

# ULI Case Studies

## Storrs Center



DESROCHES PHOTOGRAPHY

*Storrs Center's new town square, enveloped by shops and apartments, is the culmination of nearly 20 years of planning by a public/private partnership.*

### PROJECT SUMMARY

Storrs Center created a new, mixed-use downtown for the town of Mansfield, Connecticut, replacing a small shopping center adjacent to the University of Connecticut. Its 11 mixed-use buildings house 626 rental apartments and 139,707 square feet of retail and office space; 42 for-sale townhouses and condominiums are also on the site. New retailers such as a supermarket, restaurants, a medical center, and a bookstore create an eclectic college-town atmosphere, while a half-acre town square and 20 acres of nature preserves provide places for gathering and recreation.

The project was initiated by a partnership formed by the town, the university, and local business leaders. Master developer LeylandAlliance, together with apartment developer EdR (Education Realty Trust), built the \$169 million retail and residential development, while the town used over \$25 million in grants for on-site infrastructure and planning.

### QUICK FACTS

**Location**

Mansfield, Connecticut

**Project type**

Mixed use

**Site size**

47.7 acres

**Land uses**

Medical Facility, Multifamily For-Sale Housing, Multifamily Rental Housing, Museum, Office, Open Space, Retail, Restaurants, Supermarket, Transit

**Keywords**

College campus, Downtown housing, Main street design, Main street retail, Mixed-use town center, Neighborhood retail center, Public/private partnership, Redevelopment, Town center, Town square, University development

**Location type**

Small town/rural

**Website**

[www.storrscenter.com](http://www.storrscenter.com)

**Project address**

1 Dog Lane  
Storrs, Connecticut 06269

**Developer (commercial)**

LeylandAlliance LLC  
Tuxedo Park, New York

**Developer (residential)**

Education Realty Trust  
Memphis, Tennessee

**Developer (municipal)**

Mansfield Downtown Partnership  
Storrs, Connecticut

**Owner (commercial)**

SCT Storrs Center I LLC  
Hart Realty Advisors  
Simsbury, Connecticut

**Master planner**

Newman Architects PC  
New Haven, Connecticut

**Urban designers**

Urban Design Associates  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Patrick L. Pinnell Architecture and Town Planning  
Higganum, Connecticut

## Introduction

Mention a “New England college town” and many Americans will imagine an idyllic landscape of students shuffling across a town common lined with brick sidewalks, bookshops, and ice cream parlors, church bells ringing in the distance. Yet although the town of Mansfield, Connecticut, has the eighth-largest student population in New England, nothing within its 44.5 square miles even faintly resembled that scene—until an unusual partnership between a New York–based developer, a Memphis-based apartment real estate investment trust (REIT), a growing state university, and the town government cut the ribbon on Storrs Center in 2012.

## Background and Context

The story of the University of Connecticut (UConn) begins in 1881, when the Storrs brothers donated land to the state of Connecticut to establish Storrs Agricultural School. The school grew slowly over the years, renaming itself the University of Connecticut in 1939, but New England’s largest state university kept a comparatively low profile for many years. Its Storrs campus was considered so isolated that several of UConn’s professional schools (notably law and medicine) were established in the Hartford area, about 20 miles west.

In 1995, recognizing that the state suffered from a tremendous “brain drain” problem—its high school graduates go to college at the highest rates in the nation, but at the time it exported more of its students than all but one state—the state passed UCONN 2000, a billion-dollar investment in UConn’s physical infrastructure and endowment. Since then, the university’s enrollment has grown by 41 percent to nearly 25,000 students, and the state has twice renewed its capital commitment.

Yet new classrooms and laboratories could only do so much to draw students and faculty. Philip Lodewick, president of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership and previous chair for UConn’s endowment, said, “We’re the only great public university in America without a college town.” Thomas Callahan, a longtime university administrator and a board member of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership, recalls: “If you looked at applicants who chose not to go to UConn and instead went to our competition, the number-one reason they gave was that there was nothing to do in Storrs. No restaurants, no place for people to gather publicly. The same was true for recruiting faculty and staff.”

The sudden flurry of construction on campus may have been good for the university, but it heightened town-gown strife. Even by the standards of the slow-growth northeast, northeastern

Connecticut has remained resolutely rural. The area markets itself as “the Last Green Valley” within the megalopolis, a 50-mile-wide bulwark between the conurbations of Hartford–New Haven–New York City to the west and Providence–Worcester–Boston to the east.

Just a few years into UCONN 2000, the university and the town were already at loggerheads over growth. Concerted opposition from local residents pushed a new football stadium to East Hartford and led Pfizer to abandon plans for an animal vaccine research facility just north of Storrs Center. “We operate in a globally competitive environment,” a Pfizer executive told the *Hartford Courant* at the time, and “need a premier development facility in place in a timely manner.”

The university had kicked around the idea of building a mixed-use development adjacent to campus for decades, but it was a National League of Cities program called America Downtown that ultimately provided the catalyst for Storrs Center. Betsy Paterson, then a newly elected member of the Town Council, accompanied then mayor Michael Schor to a conference in 1998 and subsequently convinced the council to engage with National League of Cities’ economic development consultant HyettPalma to create a phased vision for a new downtown at the Storrs site. That initial feasibility study found widespread support among townspeople for mixed-use development and public space at Storrs and urged that the town and university form a nonprofit partnership to advance the project. Paterson was elected mayor in 1999 and would hold that post through 2015, when the town square finally opened.

