.96%	383
Own a business or commercial property in Danbury	7.06%	82
Travel through Danbury regularly	14.97%	174
Visit Danbury regularly	10.24%	119
Total Respondents: 1,162		

Focus Group Meetings

- Housing and Neighborhoods: Conducted 1/18/22
- Economic Development: Conducted 1/18/22
- City Service and Facilities: Conducted 1/26/22
- Transportation and Infrastructure: Conducted 1/26/22
- Cultural and Historic Resources: Conducted 1/27/22
- Open Space and Environmental Resources: Conducted 1/27/22

Housing and Neighborhoods: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **Schools are over capacity**
- **Affordable senior housing is a need that needs to be addressed.** What is City doing to address housing needs of seniors?
- Affordable housing is difficult to do on a stand-alone basis
- Housing development is challenging for developers. Affordable housing is especially challenging given potentially controversial aspects of the work.
- **Danbury is a “victim of its own success”** in that people want to move to Danbury and need housing.
- Danbury needs to manage its success and it needs people in town to frequent businesses.
- Cost of construction is currently high due and may be prohibitively high.
- The homeless issue is a huge issue for Danbury although it is not as large of an issue as compared to many other cities.
- **The illegal/unpermitted partitioning of existing housing and overcrowding is a big issue in Danbury,** particularly in older housing stock. Very difficult for City or property owners to do enforcement or eviction in these situations.

Housing and Neighborhoods: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **Smaller units such as microunits are needed** to address housing needs for a portion of the housing market.
- **Density is the best solution for providing affordable housing** mixed with market rate housing.
- Density has to be delivered in appropriate areas but can't provide meaningful affordable housing without a density component.
- **Affordable housing needs incentives:** tax breaks, fee reductions, etc.
- No one answer to affordable housing, rather many different solutions needed.
- Developers need incentives for affordable housing and senior housing.
- **Relax zoning regulations** to allow for more units and restrict total building area instead.
- **Expand the Central Business District zone north** towards I-84, which would allow more space to build affordable housing.
- **Development Downtown, as much as could be built, would be positive for Danbury.**

Housing and Neighborhoods: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- The Planning Department and Commissions have correctly sought to preserve the historic buildings and character of Downtown. **However, new development should be allowed in and near the Downtown where they would not require the loss of historic structures.**
- The zoning regulations for Downtown are good, but looking forward over the next ten years, parking requirements may be too high, which constrains the number of units that could be built. **The plan should encourage some flexibility in the zoning regulations with respect to parking requirements.**
- There can be a different type of affordable housing that doesn't exist in the market now, need to remain open to different product types such as micro-units.
- The POCD needs to **provide support for the redevelopment of targeted areas.**
- **A floating overlay zone should be considered for allowing increased density** in Danbury, not currently used.
- The Plan needs to establish guiding principles that provide support for the development possibilities that cannot be conceived of now.

Economic Development: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **The I-84 corridor is a challenge due to traffic congestion.**
- Traffic congestion has an impact on quality of life and in their decisions to work or live in Danbury.
- Downtown does not have the destinations and attractions needed to attract young adults as visitors and residents.
- **Downtown has very little to offer to Downtown workers.** Few restaurants to go to for lunch or after work, few places to run errands and spend money. Potential revenue is lost because of this.
- **The Still River is an underutilized resource**, many Downtown workers aren't aware that it is there.
- Its challenging to hire right now, particularly entry level in retail. Employees are coming from towns in New York, but few come from surrounding towns.
- Danbury is not an attractive choice as a destination for Danbury suburbanites. Surrounding town centers are bigger draws.

Economic Development: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Dining district on the Green was a good idea, but the area needs to be better maintained.
- **Main Street is used as a travel corridor for Route 53 and is prioritized for that use, but it should be more of a place.**
- The City is actively working towards improving the sidewalks Downtown. Leveraging funds is challenging.
- **Downtown was more vibrant 30 years ago** and can be more successful than it is today.
- **Downtown needs more people, it needs more residents.**
- The City has vacant lots Downtown that have been put out to RFP for redevelopment without any response from developers.

