

An Abstract

Downtown Waterbury 2030

The Pulse Point of the Region

(A Downtown Residents View)

by

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The Pulse Point of the Region
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Cover by A. P. Pinto

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This E-Book is available online at: <http://www.appinto.com/>

CT DOT plans for I84/RT8 Interchange are available online at: <http://www.i84wins.com/>

FORWARD

The idea for this publication came from my many interactions in both my personal and professional life as a downtown Waterbury resident. I have been a resident of downtown Waterbury for over two and a half years, by choice, and a Waterbury resident most of my whole life, except from 1995 until 2004. First and foremost, let me say that this publication is not a criticism of any person or entity involved in local or regional planning. I know for a fact that there are many positive ongoing changes taking place at this time that are not common knowledge, but will improve the community at large. This publication mentions several currently planned and proposed projects. It is written with the hope of helping people understand that we are in the midst of a moment in time where we can significantly alter the future of Waterbury in a positive way. However, the greatest opportunity is about to pass us by, because important decisions will be made in the next 90 or so days. We must “seize the moment”, before it is too late....

The City of Waterbury is in the process of finalizing its first update to the Plan of Conservation & Development since the 1970's. Consider that the current plan was probably drafted in the 1960's and think about how much things have changed since then. You should realize that our new plan should lay the foundation for positive growth within the city. The biggest difference is that when the 1970's plan was drafted, the Urban Development movement was calling for the razing of old buildings and replacement of them by new non-descript towers that focused on downtown as work areas and not as living neighborhoods. Thankfully, we have come a long way since then, and now understand the value of downtowns as “living” spaces.

In addition, there has been a significant amount of investment in downtown Waterbury over the last five or so years. These projects have helped to lay the foundation for positive future downtown development; have brought many people back into downtown Waterbury; and have made them realize that downtown is not what it was in the 1980's. In fact, much of downtown is, as a whole, a relatively safe and peaceful place. I know many will argue differently, but I think few really know downtown very well or fail to realize that downtown also has its own “micro” neighborhoods. For those that are ready to argue, consider this fact; Waterbury is a city, not a suburb. It is unfair to compare a city to a suburb. However, as a city, it is one of the cleanest and safest small cities in the nation. You don't have to believe me, do the actual research for yourself.

Finally, this publication is written with the hope of motivating other city citizens to take action and help make the city a better place, not only for themselves, but primarily for their children. The State DOT is planning on making a decision, by year end, on how to replace the current I-84/Route 8 Interchange, which we refer to as the Mixmaster. This project will not be completed for about 15 to 25 years, so many involved will long be retired by the time the decisions they make today are felt in our community. What legacy will they, and you, leave in our community for the following 75 or so years?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine downtown Waterbury in the year 2030, after the “Mixmaster” Interstate Interchange has been completely replaced and the “sprawl” from the lower Valley has overtaken Waterbury... That is what this publication challenges you to do!

We are at a “critical” point in the long-term planning of the “Mixmaster” interchange replacement project. It is vitally important to make the correct choices today, before the end of the year 2007, so that we do not allow the future growth of downtown Waterbury to be choked by poor planning, as it was in the 1960’s. This is our opportunity to work with the State DOT and make sure that our collective voices are heard! Let us work with DOT to “open-up” downtown Waterbury by “lowering” I-84 as close to ground level as possible; by moving RT 8 across the river; by pressing to get RT 8 upgraded to an Interstate connecting Bridgeport to Waterbury; by holding a National Design Competition to present new and visually appealing designs for the new Interstate Interchange so that Waterbury will be left with an “architectural centerpiece” as opposed to the current eyesore that is the “Mixmaster”; just to name a few things...

In change; there exists opportunity!!!

Here are just a couple of what could be's in 2030:

- The “new” Maloney Magnet School sits in its new downtown setting near the Waterbury Arts Magnet School or its “new” South End location in the heart of the neighborhood. The “new” MMS replaced the almost 40 year old MMS that was torn down to allow I-84 to be shifted south, allowed the saving of St. Anne’s Church from demolition and the creation of a parking area for the church.
- The modern and “architecturally” unique Regional Transportation Center now operates on a 24/7 basis and creates a constant “pulse” to the City centers activities. With a constant traffic flow and regular connections to New York City, the Transportation Center is a “Gateway” to Connecticut’s Northwestern Region and enhances the Regions tourism industry.
- An upgraded Interstate 295, formerly Route 8, connecting I-95 through the Greater Valley Area from Bridgeport to the I-84 Interchange in Waterbury creates a Regional economic domino effect. (A short list.)
 - A “new” Business Park sits at the site of the former RT 8 (west of the river)
 - Increased access to State’s “affordable” housing stock
 - Increased attractiveness of Naugatuck’s “Renaissance Place” Project
 - Increased accessibility to Oxford Airport & Oxford’s Industrial Parks
 - Increased accessibility to Waterbury & Watertown’s Industrial Parks