## The Site

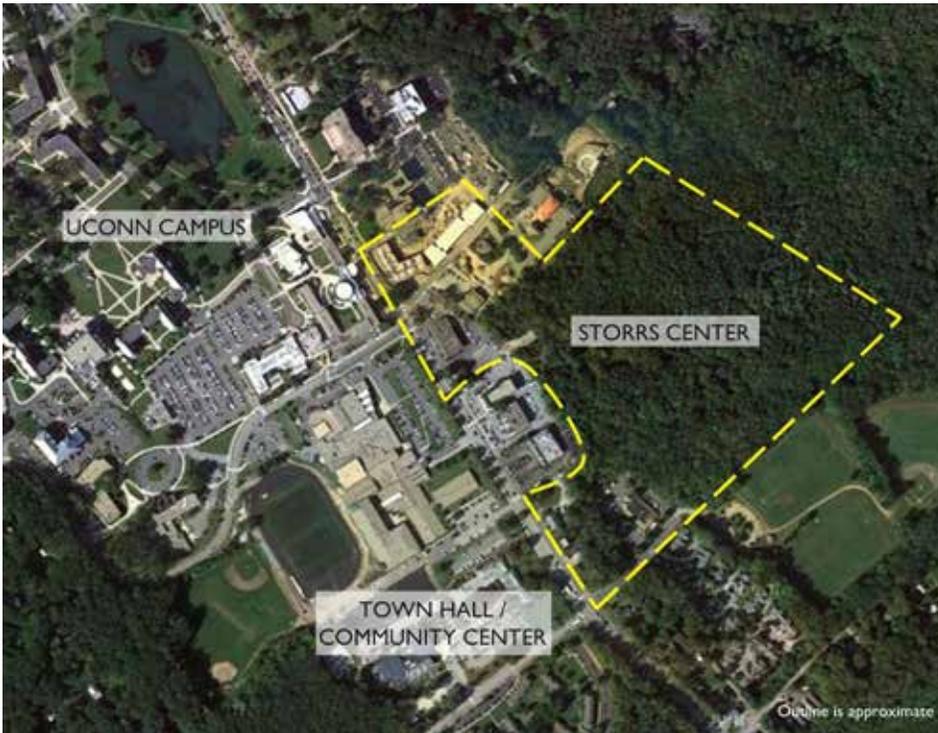
The 47.7-acre Storrs Center site stretches roughly 1,700 feet along the east side of Storrs Road (Route 195) and is about 500 feet deep. Across Storrs Road from the site is UConn’s School of Fine Arts (and its Connecticut Repertory Theater), with the rest of the campus to its northwest, and to its south are Edwin O. Smith High School and the Mansfield Town Hall.

The irregularly shaped site is hemmed in on both sides. The site’s Storrs Road frontage is split into two, interrupted by an outparcel containing three small retail buildings that house a typical campus-adjacent assortment of tenants. The site’s east boundary primarily faces protected open space, but two existing buildings also constrain the site on the east

*Much of the site was previously a nondescript shopping center.*



MANFIELD DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP



The Storrs Center site was adjacent to both the university and the town hall, but was previously underused.



An aerial photo taken after the completion of Phase I. Behind Storrs Center's mid-rise buildings are centuries-old forests and streams.

side: the Mansfield Post Office at its southern end and the Three Hierarchs Greek Orthodox Church at its northern end. Although the site is mostly uplands, two stream valleys drain away from the site toward the east.

Before construction, most of the site was owned by the university, although four additional parcels were purchased. (No eminent domain

was used.) The Storrs Road frontage consisted of a tired strip mall and a few auxiliary buildings, such as a print shop and a Quonset hut. The 30,000-square-foot strip mall engendered little love from its customers; local author Terese Karmel, writing in the *Hartford Courant*, remembered that it had “a few esoteric gift shops that never seemed to have anything anyone wanted.”

Behind the strip mall were deep woods and rocky hills. Lou Marquet, principal at Leyland-Alliance, recalls that when he first visited the site he thought, “between the rocks and the wetlands and the woods, this is going to be a tough piece of land.”

## Development Team and Approval Process

The Mansfield Downtown Partnership’s long-time executive director, Cynthia van Zelm, calls its structure a “three-legged stool.” Mayor Paterson served as one of three incorporators and ex officio board members for the partnership, alongside the chair of the Mansfield Business and Professional Association and a designee of the university president. Each group brings its own strengths to the partnership: the university owned the land and had expertise in managing large projects, while the town’s presence would reassure citizens that they had a voice in the project. The mistrust between residents and the university was such, Callahan said, that “it wouldn’t have gotten done had the university done it on its own.” Instead, the project had to be an equal partnership between elected officials like the mayor and selectmen, the town manager, and senior university personnel like the president’s chief of staff, the provost, and the dean of the School of Fine Arts.

The town also wanted to proactively involve the local business community, particularly those who could be relocated. As Paterson says, the town wanted to “impress upon them that this would enhance their businesses, not see it as something that would be in competition with them. We wanted them to feel like this was going to benefit them, too.”

The partnership structure was intentionally designed to maximize representation across the community. Up to 100 members were volunteering with the partnership’s various committees at different times, guiding the partnership’s work on tasks such as design and promotion. Critically, the partnership proactively sought out locals who might bring particular skills or representation to the group.