Economic Development: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **Focus efforts on workforce development** and increasing the quality of jobs in the area.
- Attract high paying industries and companies by developing the workforce.
- The permitting process needs to be streamlined to the greatest extent possible.
- **Encourage young entrepreneurs to establish businesses in Danbury.**
- Encourage the hiring of veterans as a means of bolstering workforce.
- **Need to do a better job leveraging presence of WestConn.**
- **Property owners Downtown need to be a part of the solution for Downtown.** They need to “buy-in” to the vision for Downtown.

Economic Development: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Need to incentivize people to be Downtown, whether for housing or a business.
- **The mall needs to transform and reinvent itself.** The building is being actively marketed. The mall wants to remain a regional draw. Office, education and other uses are being considered for the mall.
- **The POCD needs to lay the groundwork for changes to the City's zoning such as new mixed-use commercial zones, hybrid industrial zones, and/or floating zones.**
- The City's industrial zones should be reviewed to see if there are changes that need to be made to those zones to allow for new and emerging uses.
- **Analyze where the public sewer and water is and target growth to areas that are currently served or within reach of that infrastructure,** such as on Federal Road.
- **More sidewalks are needed throughout the City** to allow people to walk around and to connect University students to the City.

City Service and Facilities: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- The City is constantly updating schools with no buildings in disrepair. But they are over capacity.
- School enrollment growth isn't coming from new multifamily complexes, it is coming from neighborhoods. New developments are bringing kids, but when you look at per unit, the growth is very low. **Much of the new enrollment is being driven by existing neighborhoods.** People bringing kids in are coming into smaller apartments in existing neighborhoods, etc.
- **There are challenges in providing school facilities that meet current needs.**
- The timing might not be right for increasing spending given uncertainties surround COVID and implications for the mill rate. Everyone wants facilities and infrastructure but need to be fiscally responsible and conservative.

City Service and Facilities: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- COVID has placed additional constraints on the schools, with the need to reduce density resulting in leasing space in Ridgefield and reducing classroom sizes to the greatest degree possible. There has been a continual need to redistribute students and modify school attendance zones in order to manage the capacity issue.
- What are the needs of senior citizens in Danbury? There are waitlists at senior housing buildings, that has been reoccurring issue. **Transportation is a challenge for seniors.** There are currently 11,000 seniors in Danbury, older adults are living longer, transportation is a challenge.
- Transient community comes to the library throughout the day, which places an extra burden on the library.

City Service and Facilities: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- The idea to raise the mill rate should depend on what the federal government and state does regarding income taxes.
- **Balance is needed between maintaining facilities, facility use, and tax increases, etc.** For example, sidewalks may be desirable everywhere, but the City has limited resources to maintain.
- Need another library location on the west side of Danbury due to the growing population in that area and the limited parking at the Downtown library.
- **School expansion is needed to accommodate increased enrollment.**
- **Need to look into the reuse of existing structures.** There are development limitations based on limited space and not many available properties. Need to balance adaptive reuse with new construction.
- **Need a space to accommodate indoor soccer, other sports during winter months.**

City Service and Facilities: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Communication improvements needed for elderly residents who may not speak English as a first language, or options for seniors.
- **Need to maintain City services, need POCD to identify priorities.**
- Continue to maintain and improve sports fields, improving technology and equipment.
- Maintenance of roads and sidewalks needs to continue.

Transportation and Infrastructure: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- I-84 cuts the City in half, acts like a local road, people use it to get on and off, problems on the highway effect the City.
- **The City needs to do more to provide facilities like sidewalks and complete streets options.**
- City's supply of water is limited. Planning for growth needs to be mindful of the City's ability to supply water, particularly during periods of drought.
- Peter Pan pulled out during the pandemic, unfortunate because their routes timed well with HART schedules. There are discussions with the State about securing another operator for Danbury.
- **Need to address congestion on I-84.** There has been a spike in crash related ER visits in the past several months as traffic levels pick-up coming out of the pandemic.

Transportation and Infrastructure: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Access to hospital, particularly on City streets can be a challenge. Often critically important employees to the hospitals get caught in traffic.
- **Much of the congestion issues are related to freight.** I-84 through Danbury is a major connection between New York and New England. The alignment of I-84 contributes to the congestion and safety issues on this corridor.
- The rise of e-commerce is causing a lot of delivery trucks on local roadways. Danbury is home to Amazon distribution center.

