

Disinvested

Episode 1: An Economy for Everyone

Susan Campbell: I was only going to be here three years because I was going to go to the bigtime, and Hartford to me, was not the bigtime. I was going to work for the Washington Post or the New York Times.

I'm Susan Campbell, Freelance Writer/Author.

I'm not saying that I would've had to have turned them down had the offer been tendered, but I got hooked on Hartford. I came to Hartford knowing nothing about Connecticut. I could find it on a map barely. I get here and I think there's a lot of smart people here and we can figure out these social ills that plague everywhere. Where I didn't feel that way in my hometown, and New York just seemed too big and D.C. just seemed too big, so what I've learned in my 5,000 years in journalism here is that nothing just happens. So all the issues that we have now, we built that. But also, if we built that we can dismantle it and build something better.

Music....

Tyler Johnson: Welcome to Disinvested, a podcast about reimagining a city and building a stronger, more inclusive community, created by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. I'm Tyler Johnson.

"Now a Capital city in crisis. Hartford is addressing the very real possibility of bankruptcy..."

"Connecticut has not had a budget and the pain is really being felt ..."

"Hartford Public Schools are facing a harsh reality, a budget shortfall..."

Tyler Johnson: You may have heard about Hartford's recent struggles. Our city and region as suffering from massive disparities, which are holding us back from reaching our full potential. None of these disparities we see today happened by accident. They are the result of decades of policy decisions, structural racism, and people choosing to divest in our Capital city and many of its neighborhoods.

When you look at the data, these disparities can be narrowed down to three main factors: race, place, and income. America is the land of opportunity, but that opportunity isn't the same for everyone. Your race or ethnicity, how much money you have, and the neighborhood where you grow up play a major role in who succeeds and who doesn't. This isn't unique to Greater Hartford, but the differences here are so stark, so evident, that Hartford might just be the perfect microcosm of America.

Throughout this podcast series, we'll look at how these disparities play out in a number of ways, and more importantly, what we can do about it. This series isn't about dwelling on our mistakes, it's about looking forward. But before we can talk about solutions, it's important to understand how we got here.

Susan Campbell spent 26 years covering the Hartford region as a writer for the *Hartford Courant*. These days she teaches journalism at the University of New Haven. Her latest book, *Frog Hollow: Stories from an American Neighborhood*, explores the history of one of Hartford's oldest and most historic neighborhoods, which encompasses the area from Capital Avenue down to Trinity College.

Susan Campbell: The Frog Hollow neighborhood; it was farmland until about the 1850s, and the Park, or Hog River went through there, so it was a perfect place for manufacturing. Sharp's Rifle was the first factory there followed by just a host of incredible factories that turned out everything from sewing machines, bicycles, electric cars before they were cool, tools, and everything you can imagine was created there in Frog Hollow. That's what drew me to the neighborhood because it felt like a microcosm of everything.

Basically every street was paved and every block that was going to be developed was developed by the turn of the last century, and bit by bit the manufacturers left and some of the original residents stayed but for the most part, they followed out to their jobs to live in the suburbs; that was the American dream, right? And that didn't just affect Frog Hollow, but it's uniquely obvious there.

Tom Condon: Hartford like other Connecticut cities developed as a manufacturing powerhouse. Henry James did call it the richest little city in the country, and in Hartford's case it had kind of a layered cake prosperity. It had insurance, financial sector, and manufacturing.

Hi, I'm Tom Condon. I am a writer for the Connecticut Mirror.

All these great manufacturing powerhouses that created these semi-strong, semi-independent cities ... it went south or it went away. That has been very difficult to deal with.

Middleclass people largely left a lot of the cities taking part in the great post war suburbanization sometimes called *sprawl*. So it moved in the direction of Connecticut becoming a large suburb with pockets of poverty.

Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens: Connecticut remains one of the most segregated states in our nation with some of our MSA areas – the Metropolitan statistical areas being in the top 10.

Tyler Johnson: Here's Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, which works to ensure that Connecticut residents have equal access to housing opportunities.

Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens: And really, we can trace back that racial segregation over 100 years of policy decisions and development decisions. So like most Northeastern cities, Hartford was developed around industry and so a lot of the housing stock we see in Hartford is a result of workforce housing. So things like the Colt Factory build housing and the old Sift Mill in the North End built housing, but they only build housing for white workers and they excluded workers of color from this housing, which then forced a concentration of individuals and families of color into one single neighborhood.

In the 1930s as a result of the Great Depression, there was a tremendous risk of what we have come to term or know in 2008 as the *Foreclosure Crisis*, and that was going to happen in the 1930s. So the Federal government had to figure out a way to, for the first time, enter the housing market and save homes from foreclosure. They had never done this before so they didn't know how to do it.