The partnership could draw upon its substantial community goodwill to advance the project in unusual ways. Its members lobbied the state and federal governments for critical grants and approvals, such as a letter-writing campaign to the governor and state Department of Trans-

portation to allow pedestrian-friendly changes to Storrs Road.

One of the partnership's first tasks was to turn the vague action agenda into a more concrete concept plan. That plan, developed by engineering consultants Milone & MacBroom, solidified the concept of a large, mixed-use town center with three key elements: commercial, housing, and public space—in particular a town common. Paterson also says a common theme was that residents “wanted it to be unique, and didn't want to rely on national businesses. We wanted it to be a point of destination,” attracting visitors to the university's many cultural and athletic events who otherwise “would eat out of town before they got here,” because Storrs offered little to entice the palate.

The concept plan also urged that the town work under the state's redevelopment law to create a “Municipal Development Plan” that would designate the partnership as the plan's development agency and give it limited statutory authority over the site. That statutory plan, which van Zelm calls “a pretty comprehensive bible to keep us moving along,” was written by architecture firm Looney Ricks Kiss. It laid out the land uses, environmental parameters, financial projections, and relocation plans for affected businesses.

“We determined very early on that we would get all the input that we could” about the plans, recalls Mayor Paterson. “We held over 400 meetings with every aspect of the community. We even had children draw a mural on the back of an existing building, showing us what they wanted.” Yet Paterson would also stress to locals that Storrs Center would not fundamentally change most of Mansfield: “Once you were two minutes away, the town would be the same as it had been for 50 years.”

Lodewick adds that “it took a lot of time early on, getting everyone in the choir on the same song on the same page of the hymnal.” Callahan says that “we wanted to keep the plan at a fairly high level, so that the developer could shape it. Only once we had the plan did we go out and seek a master developer for the process.”

LeylandAlliance joined the effort as master developer of Storrs Center as a result of a request for qualifications that was issued in 2004. Leyland began in the 1980s, as one of many small firms rehabilitating historic buildings in lower Manhattan, and in the 1990s became an early adopter of new urbanism. Chief executive officer Howard Kaufman recalls the lessons Leyland Alliance learned from prior public/private development partnerships, notably in Norfolk, Virginia, and North Augusta, South Carolina: “We're work-

ing with what the public wants to do, being patient, listening to the needs and wants and goals of the public. Our job is to deliver their vision; even though we need to make it financially viable, we work together to do that.”

The partnership thought Leyland “understood the long-term vision and concept of creating a great college town environment,” says Lodewick. Callahan adds that “their character and personality and the new urbanist sensibility they brought resonated very well” with the stakeholders.

The state formally adopted the Municipal Development Plan in 2006, and its zoning regulations (the first mixed-use zones in town) and design guidelines were adopted by the town following four nights of public hearings in 2007. Thereafter, the partnership, rather than the town, would have primary purview over approving developments within Storrs Center. Thanks to the extensive outreach, the plan was “the first time we had unanimous support from the Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council for a project with regard to the university,” says Lodewick.

## Design

The site's irregular shape and topography led to a layout that divides the 17 developable acres into four neighborhoods. The two more retail-intensive areas face Storrs Road, with less-intensive neighborhoods connecting behind the outparcels.

The large Town Square neighborhood sits directly on Storrs Road at the northern end of the site, across from the university. Two existing roads, Dog Lane and Bolton Road, were realigned to wrap around the square on its north and south; a traffic signal makes crossing Storrs Road from campus to the town square easy. Royce Circle, an internal street, starts at the square as it arcs southeast into the site. The Town Square neighborhood was the first to be completed and includes five mixed-use buildings and one small retail outbuilding. The parking garage is located at the rear edge of this neighborhood, and a surface lot separates the area from university buildings to its north.

The Market Square neighborhood, the second to be built, also fronts Storrs Road but at the south end of the site, across from the town hall. It includes two retail buildings along Storrs Road, separated by a surface parking lot: a 30,000-square-foot Price Chopper supermarket and a small retail outbuilding. The



DESROCHES PHOTOGRAPHY

One side of the town square is lined with eateries.

# STORRS CENTER SITE PLAN



Site plan, showing the distinct neighborhoods within Storrs Center.

existing post office is immediately behind this neighborhood.

Joining the two neighborhoods along Wilbur Cross Way, but hidden from Storrs Road by the outparcels, is the most recent neighborhood. It includes four mixed-use buildings of apartments over retail or office and one retail building housing a child care facility.

Behind Wilbur Cross Way is Main Street Homes, an enclave of 42 for-sale townhouses and flats atop a ridge between the site's two streams.

The overall design vision was set forth in the original plan's zoning and design guidelines, including the traditional architectural style and materials. Wilbur Cross Way has a more contemporary appearance, with brighter colors and flat roofs—a shift driven in part by the need to differentiate the area and, Marquet says, because ice

readily slid off the first buildings' pitched roofs.

Most of the mixed-use buildings are Type IIIA wood frames over a concrete ground-floor podium, with facades of fiber-cement board siding or brick veneer. Design details such as returns underneath the windows add depth to the facades. "The hardest thing to do is to handcraft it," says Marquet, but such attention to detail is needed to make the place feel authentic rather than mass-produced. Although the design guidelines seemed fairly clear at first, he wishes they had been even clearer, to avoid on-the-job learning.