REJUVENATED INFRASTRUCTURE

There are currently a number of ongoing projects within the city of Waterbury. The ones we are all most familiar with are; the building of three new elementary schools and rehabilitation of three other city schools; the renovation of Waterbury's City Hall; and the Brownfield's remediation program. These are just a few of the ongoing projects, as there are many smaller ongoing projects, as well as a number of projects in the planning stages. There are even some larger ongoing regional projects that are ongoing, with the expansion of Naugatuck Valley Community College serving as a prime example.

This publication is focused more on the future of Waterbury than on the present. It aims to make one think about *what could be*, rather than what things currently are here in Waterbury. When we are looking at revitalization, it is important to picture the end result, so that all projects can focus on a common goal and people can understand how all the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. By doing this, it makes understanding the need for certain types of development and the important location sensitivity issues of those developments within the City limits, and especially downtown.

The single most significant project of our day is the Mixmaster replacement project. Now is not the time to stand idly by and let others make the decision, just look at what happened the last time the community did that, and the headaches we all have today when traveling through the Mixmaster. The State DOT will be deciding very shortly on the final location of the new Mixmaster, which will hopefully lose that nickname in time. Therefore, now is the time to take action, before it is too late. The City will lose millions of dollars of taxable commercial property and must make sure there is a reasonable positive trade off. The final design will dictate how many properties will be razed, as well as whether or not to shift Route 8, east across the Naugatuck River.

It has preliminarily been decided that I-84 will be shifted south and converted into a single level structure. It has not yet been decided if a short section of Route 8 should be shifted east across the Naugatuck River from just south of the Meadow Street/Bank Street intersection north past West Main Street. This decision will have significant impact on the community. If Route 8 is shifted east across the river, the City will lose millions of dollars in "older" taxable commercial real estate and business property, but will "receive" a strip of "newly reclaimed" land on the west side of the river, the current RT 8, which will be relatively flat and bordered by the Naugatuck River (current CT DOT Plan 8). One thing that we should consider doing is holding a National Design Competition for the "Architectural Design" of the new Interstate Interchange, which would allow us to present to CT DOT some possible "visually appealing" designs for DOT to consider, which could help create an "architectural centerpiece" for the City.

In change; there exists opportunity!!!

Here is a picture of what could be in 2030:

- The final section of the newly completed “Interstate Interchange” of I-295 (former RT 8); Interstate 84; and Route 8 (north of Route 73) is opened. The new design makes the interchange an “architectural centerpiece” in a City center full of architecturally rich historical buildings and makes the City a must see destination.
- A new, vertically lowered, I-84 opens up amazing southerly views down the valley from the entire City center, making it unbelievable that the old I-84 was allowed to be built as a 100 foot wall that closed off the entire City’s downtown, which was already almost entirely surrounded by hills on all of its other sides.
- The new consolidated exits from I-295 (former Route 8 between Bridgeport and Waterbury) and I-84 completely eliminate the triple lane cutovers in the original design and form a new traffic “circle” in downtown Waterbury.
 - I-295 and I-84 have new downtown Waterbury exits and on ramps at:
 - (south of I-84) Bank Street
 - (north of I-84) West Main Street
 - (north of I-84) Freight Street

Note: DOT Plans 7 & 8 Have No Downtown Exits from RT 8 North, South of I-84

- New traffic pattern “circle” encompassing “new” Frontage Road, built north of “new” I-84, with Meadow Street, Grand Street, and South Main Street.
- The “new” Maloney Magnet School sits in its new downtown setting near the Waterbury Arts Magnet School or its “new” South End location in the heart of the neighborhood. The “new” MMS replaced the almost 40 year old MMS that was torn down to allow I-84 to be shifted south, allowed the saving of St. Anne’s Church from demolition and the creation of a parking area for the church.
- A number of “new” 12-story buildings built in the last two decades now “fill-in” the downtown in what used to be small flat parking lots, which were replaced with underground parking in the “new” buildings. These new “landmark” buildings accommodate a mix of retail, commercial and residential tenants; and their architectural designs enhance the City’s rich architectural legacy.
- With the upgrade of Route 8 to Interstate 295 between Bridgeport and Waterbury, the upgraded rail line between the two cities carries a steady volume of both commercial and passenger traffic. In turn, this has resulted in the need to expand the Regional Transportation Center in Waterbury, near the Bank Street exit and on ramps, and is yet another “architectural centerpiece” in the City.