So with the Great Depression and with new deal legislation, we saw the Federal government enter into what we know as our traditional 30-year mortgage. But they had to figure out a way to back those mortgages, to know that their investment in homes was secure. So they hired the Homeowners Loan Corporation, which was created under the Federal Housing Administration, to grade neighborhoods.

The problem with the grading and what we have known as the consequences of redlining, is the neighborhoods were not graded for their access to transit, their access to water, their access to infrastructure, or their access to employment. They were not graded for the quality of the housing stock. They were graded on who lived there.

Susan Campbell: This Federal agency had representatives who would drive through neighborhoods and they would try to guess: is this a neighborhood where we could write some mortgages?

Tyler Johnson: Again, here's Susan Campbell.

Susan Campbell: They drove through neighborhoods like Frog Hollow. They would look around and if the buildings seemed a little bit run down then they would make a little mark on their clipboard. But here's where it gets scary. If they saw an African American they'd make a little mark. If they saw someone who looked like an immigrant – go figure what that is – they'd make a little mark, and then the neighborhoods were color-coded. You've heard of redlining. That's where this comes from.

If a neighborhood was colored green or blue then the chances are you will get your mortgage repaid, so banks, you should write mortgages here. If they were yellow, it was more you might want to think about that because you just might not see that money ever again. If they were red, forget it, meaning that these people who never got out of their cars sat there, looked around and said, yeah I don't think so.

Disinvested Episode 1: An Economy for Everyone

So that was incredible divestment of any kind of support for that neighborhood. So when I go to suburbs and I talk about Frog Hollow that's my message: get out of your car. You have no idea what you're missing.

Music...

Tyler Johnson: When you look around Hartford you can see that something has changed. People are tired of all the negativity directed at our Capital region and they've begun to take action. You can see a revitalization happening. Our city is on the rise. What we need now is a vision. We have an opportunity to build something new, to recreate a better Hartford region for the next generation.

Jackie Mandyck is the Managing Director of iQuilt Partnership. She is leading a new initiative called Hartford 400, to envision a different type of city.

Jackie Mandyck: As you may know, Hartford turns 400 in a mere 16 years. So in the year 2035, Hartford is going to be 400 years old and how do we want Hartford to look? How do we want it to feel? What kinds of things do we want to accomplish? We're trying to create that North Star for Hartford – not only for Hartford the city, but Hartford the region. You know Hartford should strive to be the best that it could be. It doesn't have to be another major metropolitan area, it can be different. It can be itself, it can be unique, and it can be Hartford.

I think what people want to see is they want to see that vibrancy. It doesn't have to be 24/7 but they want to see vibrancy, they want to see more small businesses. They recognize the region's wonderful assets as far as its cultural assets and I think they want to highlight that as far as a region. I think vibrancy is probably one of the biggest things that we constantly hear and people really moving together in one direction.

Tyler Johnson: To create a vibrant city, we need to fix our economy. Without a thriving economy, it's difficult to address our other challenges, so that's the subject of our first episode: *Economic and Community Development*.

How do we create an economy that works for everyone?

Jay Williams: Hi, my name is Jay Williams. I'm the President and CEO of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. So my view of economic and community development has been shaped and informed by my personal and professional experiences over the last 15 or so years. I started off in this realm in banking. I then had five years of experience as Director of Economic Development in my hometown of Youngstown, Ohio, running and serving as the mayor of a city that had undergone economic upheaval.

Prior to arriving at the Hartford Foundation, I spent three years heading up the Economic Development Administration, serving as the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development. All of those experiences helped to shape and inform my views.

It's impossible to have a vibrant community if a segment of the population is underserved, overlooked, and not connected to the opportunities that exist. There's an axiom that often is cited that says, "A rising tide raises all boats." Well that is not the case if you are participating and don't have a boat or if your boat is rattled with disrepair.

The notion of being competitive as a region requires us to do everything that we can to ensure that every segment of the community is connected with opportunity.

Erik Johnson: Hello, my name is Erik Johnson. I'm the Director of Development Services for the City of Hartford.

How do we make sure that whatever growth trajectory that we're on, there is some equity in that? I always say when you go to people it used to be what the taxi cab drivers say when you flew into a city and now it's what Uber or Lyft drivers say. If the people who are the backbone of your city or your place don't believe in the place then it can never be great. Because if you don't see yourself in the change then either you're going to continue to be negative, you're going to be disinvested, or you're going to say bad things.

So I think inclusiveness is really about making sure that the diversity of experiences in people that we're trying to promote and grow is represented, because if not, your communities won't be interesting, nor will they be equitable. Nobody wants to be in a place that's none of those things.

