

3. Potential Growth Opportunities

A) RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

The increasing emphasis at UConn on research and development and university-industry relationships provide Mansfield with an opportunity to capture technology companies spinning out of UConn and those seeking research partnerships with the university.

The State of Connecticut economic development strategy includes a focus on UConn as a driver of 21st century economy prosperity. Major planned investments by the State in UConn over the next 10-20 years promise to significantly affect the Mansfield economy.

- **NextGenCT.** This initiative, which includes significant investments in campus facilities and increases in faculty and enrollments, focuses on expanding the level of research, technology commercialization and new enterprise development at the Storrs Campus, which could spur increased demand for R&D, office, and light manufacturing space in Mansfield. The increase in students and faculty could also generate growth in other economic sectors including retail, accommodation and food services, and other consumer services.
- **UConn Technology Park.** The Tech Park, as currently envisioned, will involve the build-out of up to 900,000 square feet over a 10-20 year timeframe. The first building in the park, the Innovation Partnership Building (IPB), will be State-owned and operated. Most of the other buildings are expected to be privately developed and to house corporate research facilities, emerging technology firms, and possibly federal labs. While Tech Park land is expected to remain State property, these private facilities are envisioned to be equipment-intensive and thus to generate a high level of property taxes to Mansfield on the improvements (buildings and equipment). While the nature, scale and timing of the Park's construction remain undetermined at this time, its completion has the potential to result in significant business development, job creation, and local property tax revenues over time. In the shorter run, the graduation of firms from the new incubator could increase the number of second stage firms desiring to expand within Mansfield as they seek to maintain proximity to UConn facilities and relationships with UConn researchers.
- **UConn Technology Commercialization Partners.** UConn and the State of Connecticut have greatly expanded resources to support technology commercialization and entrepreneurship. UConn's Office of the Vice President for Research operates a variety of programs specifically aimed at promoting technology-based economic development related to UConn's research strengths. These programs provide resources for companies seeking the expertise of UConn faculty and researchers, manage the intellectual property created at the university in life and physical sciences, assist in creating new start-up companies based on technologies developed by faculty and staff, and accelerate the establishment and development of entrepreneurial companies through incubator space and support services.

- **Connecticut Innovations (CI)** is another important source of support for startup and early stage companies. CI provides a variety of financing and technical assistance tools, including SBIR matching grants, the TechStart Accelerator Program, the Seed Investment Fund, ELI Whitney Fund early stage venture capital funding, the Clean Tech Fund, and the BioScience Facilities Fund, which finances wet lab and related space.

Mansfield already has a small base of research and development (R&D) and technology firms that, while generally small and not highly visible, generate income, tax revenues, and high-quality employment, and have the potential to grow. While the UConn campus provides fertile ground for technology commercialization and entrepreneurship, Mansfield is hampered by a shortage of R&D space and land zoned for R&D facilities as firms grow and look for larger space. Some firms are reported by UConn staff and Town officials to have relocated outside of Mansfield for this reason. Without the development of additional R&D space, Mansfield will continue to lose growing technology firms to other communities.

B) PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS SERVICES

Mansfield has a significant number of small firms (generally four or fewer employees) that provide a wide range of business and professional services in regional or even national markets. These include engineering and architectural services, computer programming and computer systems design, graphic design, environmental consulting, management consulting, and other business services. As described earlier, these types of businesses (classified under professional and technical services and administrative services) have been growing in the Tolland-Windham region during the past decade but not in Mansfield. More attention to accommodating the growth needs of these types of firms could yield more business and employment growth within Mansfield.

C) RETAIL AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Data indicate that Mansfield has a relatively small retail sector. Increases in students and faculty at UConn as well as the ability to realize the growth opportunities described above will increase the base of consumers (i.e., residents, employees, and students), potentially creating greater demand for retail and consumer service businesses. However, because the Mansfield population has typically dropped during the summer, the seasonal nature of the market has made it difficult in the past for some retail and service businesses to survive over the long term. More summer programs on campus, as well as advertising to year-round residents, would help support retail, especially in Storrs Center and other areas near campus. As UConn upgrades residence halls with air conditioning and other improvements, it is expected that summer programs will expand.

The new Storrs Center has met with considerable initial success in leasing ground floor space to commercial tenants. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Storrs Center

merchants did better than expected in the summer of 2013, their first summer. The experience at Storrs Center with commercial lease and occupancy rates during the next few years will provide one indication of the potential for further expanding retail and consumer services within the town.

D) TOURISM

Mansfield has a wide variety of tourism attractions that could draw more visitors, particularly from within the southeastern New England market. Mansfield is located approximately 22 miles from I-91, a major North/South transportation corridor, and 30 miles from I-90, a major East/West corridor. The town is 20 miles from Hartford, 85 miles from Boston and 137 miles from Manhattan. This location places the town in a prime tourism location. While the town lacks a major tourism destination, its location in the Last Green Valley combined with a mix of arts, history and cultural heritage, outdoor recreation, and tourism venues and events offer a diverse tourism experience.