Considerable thought was given to pedestrian-friendly street design, both within the site and at its edges. Storrs Road posed the greatest challenge, because it is both a state highway and the project's front door. Following its new Context Sensitive Solutions guidance, the state

Department of Transportation ultimately approved changes to the road that calm traffic and improve walkability. One major change was adding 67 parallel parking spaces, thereby both improving convenience for the storefronts along the street and sheltering pedestrians along its sidewalk. Still, the road ended up wider than the original design had called for, including a one-foot-wide stone strip that had to be laid between the parking lane and the vehicle lane.

The site's two Storrs Road frontages reflect two different approaches to meshing modern retail, "roadside architecture," and walkability. The formal, half-acre town square is surrounded by five-story buildings that envelop the square and street. One corner of the square is anchored by a CVS drugstore, without any visible parking out front. Bacon says a lot of effort went into the Town Square neighborhood, both the square



PAYTON CHUNG

*Buildings along Wilbur Cross Way have a more contemporary appearance.*

itself and the buildings enveloping the square that would give it a sense of enclosure.

“One recurring theme” from the very first public meetings, Bacon says, “was a town square—like the town common that’s so frequently seen in New England.” The job of designing that common ultimately fell to the smallest landscape architecture firm interviewed by the town, Kent + Frost Landscape Architecture. Bacon calls it “one of the most successful projects . . . the final plan seemed to capture everything on our wish list” as a town, including a performance stage, sculptures, seating areas, and a central green.

At the other end of the site is Market Square, which was built with a more conventional retail format. The relatively tight site for a supermarket required some cajoling: “It’s going to be a notable project, so why don’t you have a notable building?” Marquet recalls. The grocery has a seating mezzanine above the selling floor, large windows facing Storrs Road, and a lattice-shaded sidewalk promenade between the parking lot and the street.

Market Square had to be wedged between Storrs Road and an existing post office that was 250 feet behind and 25 feet below the road. To squeeze the supermarket and Wilbur Cross Way in, Leyland had to convince the postmaster to slice off a corner of the existing parking lot. Marquet



PAYTON CHUNG

*The supermarket continues the pedestrian-friendly streetscape along Storrs Road.*

approached a longtime friend who had recently retired as a regional manager within the Postal Service to broach the subject. Together, they observed the traffic patterns at the post office and discovered that “the traffic was a mail drop-off problem, rather than people parking and walking into the building.” Instead of a larger parking lot, a new driveway wrapping around a mail drop cut the post office’s parking needs. An earlier plan had the supermarket’s parking tucked into the hillside

beneath the store, but after the recession that plan was discarded in favor of keeping everything on one level. Still, the sharp grade change between the supermarket above and the post office behind and below requires a pair of steep retaining walls on either side of Wilbur Cross Way as it threads between the two.

Storrs Center’s principal buildings grew taller between iterations of the plan. Bacon recalls that “earlier concepts of downtown were much

more modest.” Even though residents “initially wanted to have a whole lot of retail shops,” says Paterson, the feasibility studies made it “quite apparent that was not going to be easy, because we don’t have the population to support it.”

Bacon recalls a similar evolution, saying “the necessity of populating the town with enough residents to support the businesses required higher structures” than first envisioned. “The height was a bit of a problem in terms of the public reaction, but now we have not only a concentrated urban-style downtown, but also a very generous open space next to it,” he continues.

LeylandAlliance opted to devote more of the land to permanent open space and to build higher on the remaining footprint. “If you’re only going to use that much property, how are we going to deliver what we want as a town? Well, we have to make it one story higher,” says Marquet. “Once [the townspeople] understood it, they were all smart. ‘Okay, as long as we only do this here, we’re okay with it.’” The final plan resulted in 24 acres of open space being permanently deeded to the town.

## Sustainability and Water Quality

The site’s zoning includes a set of mandatory sustainability guidelines that closely parallel the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development standards. Those guidelines specify a 50 percent reduction in energy use compared to conventional buildings and a 65 percent reduction in water use relative to code.

The Shetucket River valley around Mansfield is a designated National Heritage Corridor, in large part because of its scenic beauty and pristine water quality. Integrating dense new development into this context while avoiding impacts to sensitive wetlands was one reason behind the decision to limit the development footprint.

LeylandAlliance’s conservation biology consultant, Michael Klemens, serendipitously happened to have grown up in Storrs and studied at UConn; he was deeply familiar with the site and its two seasonal wetlands. Ultimately, 18 months of detailed analysis of the site’s eight drainage zones, and appropriate mitigation measures, resulted in a stormwater plan that was accepted by the state and federal governments.

One of the two wetlands that were removed was a degraded, silty area near where the transportation center stands today. It was replaced



PRAYTON CHUNG

*Permeable paving on the town square reduces runoff to a local pond and helps sustain its landmark oak tree.*

with large dirt-floored cisterns, up to 40 feet long and 10 feet deep, that sit underneath Wilbur Cross Way, intercept stormwater, and slow its passage toward the streams to the east.

Curb inlets at Storrs Center direct stormwater flow first into street-tree basins that are planted as drought-resistant rain gardens. The town square’s permeable paving balances its heavy pedestrian traffic with a directive not to affect water flows into Mirror Lake, a notable campus landscape feature just to its northwest. The only landscape sprinklers on site are for the small green within the town square.

Drinking water and sewer service are provided through a contract with UConn, which operates the area’s only public water supply system. At the same time that Storrs Center was built, the university expanded its water capacity by constructing a wastewater reclamation facility, which substantially reduced potable water use by treating effluent for uses such as irrigation and utility process water.