Transportation and Infrastructure: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **Traffic safety should be one of the City's main goals.**
- Would like to use the Regional Safety Plan to get some improvements funded. There is a lot of local traffic on I-84, this speaks to the lack of cross-Town routes. City is very hilly, so not many opportunities. Should think about intersection choke points, or intersection alignments.
- **Focusing on trail connections and addressing congestion should be the biggest priority for the City.**
- HART Transit riders want more hours and more service frequency. All dependent on funding from the State. Statewide project for bus shelters and signage may be addressed in the future.
- Expansion of SweetHART service is needed, access into neighboring communities is needed. The SweetHART service provides needed access to the hospitals and other places where people can have basic needs met. Opportunities to expand service between Danbury and Norwalk are there.
- Bike trails would be great and would support the ability of people to bike and bike safely. - Transportation benefit, health and wellness, family benefit.

Transportation and Infrastructure: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Need to balance quality of life issues in Danbury versus changes and progress such as road widening, etc.
- **Improving I-84 is key to resolving the City' traffic issues.** Would be great to have same benefits that Waterbury experienced after improvements.
- **Maybrook Line would be a great improvement for the City,** it could take volume and congestion off I-84.
- Recommend future and proposed improvements in the POCD. This helps with funding.
- As the I-84 PEL study moves forward, it is critical for everyone to work together. Much coordination needs to happen between CTDOT, HART, City, Etc. Need combination of improving I-84 and the local roads, everything has to work together and be coordinated.
- **Relocation of the Pulse Point adjacent to the Train Station would be beneficial for commuters.**

Cultural and Historic Resources: **Issues**

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Danbury has over 20 cemeteries, many are inactive. Many do not have any preservation or stewardship lined up.
- **There are many City owned historic buildings that need basic maintenance and funding is not available.** Not sure that the City is going to have the financial resources to maintain all the City owned historic buildings. State and Federal funding streams have dried up.
- Historic buildings need maintenance and there is a constant upkeep. Basic upkeep and extraordinary costs (ever 20 years) are high, would be helpful if planning for these costs could be done.
- **Funding is always a problem.**

Cultural and Historic Resources: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **The City needs to prioritize investments in historic resources.**
- **Need a coordinated and managed inventory and periodic reevaluations of all the City owned historic buildings.**
- The POCD might help create a plan that is inclusive of the historic assets. Tarrywile has a running list of maintenance needs and major projects.
- **Need more support for arts in Danbury.** Maybe gallery could be incorporated into the Library – it could become an arts and cultural center. Need more presence of visual arts, expand on sculptures Downtown.
- Highlight ethnicity and diversity of Danbury's residents. Cultural Alliance would like to help in any way.
- 125th anniversary of Marian Anderson's birth is this year -would be nice to have a monument to dedicated to her.

Cultural and Historic Resources: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Need art Downtown.
- **Danbury has the infrastructure to promote the arts, but need time, funding, and vision to move this forward.**
- Danbury Cultural Center needs to be better promoted and the building is in need of reinvestment.
- **Need to highlight and tell story of Danbury better, better promote all the great things the City has to offer.**
- Consider a tourism district.

Open Space and Environmental Resources: Issues

What we heard from focus group participants:

- Meadow management is needed at Bear Mountain Reservation. Autumn Olive (an **invasive species**) is encroaching into the meadow.
- Japanese knotweed is a big problem along waterways, can't keep up with eradicating it.
- Surrounding Towns have land trusts with donors that make funding easier (Ridgefield). **Danbury has a lower share of properties that are deed restricted open space.** City needs donations and benefactors.
- Tarrywile Park is not permanently protected. **Need to prioritize protection of open space.**
- **Lawn care and fertilization causes runoff problems.** Need to educate residents about the pollution issues related to fertilizers and pesticides running off into water sources and wetlands. Many owners with properties on the water want green lawns right up to the water's edge with no buffer zones.
- **The City has limited forestry staff** that can assist in invasive species management.
- **Many commissions and groups have limited to no funding. Volunteers are sparse.**

Open Space and Environmental Resources: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **Commissions may need to be consolidated to better function.**
- Many commissions are not active, might make sense to consolidate the many commissions covering open space. Would be good if commissions merged and consolidated.
- **City should partner with conservation groups like land trusts.**
- How do we maintain the open space resources we have today and how do we grow and expand these resources? **Need to provide more protected open space.**
- Balance is key word, don't want the City to lose any open space. We know there are parcels that will come up for development, **need to find where the most valuable open space is that is not owned by the city and prioritize preservation of those areas.**
- **Need for growth to be sustainable.** Plan should put some constraints on density of growth and where it can occur. Related to that are policies around infrastructure, sewer supply, water supply, roadway capacity.

