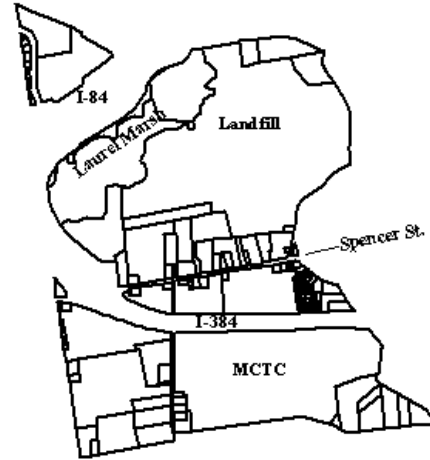


## Spencer Neighborhood Description

The Spencer Neighborhood presents interesting challenges and opportunities. The boundaries of the neighborhood were dictated in part because of the physical barriers caused by the interstate highway system, and in part by the land use and development pattern in the area. Spencer Street forms the spine for this neighborhood, bounded on the south by Wetherell Street, on the north by Route 6/44, on the east by Bidwell/Olcott/ Love Lane and on the west by the East Hartford town line.



This area was once the rural fringe of Manchester and agricultural uses are still evident in the area. Almost 40 acres are an active agricultural use: 19 acres of the Botticello farm on Hillstown Road for vegetables and flowers, a four acre tract on Spencer Street planted in flowers for commercial sale, and 14 acres on Spencer Street and Hillstown Road currently planted in tobacco. Commercial agricultural use presents an interesting opportunity for farmland preservation in this neighborhood.

What is now Laurel Marsh was once the bottom of Laurel Lake, a major recreation destination for residents of the Hartford region accessible by street car from both the City of Hartford and from neighborhoods in central Manchester.

Most of the Spencer Neighborhood developed after 1950, well after Manchester's adoption of zoning regulations in 1938. The original zoning in this area was for rural residential uses and changed over time in response to specific development proposals.

Interstates 84 and 384 sweep through the neighborhood creating a convenient location with excellent highway access, but also significant physical barriers in the neighborhood. Manchester Community and Technical College (MCTC) is the largest community college in the state and is a major institutional, educational, and recreational feature but is not easily accessible by foot. Because MCTC is reached by Hillstown Road and is separated from the residential communities by I-384 it does not contribute as much as it could to the neighborhood's vitality.

The town's large land holdings in this neighborhood include the highway department and garage, salt storage shed, leaf composting area, sanitary landfill, and waste water treatment plant. While providing essential town services, and increasingly regional waste disposal services, these facilities also create odors, provide feeding grounds for flocks of seagulls, and are adjacent to the nesting grounds of large flocks of starlings (a unique problem for neighborhood residents and businesses, and a significant dilemma for the town).

The birds contribute to the odor problem and carry their waste beyond the landfill proper to the residential and commercial properties along Spencer Street. Landfill generated methane and its odor is also a problem. The town is diligently working towards a solution to reduce or eliminate odors from the landfill and attempts to operate the sewage treatment plant to minimize those occasions when odors emanate from there. The town is proposing to build a methane gas collection or flare system which could be completed in the near term and should eliminate some of the odor problem. Also, in a few years it is likely the town will not use the landfill for household solid waste. This will eliminate the food source for the seagulls and may make it easier to effect a long term solution to that problem as well.

Spencer Street, a minor arterial, serves the western end of Manchester and provides access to I-384 as well as shopping, services and MCTC. There is a varied land use pattern along Spencer Street. The eastern and western ends of Spencer Street are developed or zoned for business. The Shop Rite and K-Mart plazas near Exit 1 off I-384 have recently experienced high vacancy rates and deteriorating physical conditions, although there has been evidence of reinvestment such as the new Pep Boys building and improvements to Shop Rite which is under new ownership. This commercial node near I-384 is a convenient shopping area for Spencer Street area residents, commuters on the interstate and to a large residential area in East Hartford.

