



# TUNNELVISION

REVITALIZING OUR DOWNTOWN AND HARBOR PARK WITH A WIDESCREEN MOSAIC FOR AND BY THE COMMUNITY



## RECONNECTING MIDDLETOWN TO THE CONNECTICUT RIVER

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**MIDDLETOWN HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN SHAPED BY OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CONNECTICUT RIVER.** The river provided food and transportation to indigenous people for millennia, and later became the point of entry for colonists. Middletown's once-thriving port supported the trade and economic opportunity which spurred the city's development. In the 1960's, however, the construction of Route 9 severed the heart of the city from the river - the end result being that pedestrians must now walk through a long and poorly-lit industrial concrete tunnel to reach the waterfront.

**WHAT IF WE COULD TRANSFORM THE TUNNEL,** creating a destination that would draw people to Middletown, downtown businesses, and the developing riverfront? The goal of **TunnelVision** is to completely cover the foreboding concrete walls of the tunnel with a mosaic mural that explores who and what came before us and what continues to happen beneath our feet.

## RECONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

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**HUMAN CONNECTION IS CRITICAL** as individuals and as a community, and the spaces where we thrive reflect and amplify that connection. By remaking the Harbor Park tunnel and reminding ourselves of those connections, we would bring people back to the park and to the downtown, experiencing our natural beauty and exploring Main Street's unique and wonderful restaurants and diverse businesses. It is an infrastructure improvement that benefits the town on every level.

## THE MOSAIC STORY OF OUR TOWN

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**THE TUNNELVISION PROJECT** would illustrate these connections in social ways, in historic ways, and across deep time - all through the earth. Geology and populations have changed and continue to change. Using mosaic - an ancient and lasting medium perfectly suited to the tunnel walls - artists, scientists, archaeologists, and historians would collaborate to tell a story of these changes. At the heart of the project is ongoing community participation in concept, development, and installation.





Detail of the ramp leading down into the tunnel in its current condition



Artist's rendering of the same space, showing portion of installed TunnelVision mosaic

## WALKING INTO THE EARTH – AND BACKWARDS THROUGH TIME

**WE STAND ON THE VERY SURFACE OF A LIVING WORLD, IN CONSTANT MOTION MEASURED IN SECONDS AND EONS.** Some soil creatures live for a single day, while we count our own time in decades. These timelines overlap, interact, and impact each other, even though their scales are exponentially different. *The TunnelVision mosaic would evoke an archaeological dig exploring this history* - human, natural, paleological, and geological - from the Precambrian dawn of life on Earth through the present day, so it can all be experienced simultaneously.

**STARTING DOWN FROM THE ENTRANCE BY MELLILI PLAZA,** one would first see a cutaway of the earth, with soil life: worms, grubs, and fungi. Further down the ramp and deeper in the soil would

be artifacts of our current civilization. Next would be the story of the American era: the African diaspora and European colonization, with farming, trade, and industrialization spurring waves of migration. The base of the ramp would be dedicated to the Wangunk and other First Peoples of Connecticut.

**UPON ENTERING THE TUNNEL,** the traveler would see the time before man; the primeval forest, mastodons and other extinct mammals, the glacier that buried Connecticut under thousands of feet of ice 20,000 years ago. Then one is cast back across billions of years: dinosaur bones and footprints, plate tectonics, lava flows, and the primordial sea.

**TOWARDS THE RIVER END OF THE TUNNEL,** the crust of the earth gives way to a view of the active waterfront harbor of two centuries past.

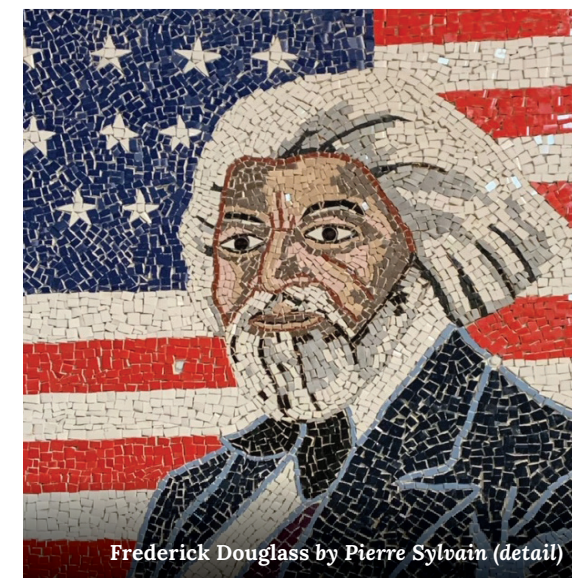
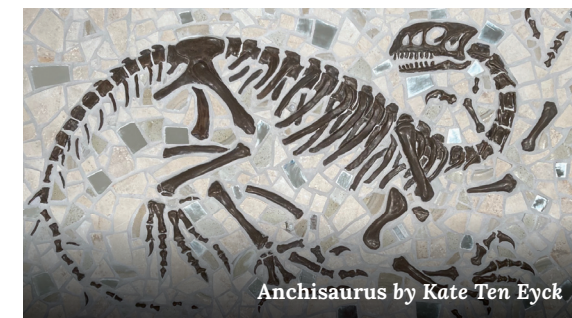
## A COMMUNITY BUILT ON COLLABORATION