## Financing

Almost 90 percent of Storrs Center’s cost was financed conventionally, through the private sector, but getting there required leveraging 16 different federal and state grants totaling \$25 million, in addition to local funds spent on planning, infrastructure, and maintenance. In addition, a partial tax abatement reduced local property taxes on the first three buildings for seven years.

Paterson recalls that from the start, she knew that such a small town “couldn’t do it on our own, so we appealed to our legislators for

grants. . . . Cynthia [van Zelm] and I went to Washington at least once, and we were very active in the Conference of Municipalities” to advocate not just for the project, but for municipal investments more broadly. The first few grants, from U.S. Department of Agriculture and Connecticut Office of Policy and Management programs for rural areas and small towns, went toward planning efforts like the Municipal Development Plan. Later grants paid for transportation infrastructure, and a few final grants enhanced the project’s public spaces.

Kaufman says that in development, “You have to be lucky as well as good.” And Mansfield was lucky to be very well represented in the State House. The president of the state senate and the majority leader of the state house both hailed from Mansfield. When necessary, the Mansfield Downtown Partnership could also turn out a well-organized public committed to seeing the plan become reality.

## Infrastructure

Much of the site’s transportation-related infrastructure was funded through different public sector sources. The overhaul of Storrs Road’s streetscape was awarded \$6.73 million from federal and state transportation funds and from state community development funds. To get funds to pay for interior streets, Wilbur Cross Way was designated a “transit pathway” necessary for buses to get to and from the intermodal transportation center. That meant the road itself—but not the sidewalks—would be eligible for federal transit capital grants. The town managed the reconstruction of Dog Lane, which

cuts across the northern end of the site and now ends at the town square.

As with other downtown developments, public subsidies for structured parking proved “really key to getting the density that we wanted downtown,” says Kaufman. The largest single grant for the project was a \$10 million state grant that paid most of the parking garage’s cost. The remainder of the garage costs were split between Leyland and the town. Leyland agreed to handle management and cover any operating losses for the first seven years, and to split any operating profits in half. The contract’s term was extended due to construction problems, but “the garage has been profitable from day one,” says Kaufman, largely thanks to a master lease with EdR and monthly commuter parking.

Federal transit and intermodal grants of \$4.39 million went to create the Nash-Zimmer Transportation Center that is attached to the garage, as well as to the “transit pathway.” It includes an enclosed, staffed waiting area for campus, local, and intercity buses with displays showing real-time bus arrival data; a Bicycle Commuter Club with showers, lockers, and indoor racks; four electric vehicle chargers; and a tiny outpost of the Mansfield Public Library.

The town square also received several grants, from state economic development agencies and from the Jeffery P. Ossen Family Foundation.

## Residential

When LeylandAlliance first joined the project as master developer in 2004, the for-sale housing market was on fire, and the going assumption was that the housing would be condominiums—“a traditional downtown housing people from all walks of life,” says Kaufman. But before the project went out for financing, “the condo market just went away” as the subprime-mortgage bubble burst in 2008.

Student-oriented rental housing, buoyed by rising millennial college enrollment, was one of the first real estate sectors to recover in 2008’s aftermath. All the market fundamentals and comparables in Storrs pointed to student housing, yet focusing Storrs Center on students felt like a betrayal of the town’s vision.

In stepped EdR, the Memphis-based REIT that pioneered the privately built student housing industry in 1964. Today, it owns or manages 79 communities that, on average, are just 0.1 miles to a university campus. In recent years, EdR has been upgrading its asset base and now



*New buildings along Storrs Road. The road was redesigned as a pedestrian-friendly street using federal and state funds.*

calls its market segment “collegiate housing,” reflecting the broad appeal of college-town life. Storrs Center was a perfect fit for its new portfolio strategy: an entitled, high-quality, walkable property, adjacent to a flagship state university, in a market with formidable barriers to entry.

Once the decision was made, says Kaufman, “We thought that the market would largely be students, but we had to assure the public stakeholders that we would market this broadly. The partnership worked closely with EdR on marketing. We all felt that EdR would manage the residential well, and that has certainly proven to be the case.”

Lodewick points out that the partnership wanted a long-term owner/operator and that EdR, as a REIT, has held many of its properties for decades. Callahan adds that EdR was flexible with unit interiors, redesigning “a portion of the housing to accommodate faculty and other plain old Mansfield residents” with layouts that include dining rooms and foyers. The university master-leased several furnished units to house visiting scholars.

EdR and LeylandAlliance worked together on the final architectural plans and split ownership of the buildings vertically by creating a master condominium association. EdR purchased the upper floors, as well as any residential service spaces such as lobbies or mail rooms on the ground floor. Construction proceeded with one

general contractor, but the two developers split the costs accordingly.

## Commercial

Kaufman says that once EdR signed onto the project, “that made financing much easier, without a doubt. That showed a lot of confidence that we had demand for housing at Storrs,” even without any preleasing on the retail side. The construction financing was fairly conventional, according to Kaufman, with 30 percent equity and 70 percent debt.

Even though “our PPP [public/private partnership] agreements were a little daunting for everyone to get their arms around,” Kaufman says, several lenders competed for the business. The construction loan was led by PNC Bank, with local lender People’s United Bank participating. In recognition of the project’s multiphase approach, the loan has a longer-than-usual term, a practice known in the business as a “mini-perm.”