The northern side of Spencer Street is zoned either business or industrial. Land uses include a bowling alley, a now vacant soda manufacturing plant, a private sanitation company, convenience retail, and a wholesale furniture establishment. Also included are active agricultural lands including a cornfield and a gladioli farm. Many of the commercial uses here developed around Spencer Village, a Manchester Public Housing Authority owned senior housing project built in 1976 in what was then a sparsely developed rural fringe of Manchester.

To the south of Spencer Street most of the land is zoned residential. There are a few single family residences on Spencer Street and Wilfred Road provides a cluster of duplexes. Some of the older single family homes on Spencer Street have been converted to professional or personal service offices. The two largest parcels on the south side of the street are a 15 acre agricultural property and the 371 unit Squire Village rental housing complex. The latter is a government assisted, privately owned residential community serving primarily low and moderate income households.

The challenges presented by the neighborhood are first to provide a safe, attractive, and healthy environment for neighborhood residents; second to ensure continued economic viability and success of the commercial areas; and third, to encourage physical development and future land uses which will knit the neighborhood together.

Neighborhood residents have two immediate concerns. One is for physical safety, relating mostly to the absence of a complete public sidewalk system on Spencer Street. Well-worn foot paths along the sides of Spencer Street make it evident that neighborhood residents walk to the bus stops, to shopping to the west, and to the Verplanck School and attendant recreation area on the eastern end of the street. Other destinations include MCTC and the Charter Oak Greenway along I-384. In addition to a continuous sidewalk, improved bus stop locations which are safe

and attractive, and crosswalks with appropriate signal timing and crossing intervals are critical to improving the aesthetic appearance and the public safety of this street.

The second of the residents' immediate concerns is for personal safety which relates to resident concerns about crime. Squire Village in particular has periodically had a rash of crimes to persons and property. Instances of illegal narcotic activity have also caused concerns among the residents of Spencer Village. The frequent bank robberies and calls for service to businesses in the area only heighten the sense of risk for residents and commercial property owners alike.

The demographic profile of the residents here adds to the importance of dealing with these issues in a serious and timely way. The Spencer Neighborhood has a very high percentage of low and moderate income people who depend on public transit and walking for their transportation needs. Large numbers of children walk to shopping or the Verplanck School and recreation area. The elderly or disabled residents walk to shopping but must cross busy driveways and often poor sidewalks, as well as Spencer Street. This same age group is more vulnerable and sensitive to public safety threats, either real or perceived.

The State of Connecticut Department of Transportation is soon to begin a major reconstruction of Spencer Street and the Hillstown Road/Spencer Street intersection. The town public works department has been working with the state and is being diligent in its efforts to secure sidewalks on both sides of the street. The town is currently funding sidewalk construction along Olcott Street from Verplanck School to Spencer Street. When complete these projects will go a long way to meet critical neighborhood infrastructure needs.

The police department is familiar with the issues in the Spencer Street area. An immediate effort to actively encourage the formation of neighborhood crime watches in the area through the police community relations officer should be launched. Serious consideration should also be given to instituting a community policing effort in the neighborhood. Both residents and commercial interests believe that a police substation in the neighborhood is needed. Given the traffic volumes on the street, the nature of the residential developments and household types, and the commercial activity in the area, the neighborhood seems to warrant such an effort.

Immediate efforts should be focused on ensuring the revitalization and improvement of the existing commercial areas. In terms of housing, the area seems to warrant medium or higher density multi-family housing types, but the town's larger housing strategy is to increase single family owner-occupancy and provide a range of housing types for the senior market. These latter forms of residential development should be encouraged here.

Industrial zoning and uses in this neighborhood should be limited to the Town of Manchester holdings and the existing sanitary services operation. It is advisable to eliminate the industrial zone which fronts on Spencer Street. In addition to seeking commercial uses which would fit in with the existing commercial area, these locations may also prove valuable for recreational or entertainment uses providing a different type of activity in the neighborhood and a different service for the community.

One of the shortcomings of the Spencer Street area as a residential area is the absence of formal and informal recreational and open space areas for residents. Although there are many undeveloped parcels of land in the Spencer Neighborhood, there are no areas for residents to sit, relax and socialize with other residents. The possibility of developing a landscaped area with amenities for residents and employees of nearby retail establishments should be explored.