**EVERY PHASE OF THE TUNNELVISION MOSAIC PROJECT IS DESIGNED FOR MAXIMUM COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.** Kickoff *discussions* with artists, researchers, and community members would drive the visual story. In subsequent *tile-making workshops*, artists would create the mosaics with the assistance of a diverse group of community members, with an emphasis on school children and residents of the North End. During *installation*, artists would again lead community members in work sessions assembling mosaics on panels.

**THE PROJECT ALSO FOREGROUNDS COLLABORATION THROUGHOUT THE TOWN,** bringing together the City of Middletown, Wesleyan University, Middlesex Community College, Middletown Public Schools, Wesleyan Potters, the Middlesex Historical Society, and other organizations to work towards a common goal.



## REVITALIZING MIDDLETOWN FROM MAIN STREET TO HARBOR PARK



**A KERNEL OF THE TUNNEL PROJECT HAS ALREADY SEEN THE LIGHT OF DAY AS ‘MOSAICS ON MAIN’**, a series of mosaic panels currently on display on Main Street. Middletown Artist Kate Ten Eyck and Downtown Business District (DBD) Chair Jen Alexander realized that Kate’s concept for revitalizing the tunnel with historical mosaics could be applied to an existing Federal grant commissioning artists to design temporary installations for empty storefronts.<sup>1</sup>

After discussing the project parallels, the DBD and Ten Eyck entered into a partnership called *Mosaics on Main*. Now, local artists create their themed mosaics on standard-sized panels, making for easy installation in Main Street display windows. Eventually, upon receiving city permission, the mosaic panels could then easily be retrofitted for permanent installation as part of the Harbor Park *TunnelVision* project, meaning that *funding for the tunnel mosaic has already been partly covered with existing Federal and State funds*.

The first pieces in the Mosaics on Main series are already on display in the old Woolworth’s building at 428 Main Street, with more being added along the street through the end of 2024.



## BUDGET, TIMELINE, AND LOGISTICS

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With a project of this scope, it is difficult to know exact figures. Following city approval, this project could take six to ten years, based on the availability of both human and fiscal resources. However, the cost could be divided into four general categories:

### **Physical infrastructure:**

Improved lighting, wall preparation, and installation of mosaic panels. These costs would need to be researched by the city, but a ballpark figure might be **\$60,000**

### **Artist fees:**

Payment to artists for research, design, and fabrication - **\$300,000** (based on a \$75 per square foot fee)

### **Administration:**

Payment to individuals for coordinating artists, researchers, and community involvement. Depending on the length of time to complete the project, **\$80,000 - \$120,000**

### **Materials:**

Grout, thinset, concrete board, tile, clay, and kiln usage - **\$80,000**. Ideally, a good portion of the tile could be community sourced. Individuals, contractors, and tile distributors could donate overage and discontinued tile.

Thus the total would come to roughly **\$560,000, over 6 to 10 years**. As referenced above, the first phase of the project known as **Mosaics on Main has already been funded at \$100,000** through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds secured by the Downtown Business District to beautify empty storefronts with art installations.<sup>1</sup> Once the city commits to partnering with the project, and those temporary exhibits close, the mosaics would then be professionally installed by the city into the tunnel. This ARPA funding will cover a substantial percentage of the final project. Project completion will be dependent on securing financial backing through grants, sponsors, and individual donations.

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<sup>1</sup>Funding for Mosaics on Main has been provided by the Connecticut State Legislature through funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, and is administered by the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of the Arts.



The TunnelVision project has the potential to bring together community, while transforming a crucial piece of city infrastructure from an industrial site to an educational and artistic destination. The completed tunnel would be a treasured experiential installation and a source of civic pride and inspiration to other municipalities. To learn more or to become involved, please email [info@mosaicsonmain.com](mailto:info@mosaicsonmain.com)

