

Survey and Planning Grant- River Street

Abstract

The City of New Haven is applying for funding to conduct an adaptive reuse study on the historic Bigelow complex at 198 River Street. The site is a cultural and economic asset for the City, and its precarious conditions necessitate new and creative intervention.

The goal of the grant is to produce plans to reuse the historic complex, which is currently in deteriorating physical conditions. The process will consist of hiring a consultant to conduct an economic feasibility study on potential reuse models, as well as engaging local stakeholders in assessing needs and desires for the parcel. The consultant may also consider creative ways of planning a flood-resilient reuse for lower floors, given the site's location within the 100-year floodplain. The public engagement processes will help shape the City's next comprehensive plan, as well as future planning processes in the area. The project will provide a set of models and practices that can be used in planning for future parcels with similar conditions: historic importance, deteriorating physical conditions, and flood risk.

Narrative

1. Organization description and primary mission

The City of New Haven is a Certified Local Government (CLG) under §101(c)(1) of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The CLG status is conferred to enhance the role of local governments in historic preservation by formalizing and strengthening local programs and its links with the Connecticut Historical Commission.

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As stated in its 2015 Comprehensive Plan the City of New Haven will continue to promote actions, activities, and planning processes to meet the following goals:

- Maintain the City's status as a Certified Local Government and utilize available funding streams.
- Adhere to a preservation-based philosophy to ensure high-quality efforts across a broad spectrum of uses, depending on the financial viability of the situation. To that end, encourage thoughtful conversion of some of the existing NRHDs into Local Historic Districts, e.g., Chapel Street, Ninth Square, Trowbridge Square, Orange Street, Dwight, and the Green.
- Educate and work closely with property owners about Secretary of Interior's design standards for all renovations/new constructions proposed within the historic districts, and about the available historic tax credit programs.
- Maintain accurate inventory of eligible historic properties in City's database to inform planning and development actions appropriately and create an interactive web page to make it publicly accessible.
- Identify historic structures that can be successfully used to meet the City's affordable housing goals. Low-income housing and historic rehabilitation tax credits can be combined when historic structures are rehabilitated for affordable housing.

2. Resource significance

198 River Street, better known as the Bigelow complex, was at the heart of New Haven's industrial age and is today one of the best surviving examples architecturally of New Haven's industrial heritage, as evidenced by its inclusion in the River Street National Register Historic District. New Haven played a key role in American industrial history, as the center of gun and carriage

manufacturing at the end of the 19th century and the home of major innovations like the cotton gin. Much of the city's population was directly employed by the booming industrial sector, with the population growing from 40,000 at the beginning of the Civil War to 108,000 by the turn of the 20th century. The landscape of New Haven at the height of this industrial age was thus dotted with factories, railroads, smokestacks, and cargo ships.

The story of the Bigelow Complex begins more than 150 years ago in 1869, when Hobart B. Bigelow moved his flourishing steam engine and boiler company to River Road (now River Street). Bigelow engines and boilers were sent across the continental US and abroad, fueling army bases in Brooklyn, mines in South Africa, sugar plantations in the West Indies, and coconut plants in the Philippines. As the company's exports grew, so did the complex at River Street. In 1873, two brick factory buildings initiated the development, which grew incrementally over the course of the next four decades until a steel-frame structure completed the Bigelow Boiler Works Complex in 1915. Several architectural features still extant on the facade of 198 River Street accommodated the production and shipping of the massive boilers. For example, round-arched windows were designed large enough to move the boilers from inside to outside the building. The Bigelow complex sits at the apex of two rivers, granting easy access to marine commerce, while retaining easy access to the Fair Haven-Westville railroad on River Street

After World War II, factories began to close down and manufacturing in New Haven slowed as production moved to the suburbs and elsewhere around the globe and technological advancements made existing products obsolete. Bigelow Boiler Works was one of the last companies from this golden age of industry to remain in operation in the city, but eventually closed its doors on River Street in the 1970s. The urban renewal period demolished many of Bigelow Complex's peers, causing a whole set of new urban issues in its attempts to rejuvenate a struggling city. The Bigelow Complex is one of the last physical remnants of New Haven's once prolific industrial landscape, and thus it is critical that what remains of the complex be preserved. This is not to say that New Haven's industrial heritage should be particularly venerated — while this period brought prosperity for many families and great capital into the city, it is imperative to recognize that such success was dependent on US colonial and imperial conquest, from the dispossession of Native American lands to the harmful extraction of resources in the Global South. While the industrial history of New Haven is certainly fraught, it is perhaps all the more reason to make sure it is not forgotten, so that discussion around the narrative may continue and past mistakes not made again. This history has undeniably shaped New Haven into the city it is today. To lose the Bigelow Complex is to lose history, and thus it is imperative that the complex be preserved.