Tyler Johnson: Inclusive economic and community development is one of the pillars of the Hartford Foundation's new strategic plan. A number of studies and reports in recent years have suggested that this is the best way forward.

Joseph Parilla: My name is Joseph Parilla. I'm a fellow at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, and in 2017, I led a project called the *Inclusive Economic Development Learning Lab*.

I think most people want to live in a country that is equitable and fair because it is simply the right thing to do, but it's also the smart thing to do from an economic competitiveness standpoint. Studies that are measuring both local economies and national economies have found that having too much inequality and especially too much inequality of opportunity, stifles the productive potential of individuals, which in turn undermines any economy's competitiveness and long run development paths.

Economic exclusion limits the productive potential of excluded groups, for sure, and therefore the economy as a whole. But the result of that is it raises social and fiscal costs for a society that absorbs scarce resources that could in turn support investments in really important growth-enhancing areas like education and training, infrastructure, economic and community development. So if we exclude people, we end up kind of paying for it one way or the other.

History provides a really interesting lesson on how bringing previously excluded talent into the economy spurs productivity growth. So if you just put back, for much of the 20th Century, gender and racial discrimination created barriers to labor market participation for non-white and female Americans.

Essentially lowering these barriers by extending education, changing social norms, and reducing outright discrimination, some economists have estimated that that has accounted for about one-quarter of the nations per person GDP growth since 1960. So the question going forward is what barriers and what norms need to continue to change to fully connect people to the economy, because we still obviously have barriers that are excluding.

Tom Condon: Those neighborhoods were prosperous when there were factories in them; when there were jobs.

Tyler Johnson: Tom Condon of the Connecticut Mirror.

Tom Condon: You know, it's a challenge of imagination. How can you get a factory in the North End of Hartford, you know, recreate the work ethic in these neighborhoods that really has never left. Years ago I did a piece about the Community Court. People would go to the Community Court and they would be assigned to work crews. They would be out cleaning the city, sweeping the streets or whatever, and a lot of times somebody would finish – you get two weeks on the crew, and on the third week people would come back, they just wanted to work.

I think most people want to work. That is really the key. If we can get jobs into distressed neighborhoods, they won't be distressed anymore.

Jay Williams: All economic development is community development, but not all community development is economic development.

Tyler Johnson: Once again, here is Hartford Foundation's President, Jay Williams.

Jay Williams: With economic development, it is about building the capacity of a region to attract private investment. It is about lower transaction costs, it is about trying to create a place where people have opportunity to make their way in life whether it's through gainful employment, whether it's through supporting entrepreneurship, or any number of things.

Community development expands even more broadly. With community development you can talk about things like education, housing, and other issues that are important to the quality of life.

Disinvested Episode 1: An Economy for Everyone

Erin Kemple: My name is Erin Kemple. I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

I think one of the most important things that people don't realize is how much housing affects every part of someone's life. When people think about all of the other topics that you've mentioned; education, arts and culture, jobs, and safety, housing is at the base of all of that and we have to invest both in our cities and in our suburbs.

Tyler Johnson: One way we can boost communities is by providing safe and quality affordable housing. Here's Erin Kemple and Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

Erin Kemple: So today we don't see the kinds of explicit discrimination that we saw in the past where there were maps with red lines in them. There are no classified ads that have, "For Negroes," "For whites."

Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens: Housing discrimination is really very, very hidden and can be really challenging to identify so it could be as simple as a family with a disabled son seeking a unit somewhere and that landlord saying, "I don't know if this unit is going to be good for your child."

We also see housing discrimination against families using any sort of a subsidy, known as source of income discrimination.

Erin Kemple: One of the things that would make a big difference in promoting integration is to get rid of a lot of the exclusionary zoning that we see.

Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens: Zoning is definitely a way that we keep neighborhoods racially segregated. If we don't provide for a diversity housing types within neighborhoods, then we're not going to be able to provide for a diversity of families in neighborhoods.

Erin Kemple: The way we're seeing redlining today is that banks have traditionally never been in neighborhoods of color. They've never lent there, they don't have branches there, or they're not advertising to neighborhoods of color and so they're not saying we're not lending here because of who lives here, but they're also not doing anything to overcome past patterns of discrimination.

HUD has found that only 17% of people who experience discrimination report it and the reason that they don't report it is because either they don't know that it's illegal or they don't know where to report it. We have attorneys on staff who can represent people either in administrative complaints or in court.

Jim Horan: So there are disparities within Hartford, but then the disparities between Hartford and the suburbs are even greater.

Tyler Johnson: Jim Horan is the Executive Director of LISC Hartford, which works to revitalize local neighborhoods.