A LIVING URBAN CENTER

One of the major strengths of Waterbury today is that it is primarily a homeowner occupied city, with the exception of downtown. The city has very strong neighborhoods and neighborhood groups. Again, and as a constant reminder, Waterbury is a small city, not a suburb. As a city, Waterbury has a strong residential community as compared to most cities our size. This aspect also creates the biggest threat to Waterbury's future, which is why there has been so much proposed condominium development. The pressure of development will only become more significant due to the dynamics at play in the State of Connecticut, especially during this current downturn in the housing market. This is not the 1980's issue! Lower Fairfield and New Haven Counties are incredibly expensive, and the growth pressure in Waterbury is driven by people being priced out of those markets, as well as most of Litchfield County.

In all of Fairfield and New Haven Counties, other than select sections of Bridgeport and New Haven, Waterbury has the largest stock of affordable homes in good neighborhoods available today in all of Western CT. In fact, only Waterbury, Torrington and Winsted have this type of housing stock. It is very important to understand that affordable housing today, in 2007, generally means a good percentage of homes that sell for less than \$250,000. Also, consider that for the average working family; making ~\$45,000 per household here in CT, the monthly mortgage payment would be around \$1,750 per month or about 60% of their family after-tax household income. This means that they would not qualify for a mortgage, even with very good credit. Therefore, it is of vital importance to focus the expansion of the housing market in downtown Waterbury through the construction of newer modern buildings and the redevelopment of older buildings into affordable condos or apartments, specifically meaning "real" 1,000 square foot, 2-bedroom units that go for about \$1,000 per month (today) with amenities.

In the 1980's, condominiums were being built quickly and cheaply to primarily accommodate the huge influx of Baby Boomers into the housing market. Consider that the 1990 Census shows that in the City of Waterbury (proper), the bulk of the Baby Boomers, who were between the ages of 25 and 44, accounted for over 35,000 of the City's 109,000 residents, better put as 32% of the entire City's population, which only had 18,500 residents between the ages of 45 and 64 at the time. This meant that in the early 1980's the City only had approximately 50% of the housing stock it needed to accommodate the Baby Boomers entering the housing market. By 2000, and a better gauge to see what happened during the 1990's, there were just under 29,000 Baby Boomers in the City of Waterbury, roughly 27% of Waterbury's 107,000 residents. However, and most significantly, the trailing generation, the X Generation between the ages of 20 and 34, in 2000, only accounted for fewer than 23,000 residents, meaning the X Generation is more than 35% smaller than the Baby Boomer Generation. In addition, the 2005 Census shows that we have almost 34,000 residents under the age of 20, which is a population larger than our current Baby Boomer population, and

approximately 50% larger than the current X Generation. Where will they live in the next 5-to-20 years? Where can they afford to live?

The picture being painted here is simple math; in the 1980's, we built homes for the Baby Boomers, approximately 20% of which subsequently moved to the suburbs. However, because the X Generation is so small, it still left approximately 20% of excess housing capacity in Waterbury that no one needed. In the 1990's, there was a lot of available and cheap suburban real estate around Waterbury, as well as around other cities in the State of Connecticut, which is not the case today. Plus, we need to provide affordable housing for almost another 34,000 people that are currently living in the City of Waterbury, within the next 15 years.

Today, real estate in the suburbs is at least twice as expensive as Waterbury, and after this year's (2007) Revaluation takes affect in Waterbury, the actual tax dollars paid per home will not be significantly different. In addition, the suburbs are just starting to deal with the trailing costs of population growth, primarily education and town services, and will have to raise tax rates on properties that have significantly higher values, and a 1% increase in the suburbs roughly equals a 2~3% increase in the City of Waterbury.

Again, in change; there exists opportunity!!!