3. Issues addressed

The Bigelow Complex has been abandoned for over 40 years and at risk of collapse. This was found through structural and environmental assessments conducted throughout the last twenty years. Yet, a 2020 condition assessment report by Circo indicates that the building is salvageable, if stabilization measures will be implemented immediately. This property is a high priority for the City of New Haven not only in its own merits but also due to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)'s assessment that further demolitions in the River St NRHD might result in the loss of its designation. This would result in the loss of tax credits for the rest of the district, and thus a removal of incentives to maintain the historic urban fabric.

4. Project management

The project will be managed by the New Haven City Plan Department, in conjunction with the Economic Development Administration. Aicha Woods, the Executive Director of the City Plan Department, will oversee the work at large.

5. Grant activities

The grant funds will help fund a consultant to conduct an adaptive reuse study on 198 River Street. The consultant would aim to create a vision for what types of developments would be possible on the site, given physical and economic constraints. The funds will be used to further study the environmental and physical conditions at the site. An initial contractual assessment was conducted in April 2020, but further information must be gathered on costs related to physically immediate stabilization of the building as well as long term rehabilitation, and to that end- what potential uses could be assigned to the building and the area behind it and toward the waterfront.

This process will include inviting stakeholder input on visions for the property, including ideas for how the site could best serve those who live and work nearby. The redevelopment should serve the needs and desires of those it will most affect, so the study should try to best understand how to shape the process to give people what they need and desire. This engagement process will include awareness-building around the historic resources present in the area and their potential for bringing economic and cultural investment to the area.

6. Project beneficiaries

The project stands to benefit a wide variety of stakeholders. Most directly, it will benefit those who live, work, and play in the area immediately surrounding it. Residents of Fair Haven, the area in which this parcel is located, highlighted a preponderance of empty buildings as a central issue in the 2001 Fair Haven Neighborhood Plan. By creating a plan for reuse of this site, it will be possible to use this site once again, recovering it from dereliction and preserving the neighborhood from further blight. Fair Haven is a primarily low-income neighborhood, and it is an issue of equity that remediation issues be addressed here and not just in the wealthier parts of town. Those who work in the surrounding area will benefit from the beautification just as residents will, and more jobs will likely be created in this area, benefitting the economic vibrancy of the neighborhood.

A well-preserved building will add cultural value to the area. It presents an opportunity to maintain the memory of New Haven's past as an industrial hub at the turn of the 20th century. This will improve the attachment of the area's residents to where they live, giving them a sense of connectivity between the neighborhood as it exists today and its past.

7. The "deliverable"

The result of the study would be a set of guidelines for the reuse of 198 River Street. There should be a solution for managing flooding on the first floor, creating a resiliency-minded design guideline for structures in similar conditions. The study will also yield a set of economic tools that will make it feasible for developers to redevelop the site. A bundle of creative financing methods should make the currently derelict property appealing to potential investors. The result will be an equitable model for brownfield redevelopment, taking into account community desires and market possibilities. The study's conclusions will be incorporated into an RFP for developers on the site, as well as design guidelines, financial mechanisms, stewardship, and PPP agreements, and community outreach strategies later on.

8. Sharing the grant-product with the public

The project, an adaptive reuse study, will be shared through the public in numerous ways. It will be available on the New Haven City Plan Department's website, with other "Plans and Projects": https://www.newhavenct.gov/gov/depts/city_plan/plans_n_projects/default.htm. Additionally, the project will be shared through a noticed public hearing at the Board of Alders. It will also be presented to the Fair Haven Community Management Team, an organization that serves as a liaison between the Fair Haven neighborhood and the city government. The City Plan Department will share the results of the study through various community organizations active in Fair Haven such as the Chatham Square Association. Following the creation of the report, the City will create a StoryMap explaining the results of the study, which will be shared on social media.

Importantly, the adaptive reuse study is not the end of the community engagement process. The City will continue to consult with residents and other stakeholders regarding the future of the area in determining which developers to support, what types of uses to attract, and how to program the public space in the area. Following "Shared Stewardship" principles, community members should be equal partners co-leading the preservation process along with City officials. The grant-funded product will serve as a ground upon which to build a partnership to save the district.