Jim Horan: For example, the City of Hartford has a poverty rate of about 31%, whereas the suburbs have a poverty rate of just 8%. Frequently, housing is the biggest single expense that people have, so when you have a place – a city like Hartford, which has a poverty rate of 31%, there's a lot of people who cannot afford a home by themselves without subsidy or without some way to pay for it.

One of LISC's critical focus areas is in trying to provide affordable housing, and often that means deed-restricted affordable housing meaning that it's going to remain affordable for years to come. We want to make sure that residents are not displaced so that for example, residents of Frog Hollow who have lived there for decades will still be able to live there. So having that deed-restricted affordable housing is the single best way to make sure that happens.

Rex Fowler: As a region with affordable housing, I'd say we're not doing very well. All of our affordable housing or the vast majority of our affordable housing is really concentrated in our urban centers.

Tyler Johnson: Rex Fowler is the Chief Executive Officer of the Hartford Community Loan Fund, a nonprofit that provides financial services that benefit low wealth residents of Hartford.

Rex Fowler: So there's very limited access to affordable housing than if you go into some of our more affluent suburbs. From a city perspective, Hartford has the greatest concentration of deed-restricted affordable housing of any city in the state. Quality is another question. The quality of that affordable housing in the city definitely has some room for improvement, I think.

I was on the Blight Task Force that was convened between the last administration and this one and one of the recommendations we had to better deal with blight in the city of Hartford was we need to be able to hold someone accountable here in the city. To the Mayor's credit, he hired a Director of Blight Enforcement, and I think we've seen some real good strides in the last two years under that focused effort.

Laura Settlemeyer: My name is Laura Settlemeyer. I am the Director of Blight Remediation for the City of Hartford and the Chairperson of the Hartford Land Bank. I in fact don't like the word blight for a number of reasons. One, because of the history of the term and how it has been used to justify racist and other problematic policies. The other reason I don't like the word is because it means something different to everybody who uses it. The term comes to us from biology. It is cancer in plants, essentially. Blight is "plant cancer."

What I focus on is properties that have been so neglected as to deteriorate the social fabric of the community and neighborhood on the same street, right next door, or on the same block.

We set out to say from the beginning, we're envisioning a Hartford where no neighborhood has blight. If that's our vision and that's our goal we really need to look at what incentives our policies and systems are creating and what incentives are they not creating. What is causing the blight?

Is it an owner who doesn't have the resources she needs, and if so, let's connect that owner to the resources so that she can fix up her property? Or is it an owner that is again taking advantage of the situation, taking advantage of a downturn in the market and trying to invest as little as possible until the market turns? Which type of owner are we dealing with here? And it goes to quality of life.

These buildings have been shown to attract more crime. When we're talking about abandoned structures, they can be fire hazards. We're not doing this to bring new residents in, we're doing this because we believe our current residents of Hartford deserve safe, healthy, quality housing and neighborhoods.

I don't know if there will be a way to work this in, but I just want to say – because I often don't get to say this. I often just jump right into the work of blight remediation, but I really love living and working in Hartford. I had no idea when I set out that I'd end up in Hartford, Connecticut and I'm just really happy to be here.

Kathleen Maldonado: A lot of folks might think a woman like me couldn't live in the North End, you know. They're like, "Oh my God," you know.

Tyler Johnson: That's Kathleen Maldonado. She's a resident of the Clay Arsenal neighborhood in Hartford's North End. No area of Hartford has seen more disinvestment over the past 60 years than the North End. When you talk to the residents of this area they often feel forgotten.

Kathleen Maldonado: There's a lot of biases from the North End, like we're all on EBT, we're all on housing, we're all on Section 8, none of us contribute, which is not true because you know. I'm not a recipient of state assistance, so I'm a contributor actually to my city. I work in Downtown Hartford and I do what I have to do because I love this city. I don't want to say I'm stuck here, but this is where I was born. I was born on Williams Street. This is my city. My mom is still here. I'm not leaving my mom. It's just like why are they not including us in everything that's happening in the city?

Rex Fowler: I moved up to the North End about 16 years ago. As a volunteer, I had co-founded a ministry in the North End with some friends of mine that had been going for about six or seven years, at the time.

Tyler Johnson: Rex Fowler of the Hartford Community Loan Fund.

Rex Fowler: I lived there for a year and it was like getting a Master's degree, I feel like,

in urban ministry. The residents of the North End have just really welcomed me like I've never been welcomed by a community before and I hope to live the rest of my life and die in the North End just because I just love living where I live. Yeah, I'm a minority but that's not a bad experience to have as a white person of privilege. It's really helped me, I think, focus on our organization more around the needs of my neighbors and the community.

The majority of our loans in Hartford are in the city's North End neighborhood and that's historically been a neighborhood that's been disinvested. We have rehabbed about 200 properties in the city of Hartford. We have really low defaults, which shows that low income people can pay back loans just as well as high income people. That's part of our goal is to help low wealth Hartford residents increase their wealth and kind of reduce those inequities that we see in the region.