Here is a picture of what could be in 2030:

- A bustling "Arts District" reaching from the Waterbury Green east to Baldwin Street and from Scovill Street north across East Main Street to Kingsbury Street, all centered around the Palace Theatre, the current Waterbury Arts Magnet School and the newly "relocated" Maloney Magnet School, UCONN Waterbury and a "Restaurant Row" on East Main Street. This area is primarily filled with resident artists and a variety of businesses that support their needs.
- A primarily "Entertainment District" west of Meadow Street and north from Freight Street across West Main Street to Grove Street. A central location off of the two "new" exit and on ramps from I-295 make this an easily accessible location with an almost flat and walkable landscape.
- A primarily "Entertainment District" along a "new road" just north of the "new" Frontage Road connecting Meadow Street to South Main Street. A central location off the "new" exit and on ramps and containing a "Restaurant Row" connected through Bank Street to East Main Street.

- An architecturally rich “Legal & Government District” from Grove Street south across West Main Street down to Grand Street and west from Meadow Street to Central Avenue/Church Street. The area north of West Main Street is still filled with historic buildings and old Victorian Homes used as offices and homes, plus several new “architecturally” rich modern buildings on the State Street corridor.
- A “Hotel District” reaching west from South Elm Street to Bank Street and from Scovill Street south to the “new” Frontage Road is easily accessible to the “new” I-84 exit and on ramps off of Frontage Road. This area is also the location of newer and more modern “Senior Living Centers” that have replaced the old “Senior Housing Project” buildings, which were over 50 years old.
- A central “Business District” reaching from the Waterbury Green south across Grand Street and all the way to the “new” Frontage Road and east from Church Street/Meadow Street along Frontage Road to the now two-way Bank Street. Within the district are a variety of brand new modern office buildings alongside a number of historical buildings all containing a mix of upper floor offices, business condos, residential condos, and residential apartments, as well as street level retail and a “Restaurant Row” on Bank Street.
- A primarily “Residential District” reaching east from Central Avenue to North Main Street and south from Grove Street to the Waterbury Green. This area also accommodates modern “Senior Living Centers” and residential apartments, as well as residential homes and condos.
- The modern and “architecturally” unique Regional Transportation Center now operates on a 24/7 basis and creates a constant “pulse” to the City centers activities. With a constant traffic flow and regular connections to New York City, the Transportation Center is a “Gateway” to Connecticut’s Northwestern Region and enhances the Regions tourism industry.
- The “lowering” of I-84 during its replacement has also allowed for the “opening up” of downtown without the “walled-in” feeling that a 100 foot high I-84 “wall” used to create along with the hills that surround downtown to the north, east and west. It has also made downtown an attractive area for development as a result of the “newly discovered” southerly views of the valley area.
- Much of what used to be flat surface parking has been replaced by underground parking in new modern office buildings that are over 10-stories tall. Since all new buildings fit “architecturally” with the City centers current buildings, Waterbury itself is a draw for “architectural” tourists.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC ENGINE

One of the items that becomes controversial in economic development planning is whether to take a Regional approach to projects or to simply worry about the projects in your own community or City. Although it is important to focus on the City itself, it is of greater importance to take a regional approach when working with the State on economic development projects. Consider this; does it make more sense to spend \$100 million dollars on a multi-year project that only benefits 110,000 people in a single community, or does it make more sense to spend a \$100 million dollars on a decade long project that benefits a region of over 300,000 people in a dozen communities?

In the past, we have been able to focus primarily on local economic development projects, and have held our own in competing for State dollars. However, considering how tight the State's budget is and the need to close the State's Pension Fund gaps, the only way to realistically get funding for projects will be to compete on a Regional basis and in cooperation with the surrounding suburbs. The reality is that we are interdependent on each other and need to be much more conscious of that when asking for State dollars for economic development. We can all win together!!! But, only if we work together...

Again, in change; there exists opportunity!!!