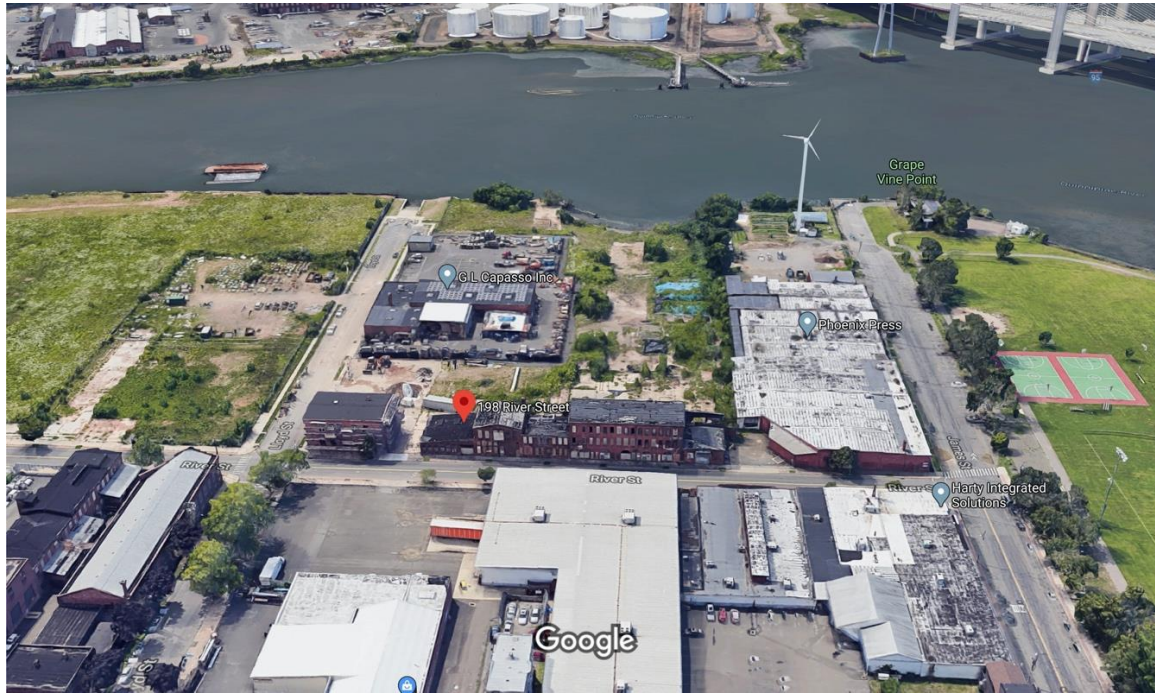
9. Measuring success/impact

One immediate measure of success is if the resulting proposal from this study is able to attract a developer. Thus far, the city has had difficulty selling this parcel to a third party, and hopefully a creative adaptive reuse method will be able to entice investment. If a developer bought the parcel, and 198 River Street were successfully preserved, success would also entail leveraging the development to maintain the designation of the River Street district on the National Register of Historic Places. Many buildings in the area have been demolished in recent years, and a successful preservation effort could both save the designation and act as a catalyst to further preservation in the area.

More broadly, success would entail the imagining of a reuse that benefits the community, develops the economy, and preserves historic architecture. The community would benefit from one fewer abandoned building in the neighborhood, particularly if that building was converted to a community-oriented space, such as a restaurant or art gallery. The parcel is located in a low-income neighborhood, and as such economic investment could be, if properly harnessed, a catalyst for inclusive growth. If the architecture could be preserved on this site, it could be preserved on other sites in the district, and could perhaps produce an effective model for historic preservation of industrial architecture in lower-income neighborhoods more broadly, in line with SHPO's goal of expanding partnerships beyond traditional preservationist communities.

Photographs

An aerial view of the site from above Chapel Street, courtesy of Google Maps.