Tyler Johnson: Inclusive economic and community development means that we need to start investing in overlooked neighborhoods. One way to do that is through nonprofits like the Hartford Community Loan Fund. Another solution is a practice known as *impact investing*. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving recently launched a subsidiary called HFPG Impact! Greater Hartford, to make impact investments in neighborhoods where they are needed most.

Alan Mattamana is a partner at Fairview Capital and a member of our HFPG Impact! Committee.

Alan Mattamana: So impact investing – I think if you looked at a classical definition it consists of two parts. So the first part is generating a financial return, and in that sense it's very similar to regular investing. But the other piece of impact investing is generating some sort of either social, environmental, or economic good. When community foundations do it, particularly foundations like the Hartford Foundation, what they're trying to do is align that impact piece – the second piece of the equation with their mission.

I do this for a living. I'm an investor for a living and I can tell you that capital is typically going to go to projects that have the highest return for the least amount of risk. The problem is in communities, and particularly in neighborhoods, there are some benefits that are not financial. All of those social benefits are not going to show up on an investor's profit and loss statement, but they're hugely important. If there was a way you could quantify all of those social benefits and combine it with a financial return, that's a real win.

I think it's also about who's making these investments in the first place. The best people to make an investment in a neighborhood are the people in the neighborhood themselves. They're the most knowledgeable, they have the most at stake, and if the investment starts to go sideways for any number of reasons, they can bring the stakeholders in the community to bear. But if there's no one in the neighborhood that has the capital, all those things that I just mentioned are just untapped potential.

Disinvested Episode 1: An Economy for Everyone

Erik Johnson: The boogeyman idea like community engagement, like what does that mean?

Tyler Johnson: Erik Johnson is the Director of Development Services for the City of Hartford.

Erik Johnson: It's really kind of this graduated idea that we should have conversations with our neighbors about what's important to them and what do they want to see. I'm a planner by vocation, so part of my job is to plan things and sometimes we get ahead of our skis in thinking we can plan the right things for people based upon what we'd want them to be.

Jim Horan: Hartford has a pretty vibrant network of neighborhood revitalization zones all around the city and different groups of residents who are engaged. I think that's the single best mechanism in Hartford to ensure that residents are engaged.

Tyler Johnson: Here again is Jim Horan of LISC.

Jim Horan: I think too though, residents often feel like they've been burned, you know; promises have been made and not kept. So part of what LISC needs to do, the Hartford Foundation, the city and other partners is that we really need to work closely with residents, listen to them and take direction from them as we go along.

Kathleen Maldonado: I don't want anybody badmouthing my zip code, Upper Albany, like we're doing it, you know. It's a little messy right now but we're getting there and there's so much opportunity here and so much happening. The residents that live here, we do care and we're not giving up on our zip code. We want more. We want more and you're not going to forget us. We are here. Yeah, don't talk about my North End.

"Also new tonight, big news for United Technologies, but a blow for the State of Connecticut. UTC will move its corporate headquarters to Massachusetts taking roughly 100 high-paying jobs with it."

"Fallout continues in Windsor over Konica Minolta's plan to move hundreds of jobs to another state. It is certainly a blow to the town."

Tyler Johnson: In addition to housing and neighborhood investment, another way to improve our economy is to help with the development of small businesses. There have been some big news stories about companies leaving Connecticut in recent years. Perhaps the most notable was the loss of General Electric, which announced in 2016 that it was moving from Fairfield to Boston.

There departures are devastating not only for the actual job losses but also for the morale of our state. Building up a strong small business culture will add vibrancy to our communities and will make our economy more sustainable in the future.

Devra Lee Sisitsky: Hi. My name is Devra Lee Sisitsky. I am the Executive Director of Makerspace CT. The Makerspace is my 33rd startup. I am what is often referred to as a serial entrepreneur, and to understand the trajectory of what that means, you have to go back probably to you know the 70s and 80s, when our culture was just starting to recognize women for things over than domestic engineering.

At that point, it was definitely difficult being a woman in the workplace. We did not know that our place was sustainable. We thought that we were just here temporarily and so women weren't as gracious or supporting of other women then. They would just as soon cut you out of the workplace so that they could head their way up to the glass ceiling where they got their heads smacked.

It has changed certainly over the years. There's a whole movement to support women, to support minorities. We're now looking at the 49% majority saying, "what about me?"

Moraima Gutierrez: So historically for women it just hasn't been easy.

Tyler Johnson: That's Moraima Gutierrez, Assistant District Director for Economic Development for the United States Small Business Administration.