Open Space and Environmental Resources: Ideas

What we heard from focus group participants:

- **Develop a plan for forest stewardship and management**, identify grant money and resources to assist DPW.
- **Educate homeowners** about low impact fertilizers. Advocating buffers on lawns that abut Candlewood Lake. Need to communicate this to everyone who owns property right up to other waterfront areas.
- Should make developers promise to do **restoration of wetland areas** as part of development agreements.

Affordable Housing Plan: **Issues**

What we heard from workshop participants:

- Danbury needs to protect neighborhoods from impacts of growth such as traffic
- Housing vouchers are not useful if rents are too high or units are not available
- **Out of state residents with high incomes flocking to the Danbury area since the start of the pandemic has resulted in a drop in housing supply and soaring rental costs.**
- **Eviction rate is also going up, a lot of people were out of work during the pandemic.** It exacerbates a challenging situation.
- **All populations in the lower income section need affordable housing including young adults who are starting off in their careers.**
- Misconception that the homeless shelter is drawing people from other Town's but that is not true. Danbury is not a hub drawing homeless people from other places.

Affordable Housing Plan: Ideas

What we heard from workshop participants:

- **Senior housing should be included within considerations for affordable housing.**
- **Consider establishing requirements for the inclusion of affordable housing in new developments.**
- Bolster the State rental voucher program.
- The City should coordinate with surrounding towns to increase their affordable units.
- **Place affordable housing in areas near transit and economic centers, change zoning regulations as needed to support that goal.**
- There should be no place off limits for affordable housing.
- Need to determine what type of affordable housing is best for Danbury.
- **Housing downtown and close to transportation options would be good for seniors.**
- Multi-generational housing should be considered.
- **Danbury needs more aging-in-place housing and workforce housing.**

Plan Themes: What is a Theme?

- A theme is an organizing principle by which many different topic areas, issues, and ideas can be organized and presented.
- The concept of a “lens” is similar to a theme. A lens suggests looking at issues through a single perspective and with a focus established by that lens.
- We are open to suggestions on the language and organizational structure of the POCD document, but the establishment of themes will allow us to organize and manage the information that we have collected.
- The themes should be aligned with the POCD vision statement.

Plan Themes: The Vision Statement

Danbury is a culturally and economically diverse City with a vibrant celebrated culture that has been and will be shaped by time yet remains grounded in its historic roots. The City is a home, a workplace, a magnet for recreational opportunities, and an environment for educational excellence, creativity and expression, all of which contribute to its coveted quality of life. Danbury will continue to grow but will do so sustainably while embracing dynamic and innovative opportunities and preserving those qualities that have contributed to its success. Its growth will be fostered through partnerships with the City's institutions, organizations, and businesses. The City benefits from stable and responsible leadership at all levels of its governance. That leadership is engaged with the community in an equitable partnership in support of this vision.

Potential Themes for the POCD

Expand

Improve

Promote

Adapt

Protect

Focus

Connect

Partner

Invest

Protect

Danbury will protect its resources with special attention focused towards its most vulnerable resources and residents.

- Protect environmental resources
- Protect neighborhoods
- Protect historic resources
- Protect vulnerable residents

Promote

Danbury will promote all that it has to offer.

- Promote arts and culture
- Promote City programs, services, and initiatives
- Promote Danbury's businesses

Expand

Danbury will expand opportunities and options presented to its residents.

- Expand housing supply and options
- Expand school capacity
- Expand mobility options
- Expand economic opportunities
- Expand open space

Focus

Danbury will focus its investments and development.

- Focus on Downtown
- Focus development where infrastructure will support it
- Focus limited resources

Connect

- Connect residents to resources
- Connect workforce to jobs
- Connect students to the community
- Connect open space
- Connect places within Danbury
- Connect to the region

Improve

Danbury will improve the services and facilities that it provides to its residents.

- Improve communications
- Improve traffic operations and safety
- Improve pedestrian facilities
- Improve parks and public spaces
- Improve infrastructure
- Improve the City's operations

Adapt

Danbury will adapt to changing conditions.