In the end, the loan was paid off early: in November 2014, the Connecticut Retirement Plans and Trust Funds, the state’s pension fund, paid \$45.8 million for a rolling acquisition of Storrs Center’s commercial space. The sale was brokered by CBRE, and Simsbury-based Hart Realty Advisors represented the pension fund; Hart also serves as asset manager for the pension fund. Although Leyland is still in charge of construction

and preleasing, the first three phases were turned over upon closing and the final phase will be purchased upon completion.

## Construction

The site offered more than the usual array of construction challenges. In addition to the wetlands, the geology was difficult. “We did not have good as-built drawings of the field conditions, so everywhere we went, we were always blasting rock,” Marquet says. Still, the project was completed on time and under budget, a feat Marquet attributes to low recession-era construction bids. The bids on the garage, for instance, were up to 30 percent below budget and promised completion a full year ahead of schedule.

That initial promise soon evaporated, because the geotechnical survey for the parking garage turned out to be faulty. Decomposing rock underneath the structure was discovered only once foundations were underway, requiring that caissons be dug just before winter set in. The mistake cost a million dollars and added six weeks to the project—although the garage absolutely had to be done before residential construction began.

In addition to the site’s difficult terrain, Marquet recalls that “the strip center was a complete cesspool of asbestos,” somehow accumulating several layers of asphalt tile on its roof, and that some contaminated soils had to be carted away. Demolition costs came in far over budget as a result.

Coordinating construction across multiple parties also proved a challenge, especially given the deadline (i.e., the first week of classes) that a college-town development absolutely had to meet. Just before the grand opening in August 2012, “we were pouring the sidewalk on Dog Lane a week before occupancy” while the town’s public works was “paving the street at the same time. Our concrete truck was across the street, and they were paving beneath us,” says Marquet. Working around each other in tight quarters required very close coordination and a strong working relationship with the town, which was not used to projects of this magnitude: “That’s where all that candor and all those meetings paid off,” he says.

Other coordination did not go so well. The state department of transportation put Storrs Road on the back burner for several months while economic-stimulus projects were fast-tracked. Connecticut Light & Power wanted meters “plastered all around the outside of the buildings,”

relenting and accepting meters in more limited locations only weeks before occupancy.

## Performance, Marketing

The many stakeholders at Storrs Center are all pleased with how the project has turned out. The apartments have been tremendously popular, especially among older students who want to live off campus. Unexpectedly, the apartments have also proved popular with seniors; Paterson is glad to see “more residents living somewhere they don’t have to drive a car, especially important given an aging population.”

The property has been a boon to the town’s budget. State aid to Mansfield, ostensibly meant to reimburse the town for the property taxes it cannot levy upon the campus, has been cut in recent state budgets. Storrs Center, though, turned untaxable university land into the town’s largest taxpayer. Paterson is excited to see “both townspeople and university people coming to eat in restaurants, going to the bookstore and the shops. It shows we really have more in common than we thought.”

From the university’s perspective, Lodewick says “this project is the most important project that’s happened on the Storrs campus in history.” Callahan says that “we don’t have the same responses that we used to have on the admitted student survey in terms of why they didn’t come.” Before, van Zelm says, “there were very few restaurants; now, some people say we have too many restaurants.”

## Leasing

Where Storrs Center really shines is in its enviable retail mix, shaped both through the planning process’s broad community participation and through strategic decisions by the developer and leasing broker. The retail program blends elements from a neighborhood shopping center, like a supermarket, drugstore, and post office, with classic elements of a college town and a few regional draws.

The two most prominent corners, where the town square meets Storrs Road, were among the first to lease. One is occupied by CVS, and the other by Dog Lane Café, an all-day restaurant and sister to a popular restaurant established in 1989 in nearby Pomfret. Dog Lane Café was the first lease signed at Storrs, and Kaufman recalls that when it was announced, “We got a standing ovation—the only standing ovation I’ve ever received as a developer at a public meeting.”

Three university-related facilities anchor the building behind the square: a UConn Health Center ambulatory care medical and dental clinic, the Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry, and a Barnes & Noble college bookstore. Although the university’s hospitals are in Farmington, over 30 miles west, “We thought it would be a good idea simply from a market share point of view to have a presence at the campus,” says Callahan. The medical center also ensures year-round visitor traffic.

The museum, an adjunct to the university’s puppetry program (one of just two in the United States) draws visitors from far afield with both creative exhibits and performances in a theater that it shares with the bookstore. The bookstore was one of a few uses directly specified in the initial plans. It was a challenge because the university’s bookstores were then operated by a co-op with unsteady finances that has since been replaced by Barnes & Noble. Either way, the museum and bookstore work together as an extension of the welcoming town square.

A new addition in the fall of 2016 is an Amazon.com staffed pickup location, one of over a dozen that the online retailing giant has brought to college towns and campuses nationwide. The 3,912-square-foot location is primarily storage, with only about 1,000 square feet up front; customers can order one of millions of items for same-day or next-day pickup. Kaufman says that this model “works well in rural areas since packages get dropped off and disappear,” and notes the strain that online deliveries place upon apartment and dormitory management. Amazon was happy to sign a noncompete clause with the campus bookseller, barring Amazon from carrying textbooks on site, and Amazon’s location at the interior of the site draws its customers past the rest of the retailers.

The partnership has been very intentional about living up to the initial promise that Storrs Center would reflect local character and not just fill with national chains. Its work in cultivating and courting local merchants has complemented merchandising efforts by retail broker Charter Realty.