Moraima Gutierrez: So most of the barriers began with access to capital. In our lifespan, it wasn't until 1988 when the Women's Business Ownership Act put an end to laws that required women to have male relatives sign business loans. So think of it, if you wanted access to capital, you needed a small business loan and perhaps you were not married, you might have to bring in your nephew who's 17 years old to co-sign for you for a small business loan. You know, when you start with those types of barriers, it's like, okay, now we're playing catch up.

Tyler Johnson: Women and minority business owners have been constantly overlooked in the past. If we invest in them there's a massive potential for growth.

Moraima Gutierrez: As of January 2017, there's an estimated 116 million women-owned businesses in the United States. So that's why it's important that we level the playing field. If you look at statistics, you know you just have to Google, *What is the fastest growing industry? Who are the folks that are opening businesses at a higher rate?*, and you see that it is women and minorities.

I believe that economic development institutions are paying attention to that. How can the region better support us? Well funding and entrepreneurial development are key, right, as well as access to capital. So access to capital is really important. We want our small business owners to be as educated as possible, as prepared as possible when venturing into the world of entrepreneurship, and to set up our small business owners to succeed from the get go. We know that small businesses are the heart of our economy.

Tyler Johnson: Fernando Rosa is the President and CEO of HEDCO Inc., a community development organization that works to develop, sustain, and grow businesses. We asked him about the ripple effect of building up small businesses in underserved communities.

Fernando Rosa: First of all, you have the job creation. You have the possibility of reducing dependency on social service. That is called creating community wealth where you're developing small businesses, you're generating monies and funds for that particular community. You're creating a self-esteem. It also increases the disposable income, and with that comes improving housing and education.

So there is a tremendous effect as we create the small businesses, as we continue to develop and improve them. Well the small businesses are the backbone of the community. They create most of the jobs, especially the day-to-day jobs in the neighborhood, and it is the small businesses that creates the quality of life in the cities that make them vibrant.

I envision a Greater Hartford that is vibrant, that has many activities, you know. As the population continues to grow and move into downtown, I think that is an expansion of the smaller businesses needed. The restaurants, the activities and bringing everything together. I am optimistic. We have gone through some difficult challenges. The city still faces some very difficult challenges, but the optimism is there. Many of us have been around for many years. I've been around for many years. I grew up practically in this city. We believe in this city.

Marilyn Risi: Upper Albany in the latter part of the 1920s and 30s was a very bustling community. It was predominantly a Jewish community; it had peddlers going up and down the street and street carts. Sometime into the 50s it had trolleys, and of course, Hartford was a bustling city.

Tyler Johnson: Marilyn Risi is the Executive Director of Upper Albany Main Street. The Upper Albany neighborhood went through many of the same struggles as other neighborhoods we mentioned earlier. Crime rates rose as the neighborhoods saw massive disinvestment. Marilyn was hired in 2000 to help revitalize the neighborhood by focusing on the Main Street corridor and its small businesses. They've seen considerable improvement in the past few years with remodeled storefronts, new development, and an increase in jobs.

Marilyn Risi: Given the population of Upper Albany, all of the businesses that we work with are minority-owned businesses. We work with them predominantly to increase traffic to their business and to make them economically profitable. We have 22,000 cars going up and down Albany Avenue on a daily basis. In any other community, people would die to have that type of traffic. These business owners have pride, they have a product; it is the only neighborhood open in Hartford after five o'clock.

Developing Albany Avenue into a vibrant commercial corridor, it helps the residents of downtown as well, and it also provides employment.

Disinvested Episode 1: An Economy for Everyone

Tyler Johnson: In a future episode of this podcast, we'll look at workforce development and how we can help individuals find good paying and meaningful careers. When thinking about macro-economic development, we can help create new businesses by supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Once again, Devra Lee Sisitsky of Makerspace CT.

Devra Lee Sisitsky: We have a facility that's over 20,000 square feet downstairs, which encompasses all sorts of traditional skills as well as industry 4.0. Manufacturing, machining, metal fabrication, welding, 3D printing, the internet of things. Customers and consumers are really educated. If they don't find the product they want, they will create it. They're going to advertise their product directly to the consumer. They're going to customize their product.

That's a lot different than what we are used to and what we've seen for years. Being a culture of conspicuous consumption is not as enchanting and as rewarding fiscally as being a culture of innovation and creation.

Our hope when people are working downstairs on projects is that they can form a company, work with one another and support one another, and we want to foster those kinds of interrelationships, and more importantly businesses in the Hartford area.

Music....

Tyler Johnson: If you look around Hartford and the surrounding suburbs, you'll see a number of similar challenges, but you can also find plenty of success stories.