- Adapt to growing population
- Adapt to climate change
- Adapt to an evolving economy
- Adapt to mobility trends
- Adapt to demographic shifts

Partner

Danbury will foster partnerships.

- Partner with surrounding communities
- Partner with institutions
- Partner with the private sector
- Partner with residents

Invest

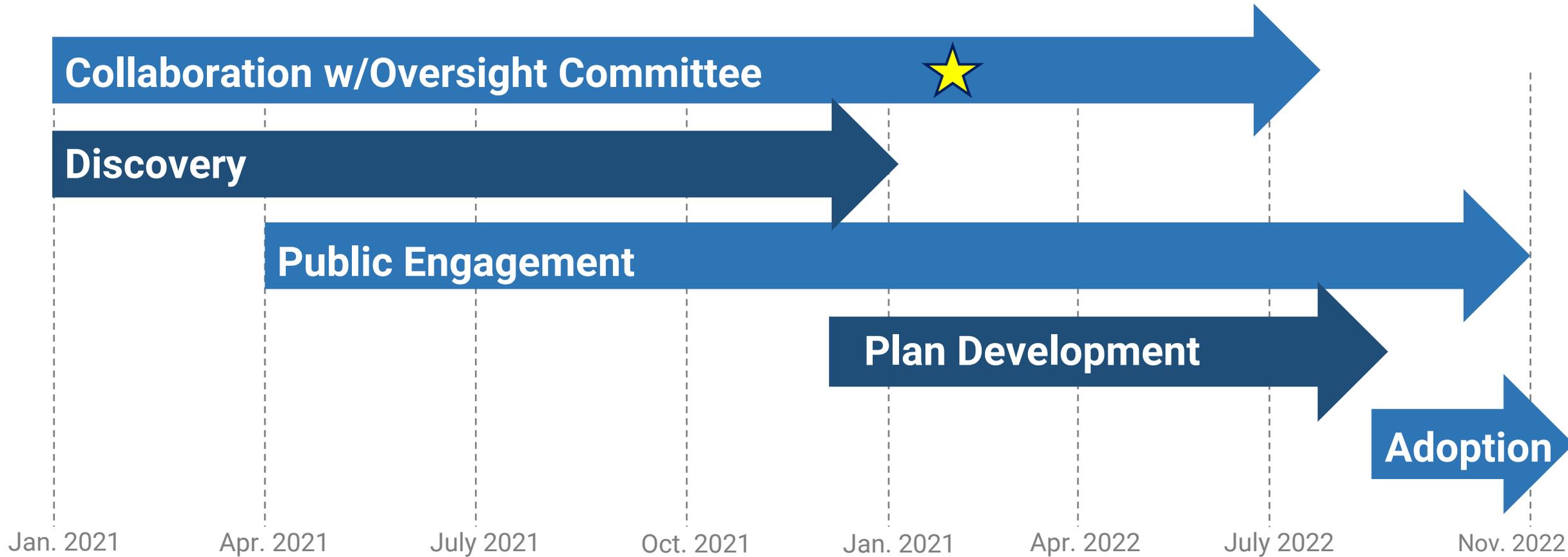
Danbury will invest in its future.

- Invest in Danbury's youth
- Invest in Danbury's workforce
- Invest in sustainable practices
- Invest in Downtown and neighborhoods
- Invest in infrastructure

Remaining Project Schedule

- March: Review plan themes and goals, review plan format options.
- April: Review introductory section of formatted plan document. Review section of draft implementation plan.
- May: Review draft section of plan. Review draft section of implementation plan.
- June: Review draft section of plan. Review draft section of implementation plan.
- July: Review draft section of plan. Review draft section of implementation plan.
- August: Review draft plan and submit draft plan to Planning Commission, Council, and WestCOG for review.
- September: Review feedback received from Commission, Council and WestCOG. Agree upon revisions to Plan as needed.
- October: File plan for public review.
- November: Public hearing for adoption.

Updated Project Schedule



Next Steps

1. Establish/refine plan themes
2. Begin developing implementation plan
3. Prepare plan format options

Next Oversight Committee Meeting

- Our next meeting will be Tuesday, March 15th at 4:00 pm

MARCH 2022

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

www.free-printable-calendar.com