Small storefronts also create a welcoming environment for entrepreneurs: 11 of the retail spaces are smaller than 1,000 square feet. Indeed, the first building completed was 9 Dog Lane, whose tiny storefronts are home to several businesses relocated from the former strip mall, such as an automobile repair shop, a travel agent, a pizza parlor, a tattoo shop,



DESROCHES PHOTOGRAPHY

*Small shopfronts in 9 Dog Lane house eclectic retailers such as a candy shop, florist, barber, and tattoo parlor. Several were relocated from the buildings formerly on the site.*

## Observations and Lessons Learned

From the moment that Storrs Center was launched by the town of Mansfield, town leaders had a clear vision in mind for what they were planning: a great college town. Having the entire plan set and approved upfront considerably streamlined implementation, notably by obviating further zoning approvals.

Van Zelm, who has led the Mansfield Downtown Partnership since its founding, was critical as “somebody who is thinking about this stuff all the time, and maintaining the relationships involved,” says Callahan. Paterson credits van Zelm’s “uncanny ability to get along with everyone,” saying “she met with every possible group you could think of, Girl Scouts to civic groups. By being open and transparent, we managed to keep the community interested the whole time. She updates city council, she kept a construction blog, posts lots of pictures, does lots of events.” One of the neighbors who ultimately was sold was Karmel, writing in the *Courant*: “When it was first proposed, I resisted the idea because I didn’t want to lose the so-called ‘rural atmosphere’ of Mansfield. Silly me. Mansfield is plenty rural—65 percent of it is undeveloped. Now it has the best of both worlds. . . . Thanks for injecting vitality into this community and for giving me a place to shop, eat and meet friends.”

As plans continued to evolve, they changed in ways that did not alter the essence of the plan. Even the most dramatic shift in plans, from owned to predominantly rented housing, Kaufman says, had an unforeseen benefit: it has “taken the pressure off some of the neighborhoods. Some of the homes were being taken over by landlords renting to students, not supervising them. Now, you have a highly managed structure downtown.”

Another instance of the original idea’s staying power is the saga of whether a hotel should be part of Storrs Center, which Lodewick says would be perfect: “People fall out of bed; they’re right downtown; they support the local economy.” A hotel was in the original plans, taken out at the university’s insistence, proposed again by LeylandAlliance, vetoed again, and finally is coming back to life now that the competition is gone.

Joining together to realize Storrs Center was not a feat that came naturally to Mansfield’s

and a barber. Paterson points out that these moves resulted from “a very robust relocation program funded by the state” and Leyland. The shops were given below-market rents because “these brand-new buildings would be market rate, and they were coming out of buildings that were paying below market rate.”

Several of the businesses around the town square have unusual connections to the university, such as Geno’s Grille, part-owned by famed women’s basketball coach Geno Auriemma, and Sweet Emotions, a candy shop owned by the former university counseling center director. Recent graduates have launched businesses at Storrs Center, like HA Café, a Japanese restaurant launched by three alumni just one or two years out of college.

Mayor Paterson’s personal favorite is a new location of Bliss Boutique, a consignment shop from Willimantic. Van Zelm looks forward to the town’s very first sports bar; in a town with “wonderful sports teams, we don’t have good venues to watch the games—yet,” she says.

## Management

Upkeep of the streets, town square, and street trees is done by the town public works department, including frequent cleanings of the tree

basins. The sidewalks are maintained by the property owners; both EdR and LeylandAlliance have on-site property management teams.

The Mansfield Downtown Partnership coordinates monthly infrastructure and communications meetings across the various management entities. It also jointly markets not just Storrs Center, but also the neighboring retail properties, as “Downtown Storrs.” Many of its signature events take place to activate the town square while students are away during the summer, including a 4,000-attendee annual festival, concerts, movies, and a “pup crawl.” Autumn events include Halloween trick-or-treating and a “Winter Welcome” to launch the holiday shopping season. Callahan says that the partnership is paying close attention to “how [the area’s] character develops over time, and making sure that it makes us all proud.”

All parking throughout the site is managed by LAZ Parking. Surface lots and parallel spaces are free but limited to two hours, and all longer-term parking must be within the paid garage. The strategy steers longer-term visitors (such as employees, commuters, theatergoers, and even regional-bus passengers) to the garage at the center of the site, while keeping the most convenient parking available for shoppers.



KIM BOVA PHOTOGRAPHY

*The partnership keeps the town square lively with frequent events, like the 2014 Celebrate Mansfield Festival.*

leaders, but now collaboration seems second nature. Numerous partnership board members credit the project with bringing town and gown together at last. “This effort built the civic infrastructure that allows the university and town to work together on a variety of issues going forward,” says Callahan, noting forthcoming water investments. Paterson cites “side benefits we didn’t even anticipate: the town manager now meets regularly with the university president,” the planners work together, and students volunteer on off-campus projects.

Once they had come together on the vision, Storrs Center had champions remarkable for both their tenacity and ability to keep to that original vision. Marquet urges others to “make sure your vision keeper has a real strong voice at the table.” Callahan remarks that “the leadership of the partnership was golden: talented, committed, and stable.” Notably, both the mayor and university president were constant presences from almost the first study through ribbon-cutting. New leadership would have slowed momentum and disrupted the consensus, he says. Marquet says the collaboration was almost old-fashioned: “Leaders might have disagreements, but they put their elbows on the table and made things happen.”

The public sector partners also made sure to select developers who matched their ability to see the vision beyond completion. Kaufman says other developers “don’t understand why we would work 10–15 years on a project. We just have different goals; we want to create something with a legacy.”