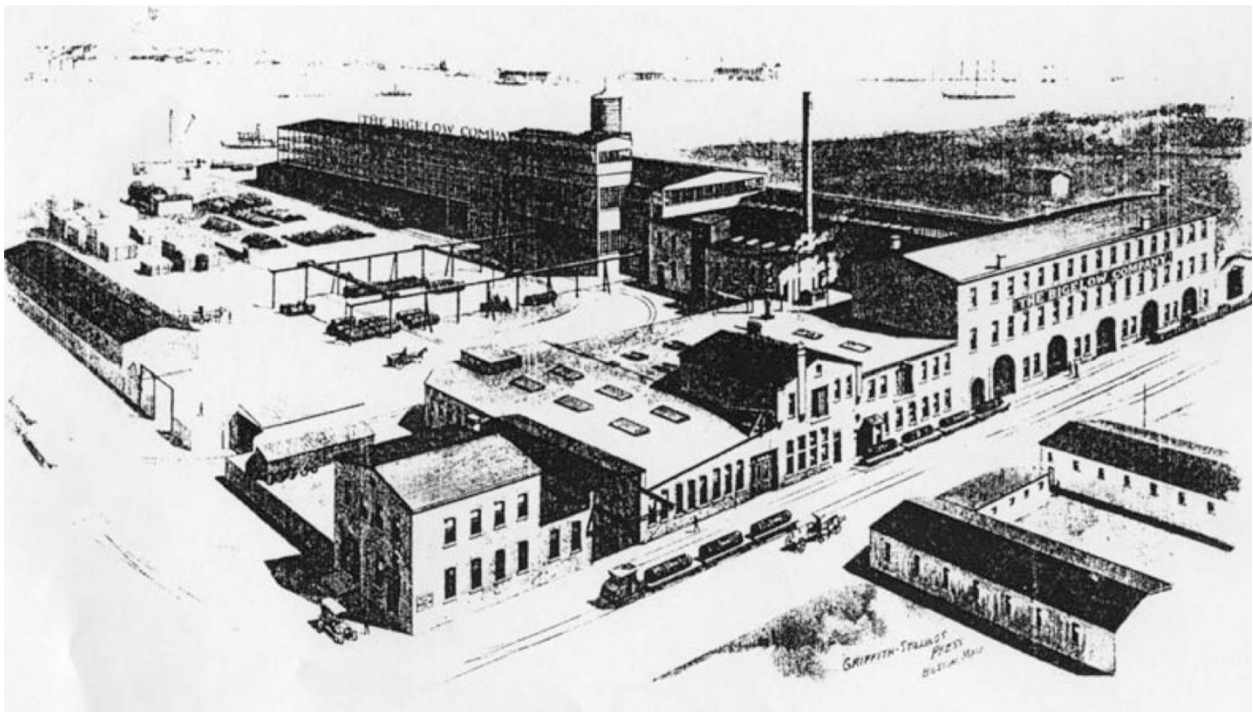
An elevation of the parcel, camera facing northeast



A view of the River Street façade



Historical image of the Bigelow complex from the city archives



Tentative project timeline

Due to the deterioration of the building, this project will be executed within a short period. We hope to stabilize the building to avoid further damage due to winter storms. To that end, the City of New Haven will seek additional funding to implement the immediate stabilizations required to keep the building intact. In parallel, the adaptive grant study will allow identifying appropriate developers and development concepts.

- August 5, 2020: Application review by SHPO
- By September 1: Finalize hiring of a consultant firm
- By October 1: Notify and present the project to the relevant city commissions and community management teams
- By November 1: Consultants file a full draft of their report after conducting two workshops: one for residents and one for business owners
- By November 20: Finalize the study report and publish in different online platforms
- By December 10: Publish RFQ based on reports aiming to get competitive proposals for redevelopment of 198 River St and stabilize the building before winter.

Budget

	Grant Share	Applicant Share	Total
Consultant Fees to conduct an adaptive reuse study	15000		15000
Printing/Copying	1000		1000
Other (Specify) 1. Translation 2. Compensation for participants in community meetings or workshops	4000 (1000 for translation and 3000 for compensation)		4000
Total	20000		20000

Budget Narrative

- Consultant Fees: Support the hiring of a consulting firm with expertise in industrial waterfront rehabilitation to conduct an adaptive reuse study
- Printing/Copying: Design, print and distribution of outreach materials
- Other:
 - Translation to Spanish of outreach materials, online story map, handouts
 - Compensation for time and effort for participants

Description of preservation activities

New Haven is rich in historic resources, including a wide variety of historic residential neighborhoods and landmarks, both buildings and places. There are 19 National Register Historic Districts in the city, five districts are listed on the State Register of Historic Places and three as Local Historic Districts. There are also 32 properties or sites that are individually listed on the National Register.

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- Maintain accurate inventory of eligible historic properties in the City's database to inform planning and development actions appropriately and create an interactive web page to make it publicly accessible.
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The following are a few examples of action items from 2020 that reflect the City's efforts and commitment to promote historic preservation:

- Partnership with SHPO and Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. to engage the public in a discussion about preservation ordinance.
- City staff participation in community led meetings to discuss different strategies to protect historic properties in the city (led by the Friends of the Dwight National Historic District)
- Collaborative effort across city agencies with SHPO and DEEP to stabilize and rehabilitate 198 River St., and to maintain the River Street National Registered Historic District historic status.
- New hub site for the Historic District Commission increasing transparency (including application materials, recording of the meetings and a demolition delay applications monitoring dashboard)

- Improved application process for Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission by holding pre-application joint meetings with applicants, and the New Haven Preservation Trust.
- Hosted DECD meeting focusing on Preservation and Opportunity zones.