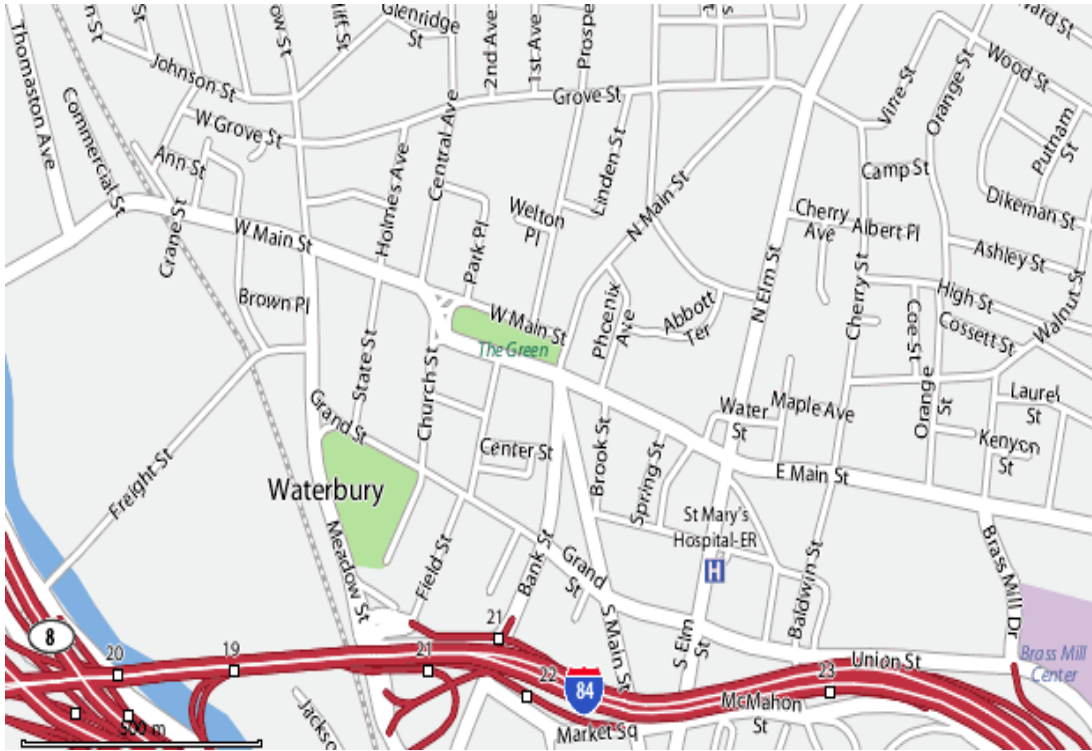
Here is a picture of what could be in 2030:

- A bustling Rail Line connects the Naugatuck River Valley from Bridgeport through Waterbury and all the way north to Winsted with service centered around the Northwest Regional Transportation Hub in Waterbury on Meadow Street.
- An upgraded Interstate 295, formerly Route 8, connecting I-95 through the Greater Valley Area from Bridgeport to the I-84 Interchange in Waterbury creates a Regional economic domino effect.
 - Eases traffic in the I-95 Corridor
 - Creates "new" Business Park at the site of the former RT 8 (west of river)
 - Enhanced Corporate presence in Bridgeport (Intersection of 2 Interstates)
 - Reduced congestion through the lower Valley Corridor of current RT 8.
 - Improved "Safety" of Current RT 8 Corridor south of Naugatuck.
 - Increased access to State's "affordable" housing stock
 - Increased attractiveness of Naugatuck's "Renaissance Place" Project
 - Enhanced Corporate presence in Waterbury (Intersection of 2 Interstates)
 - Enhanced accessibility to Oxford Airport & Oxford's Industrial Parks
 - Enhanced accessibility to Waterbury's & Watertown's Industrial Parks
 - Enhanced accessibility to Southbury's Heritage Village