## OTHER PARTICIPANTS

### Architect

BL Companies  
Meriden, Connecticut

### Landscape architect (town square)

Kent + Frost Landscape Architecture  
Mystic, Connecticut

### General contractor

Erland Construction

### Engineering

Desman Associates  
Steven Winter Associates

## PROJECT DATA

### Interviewees

Steve Bacon, president, Mansfield  
Downtown Partnership

Thomas Callahan, deputy secretary of Rhode Island Executive Office of Commerce; former associate vice president for infrastructure planning and strategic project management, University of Connecticut

Howard Kaufman, principal,  
LeylandAlliance LLC

Philip Lodewick, former president, Mansfield  
Downtown Partnership

Louis Marquet, principal, LeylandAlliance LLC

Betsy Paterson, former mayor, Mansfield,  
ex officio board member emerita,  
Mansfield Downtown Partnership

Cynthia van Zelm, executive director, Mansfield  
Downtown Partnership

## PROJECT INFORMATION STORRS CENTER

Development timeline	Year
Mansfield downtown action agenda plan completed	2000
Mansfield Downtown Partnership founded	2001
Storrs Center concept plan completed	2002
LeylandAlliance selected as master developer	2004
Municipal Development Plan adopted by state	2006
Zoning regulations adopted by town	2007
Stormwater plan and wetlands permits approved	2008
Commercial leasing begins	2008
Sustainability guidelines adopted	2008
Storrs Road improvements began	2009
EdR joined as residential development partner	2010
Construction financing arranged	2011
Construction started	2011
First three buildings opened	2012
Phase I completed	2014
Supermarket opened	2014
Nash-Zimmer Transportation Center opened	2014
Town Square opened	2015
Phase II completed	2015
Main Street Homes opened	2016

Gross building area (GBA)	
Use	Building area (sq ft)
Office	30,776
Retail/restaurant	108,931
Residential	507,704
Parking garage	235,200
<b>Total GBA</b>	<b>882,611</b>
Parking spaces	1,149 spaces

Land use plan		
	Site area (acres)	% of site
Retail and residential buildings	5.5	12%
Parking garage and transportation center	0.9	2%
Public streets, sidewalks, and parks	16.0	34%
Alleys, utilities, and surface parking	4.7	10%
Nature preserve	20.5	43%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Residential information

Building or unit name/type	Number of units	Unit size (square feet)	Percentage sold/leased	Typical rent or sales price
The Oaks on the Square (rental)	626			
Studio	156	384–490	100	\$1,135–\$1,195
1 bedroom, 1 bath	184	548–704	100	\$1,655–\$1,745
2 bedrooms, 2 baths	164	771–1,077	100	\$2,445–\$2,555
3 bedrooms, 3 baths	122	1,032–1,252	100	\$3,135
Main Street Homes (for sale)	42			
Storrs Townhomes (2 bedrooms, 2.5 baths)	24	1,058	100%	\$269,000–\$319,000
Eagleville Townhomes (2 bedroom, 2.5 baths)	4	1,857	75%	\$474,000
Mansfield Townhomes (3 bedrooms, 3.5 baths)	4	2,215	100%	\$535,000
Condominiums (2 bedrooms, 2 baths)	10	1,529–1,840	60%	\$399,000–\$504,000

### Retail/restaurant information

Percentage of retail GLA leased	97%
Annual rent range	\$25 per sq ft
Average length of lease	10 years

Key retail/restaurant tenants	Retail type	GLA (sq ft)
Price Chopper	Supermarket	32,175
UConn Health Center	Medical clinic	17,977
Barnes & Noble College	Bookstore and café	14,927
Educational Playcare	Child care	14,000
CVS	Drugstore	13,267

### Development cost information

Site acquisition cost	\$19,000,000
Hard costs	\$119,000,000
Soft costs	\$31,000,000
Total	\$169,000,000
Hard costs per square foot	\$149.53
Total development costs per square foot	\$212.35

### Financing sources

#### Debt capital sources

PNC Bank	\$100,500,000
Washington Trust Bank	\$17,100,000

#### Equity capital sources

LeylandAlliance LLC	\$12,200,000
EdR LLC	\$39,240,000

#### Public capital sources

State Bond Commission (parking garage)	\$10,000,000
Federal Transit Administration	\$5,390,000
Federal Highway Administration	\$2,500,000
U.S. Department of Transportation (earmark)	\$2,250,000
Connecticut Department of Transportation	\$1,730,000
Connecticut Small Town Economic Assistance Program	\$1,700,000
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act	\$712,500
Connecticut Main Street Investment Fund	\$500,000
Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development	\$450,000
Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation	\$190,650
U.S. Department of Agriculture	\$175,000



## About the Urban Land Institute

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 38,000 members, representing the entire spectrum of land use and development disciplines. Professionals represented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, and students.

ULI is committed to

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanisation, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both the built and natural environment;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and
- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

**Patrick L. Phillips**, Global Chief Executive Officer

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## ULI CASE STUDIES

The ULI Case Studies program highlights and showcases innovative approaches and best practices in real estate and urban development. Each case study provides detailed information regarding the ideas, plans, process, performance, and lessons learned for the development project. Each also includes project facts, timelines, financial data, site plans, photos, location maps, and online videos. The new ULI Case Studies program is the revitalization of a program begun in 1971. For more information, visit the ULI Case Studies website at [www.uli.org/casestudies](http://www.uli.org/casestudies).

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