- **Arts.** Mansfield offers a number of high-quality performing and visual arts attractions, primarily through UConn. For more information, see Chapter 5: Community Life.
- **History and Cultural Heritage.** Historical and cultural heritage attractions include: the Gurley Gristmill, the only remaining stone mill of its kind in Connecticut; the Mansfield Historical Society and Museum, which offers exhibits and educational programming related to Mansfield's 300 year history; and the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History, which hosts exhibits integrating Connecticut's natural and cultural history.
- **Outdoor Recreation.** Several parks and recreation areas are located within the town, including Mansfield Hollow State Park, the Albert E. Moss Forest, Shelter Falls Park, the David Storrs Chapin Coney Rock Preserve, the Knowlton Hill Preserve, and the Wolf Rock Nature Preserve. These sites offer a wide range of outdoor recreation activities, including hiking, biking, boating, fishing, bird watching, rock climbing, and cross-country skiing. The new Adventure Park at Storrs, an aerial park, offers a family-oriented rope and zip line course. Special events include the annual Wilimantic Down River Canoe and Kayak Race from Tolland to Mansfield, and Walktober, a series of hundreds of hikes and other regional events that attract thousands of visitors annually from New England and beyond.
- **Agri-tourism.** According to the 2007 census of agriculture 2% of CT farms (and 2% of Tolland County farms) offered agri-tourism and recreational services, ranking Connecticut number three in New England for the percentage of farms involved in agri-tourism. Local agri-tourism attractions include UConn, Cedar Ledge Tree Farm, with a range of fall and Christmas season activities, and Bassett's Bridge Farm, best known for its stroll gardens displaying perennials, annuals, herbs, shrubs, and trees. These provide a powerful engine for further development of agri-tourism, cross-marketing eco-tourism, and adventure tourism opportunities that can be compatible with agricultural enterprises.



Photo credit: Peter Morenus/UConn

UConn's Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry is a unique attraction, drawing people of all ages.



Mansfield offers a range outdoor recreation activities, including kayaking, hiking, fishing and cross-country skiing (River Park shown above).

The 2013 Tourism Impact Report commissioned by the The Last Green Valley (TLGV) demonstrates the potential for tourism as an economic growth sector. Tourism activities in the region have grown substantially over the past few years, from 1.3 million visitors with \$158 million in economic impact in 2010 to 1.9 million visitors in 2013 with \$278 million in economic impact. While 66% of visitors to the Last Green Valley are day trippers (compared to 35% statewide), the number of visitors with overnight stays increased from 25% to 34%. Visitors with higher household incomes spent more per visit; however, those with lower incomes visited more frequently.¹⁷

Mansfield and the surrounding region are well-positioned to tie into the state’s tourism branding and marketing initiative, “Connecticut...Still Revolutionary.” The initiative seeks to link the state’s historic past with its legacy and continued role as a center of innovation. The region’s historic sites, some tied to Revolutionary War figures such as Nathan Hale, Samuel Huntington, and Governor Jonathan Trumbull, its role in the industrial revolution, and its significance today as a center of leading edge research at UConn, can all be capitalized upon to strengthen the region’s position as a tourism destination.

Expanding tourism in Mansfield could strengthen the town’s economy and, in particular, create more activity during the quiet summer months when UConn is not in full session. Expanding agri-tourism offers the additional benefit of providing supplemental income to farmers. This is likely to require more intensive local efforts to highlight the town’s attractions within the regional tourism market that could include the development of themed trails, tourism packages, and special events, and working with other towns in the region to provide a more diverse and appealing visitor experience. It may also require further development of local visitor infrastructure (e.g., inns, bed and breakfasts, and campgrounds) that could help to attract more visitors to Mansfield and increase their spending while here.

E) AGRICULTURE: LOCAL MARKETING AND VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTION

Connecticut in general and Mansfield in particular are both utterly dependent on food that comes from hundreds and even thousands of miles away. A 2012 report by the Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy estimated that locally produced food accounts for 2.5% of Connecticut’s total food expenditures. That means 97.5% of the value of all food is imported from other states and countries.

Although Connecticut is likely to remain dependent on other states and countries for food, increasing the amount of food produced locally is a worthy goal. The Governor’s Council on Agricultural Development has proposed a target of 5% of food expenditures on locally-grown food by the year 2020. One of the ways of facilitating increased local production is through more effective marketing. Mansfield is well served by a year-

¹⁷ 2013 Tourism Impact Report summary sheet, commissioned by The Last Green Valley and prepared by Witan Intelligence.

round farmer's market and has one active CSA farm. Mansfield can build on this modest current agricultural marketing platform and benefit from lessons learned by others and the structures they develop.

Those seeking to farm full-time (and even part-time) often need to move from production of raw materials to production of value-added products. Even those producing raw materials, must, if they choose to market at any significant scale, meet ever higher safety and quality standards to find and maintain a footing in the marketplace. Some of the costs associated with value-added production—trainings and certifications, labeling and packaging, and enhanced distribution—can be shared among groups of farmers, but only when there is sufficient volume of similar product to warrant it. With the exception of its dairy operation, Mansfield's agricultural activity is so diverse and currently at a scale so small as to make it difficult to justify individual farmers investing in any particular type of shared value-added facility. However, if subsidized facilities come on line, existing and future Mansfield farmers will have the opportunity to develop new products and serve new markets. Such a facility could enable the Town to promote a regional approach to agricultural facilities and marketing.