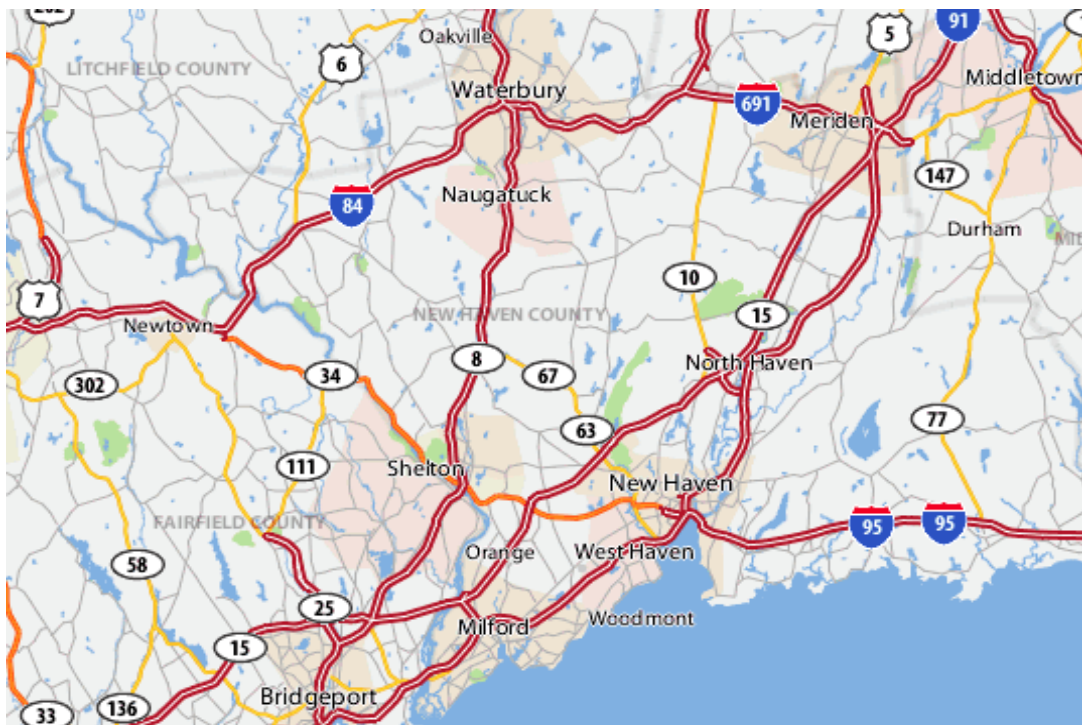
- Downtown Waterbury once again is a bustling “modern” City center with a number of new “architectural” landmark buildings built by corporations that have moved to the City because of its location, the Region’s educated workforce, and the City’s more affordable housing market for their employees.
- Historic Downtown buildings are “centerpieces” of an architecturally rich downtown and are primarily filled with upper floor housing and main floor restaurants and specialty retail stores.
- New, modern buildings attract professionals from throughout the region to an affordable and accessible City center which leads to a mini-explosion of new businesses that provide services to these professionals. These professionals mainly operate on non-traditional work schedules and have driven businesses to provide more services in the evenings and on the weekends.
- The additional benefit of having professionals living in the City’s downtown has naturally lead to a number of new locally started businesses that want to grow and stay local, in the Waterbury area, since their founders are local.

APPENDIX

Downtown Waterbury Map



Regional Map



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Pinto is a downtown Waterbury resident and business owner. He operates a health insurance consulting agency and is both a licensed Certified Insurance Consultant and a licensed Insurance Producer in the State of Connecticut. Mr. Pinto has self-published a paperback book on health insurance, titled: *The Health Insurance Handbook: Understanding & Shopping for Health Insurance*; as well as two E-Book versions of the book; an Individual Guide and a Small Business Guide, available at the following web site: <http://www.appinto.com>. Previously, he has been a partner in several start-up businesses, including an Internet Service Provider; a Shared Office Suites Business, and a Hosted Phone Service.

Mr. Pinto is a 1st generation American citizen born in Waterbury to immigrant parents from Portugal. He was raised in Waterbury and attended both public schools and private catholic schools while growing up in Waterbury. He is also a 1990 graduate of Waterbury State Technical College, now known as Naugatuck Valley Community College, with an A.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering Technology. In addition, he returned to school in the mid-1990's to earn both a B.S. degree in Chemical Engineering (1998) and an MBA from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (1999), located in Troy, NY. Mr. Pinto also served in the United States Army National Guard and the United States Army Reserves for a total of fourteen years, as both an Enlisted person and a Commissioned Officer.

Mr. Pinto is also very active in many local business groups and volunteers between twenty and forty hours per month to charitable organizations and community service groups. As a result of his volunteer work, he was selected by New Haven Business Times magazine to their 13th Annual 2006 Forty under 40, a list of up and coming young professionals in the Greater New Haven Region that serve their communities. Mr. Pinto's volunteer service includes, but is not limited to, some of the following organizations:

- American Red Cross – Waterbury Area Chapter: Volunteer, Board Member
- City of Waterbury: Retirement Board Commissioner (Volunteer)
- Downtown (Waterbury) Merchants Association: Volunteer
- LAE Housing Corporation (Alumni of ΣAE at RPI): Advisor, Former Board Member & Chair
- Main Street Waterbury: Volunteer, Former Economic Restructuring Committee Chair
- Portuguese Sports Club of Waterbury: Golf Tournament & Scholarship Fund Committee
- Waterbury Regional Chamber of Commerce: Member, Former: Leads Group II Chair, and member of Small Business Council, Manufacturers Council, and Health Care Council