Peter Gillespie is the Economic and Planning Director for the Town of Wethersfield, a suburb directly bordering Hartford to the south, that's seen a lot of recent growth.

Peter Gillespie: Wethersfield has a real strong sense of community. There are generations and generations of families that stay in the community. Their children come back to the community so it has that strong connectivity to that past. It's also a very historic community. The town's heritage is a very important part of what I do. We try and maintain and enhance that.

Right now we've seen a huge increase in the amount of residential activity going on in the town. It rivals any activity we've had in the last 25 years. We have, I think, laid the groundwork for some of that, but I never take credit for anything that I've done; it's a community effort. The key is identifying the right stakeholders, making sure they have a seat at the table and that there's meaningful public involvement. It can be painful, it can be time consuming, but in the end it's worth the effort.

Jim Horan: It's complicated to run a city and it's complicated to turn around a city that has a lot of poverty and a lot of disinvestment and to attract new investment.

Tyler Johnson: Jim Horan of LISC Hartford

Jim Horan: I worked for Mayor John DiStefano years ago in New Haven. I think New Haven really did a terrific job of doing that, and I think that that's been happening in Hartford, as well because the leadership from the Mayor is critical and then the people that the Mayor appoints. So that's one factor. Another big factor is investment from corporations, from foundations, and from others; that is really critical.

Collaboration is key and no one group, no one person can create the differences that are needed. Everybody has a part to play and everybody can make a difference, but it's really by working together that the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Tyler Johnson: The idea of better collaboration is something that came up frequently in our interviews. If we want to be successful in the modern economy, if we want to create an economy that works for everyone, the Land of Steady Habits is going to need to embrace a new mindset, and we need to do it quickly because we're facing a unique set of challenges.

Here's Tom Condon of the Connecticut Mirror.

Tom Condon: Hartford doesn't have enough land to exist under a property tax system. You can't succeed under a property tax system if you don't have any property. Now Hartford's only 18 square miles to begin with, and 59% of it is off the Grand List, so Hartford is forced to charge high taxes, which in turn drives businesses out of the city. Hartford has the highest commercial tax rate in the state.

Lyle Wray: The bottom line is Connecticut is 35 or 40% dependent on property taxes of all taxes.

Tyler Johnson: Here's Lyle Wray, Executive Director of the Capital Region Council of Governments.

Lyle Wray: It's way over represented nationally. Most places have, I don't know, 20. Point two, it's not growing very much, so if you look at Hartford right now, it's half of what it was 25 years ago, oops. So you can't have your revenue system at half of what you were 25 years ago because every year your costs go up.

One of the things that's very interesting when you do the traditional strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, and threats, the strength list here is absolutely amazing. So we have an amazing cultural basis. We have a higher education basis. We're 40 minutes to the top 5 ranked university in the world, and there's a whole raft of stuff here. The question is how do we leverage those to get the best bang for the buck, and I think we have a lot of work to do.

The real issue is economies of scale. We have more than one hundred 911 call centers in the state. Houston, Texas has the same population and has one. Guess who has a better system that costs a lot less money? We're trying to find all of those places where we can get a lot better at providing better services at a lower cost by having a bigger scale.

Tyler Johnson: One thing we haven't mentioned yet is transportation. We'll cover this more in an upcoming episode, but it's worth mentioning now because transportation is vital to the modern economy and workforce, and it's an area that requires working together as a region.

Lyle Wray: When we have better transportation systems it's easier to get stuff done and that's, I think, the critical aspect of transportation. We've been sort of a drive or die system for a while. We've really got to get way beyond the drive or die system of transportation. We've made a lot of progress both with CT FastTrack and CT Rail. \$1.2 billion dollars to get all of the costs to get reconnected to Boston by rail on an hourly basis sounds like a lot of money but it's not.

The highway out the door here, the viaduct plus the interchange on I-91 and I-84 would be, I don't know, \$5-7 billion? If you look at the increased real estate value and increased real estate taxes we can do the math on when you get the money back. And then frankly, it's important for attracting the next generation of workforce.

Well, I mean the good news and the bad news. The good news is Connecticut's been rich for 150 years. It's been a very affluent state. The bad news is we're rich for 150 years. The competitors we have, the Colorados, the Minnesotas, the Michigans were poor and had no money and they're scrappy. We're not scrappy. We haven't been scrappy for a long time, so places like Washington State have vastly lower taxes and a vastly lower costly government. It's a very different deal, but somehow they're scrappy and make things happen. Entrepreneurship, innovation, all of those things came out of scrappiness. We need to find our edge again.

Tom Condon: You know we have all these, you know, 169 cities and towns in Connecticut and I think everybody agrees that if Connecticut were founded next week, it would not be with 169 towns. It might be with five. You know, some kind of metro government, right? One study estimated it would save about 20% of administrative costs. The better advantage, I think, is in economic development.

Brookings did a study that showed that regions are really what drive the national economy. It's not cities necessarily, and it's not states, it's regions. Regions are economic engines, but the regions have to be cohesive, they have to work together.

Joseph Parilla: The reality is that economy really doesn't respect those boundaries. You may live in one town and work in another, go enjoy an amenity in a third town.

Tyler Johnson: That's Joseph Parilla of the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program.

Joseph Parilla: As a result, each of those jurisdictions are essentially tied to the fates of the broader region. There's actually strong evidence that the more politically fragmented a region is, the lower its overall economic productivity. That fragmentation perhaps represents something about society in the sense that people want to not live near certain groups or they really want to live near people who are the same socioeconomic status as them or the same race, or if we let some of those people into our community then it will be undermined in some way.

So really the fragmentation is perhaps a reflection of social fragmentation. If you're in a region where those conditions are really, really strong, it becomes really hard politically to make shared investments.

Erik Johnson: To tell the Hartford story is to tell the Connecticut story, and Connecticut does a terrible job of telling its story.

Tyler Johnson: Here again is Erik Johnson.

Erik Johnson: We're expensive and we're blah, blah, blah, but we have an amazing quality of life and you know; we've got water, we've got mountains, we have hiking trails, we have kind of great corporate partners, and I'm a Fall guy so this is like the best season ever. I think we, generally speaking, do a bad job of telling people how good we are.

Tom Condon: You know, there's been no thought that I know of, no vision. What do we want Connecticut to be? I mean do we want it to be a big suburb with a few pockets of poverty. Do we want it to be something else? Connecticut could use a vision of what it is we want this state to be. Then, if we had that, we could reduce it to a plan and then execute the plan.

Tyler Johnson: Jackie Mandych is hoping that the Hartford 400 Project will be that vision.

Jackie Mandych: I think this is Hartford's time and I think if you look at over the last 10 years – I've been working in Hartford now for almost 25 years, and I think if you look at the last 10 years it's been the most transformative time that we have seen in a long, long time and I think we're definitely on an uphill. The momentum is definitely moving forward.

You know by the time we're 2035, what does it mean to have a society that's more equitable? Well what does that mean? It sounds really good but what does a society that's more equitable really mean and how do you bring different organizations, entities, governments, for profit, and businesses; how do you bring them together to have a discussion to move forward? How do you bring people together to take 2 and 2 and get way more than 4? This is about allowing people and giving people the time and privilege to go ahead and dream again and say it's okay to dream again, and what do you really want?

Jay Williams: I think it's a critical moment in a lot of respects. I think we stand at a critical juncture in the conversations that's happening at the national level, at the state level, at the regional level, at the city level, and in our own existence again, having been around for over 94 years.

Tyler Johnson: Jay Williams, President of the Hartford Foundation.

Jay Williams: I hope in 15 or 20 years that we would be in a community that understands and has connected the assets and the opportunities for individuals who have for far too long been underserved and overlooked. A community that is learning and proud of its history, but yet and still taking on the challenges of making sure that we're inclusive.

We talked about the opportunities to individuals whether they are choosing to relocate from a much larger area, from another country altogether, or individuals who are here that have choices to live anywhere else on this planet but saying, "You know what, we're choosing to still reside in Hartford for these reasons," whatever those reasons happen to be to those members of the community.

Tyler Johnson: Nearly everyone we spoke with had a vision for the future of Greater Hartford, but the thing that kept coming up over and over was the need to build stronger communities and repair our fractured social bonds.

We'll leave you with Alan Mattamana of Fairview Capital, whose thoughts were echoed by a number of other people.

Alan Mattamana: I'd like to see a Hartford where we actually truly talk about one Hartford...

Background Music...

...a Hartford where everyone in the city feels connected, and I mean truly connected. A Hartford where people from the communities don't look at Hartford as a border, and a Hartford where the Greater Hartford communities have invested in the city not just financially, but from a social perspective as well.

Music....

Tyler Johnson: Thanks for listening to *Disinvested*. I'm Tyler Johnson.

In the coming weeks, we'll explore some of the other issues affecting Greater Hartford including community safety, education, workforce development, re-entry, food insecurity, arts and culture, and more. We hope you'll subscribe and share with your friends.

Disinvested Episode 1: An Economy for Everyone

This podcast is created by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Produced by Tom Zeleznock, Steph MacGillivray, Michaela Mendygral and Autumn Gordon-Chow.

Music provided by Among the Acres.

Special thanks to everyone who appeared in this episode.

The Hartford Foundation supports many of the organizations featured in this episode through grants, capacity building and more.

Visit hfpg.org to learn more.