

**NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
REDEVELOPMENT AREA PLAN UPDATE  
WORKING GROUP MEETING #7  
JANUARY 23, 2018**

**GROUP MEMBERS:** Tami Strauss, Director of Planning and Community Development; Sabrina Church, Redevelopment Agency; Melissa Kaplan-Macey, RPA; Sarah Serpas, RPA; Doug Stern, Common Council; Jackie Lightfield, Norwalk 2.0; Nora King, Planning Commission; Christine Bradley, Director Norwalk Library, Carol Sulheim, Cornerstone Community Church; Morris Gross, Norwalk Hospital; Dennis O'Connor and Britt Liotta, Norwalk Transit District

1. Welcome and Introductions. Ms. Strauss called the 7<sup>th</sup> Working Group Meeting to order at 10:40 AM.

2. Plan production/adoption timeline. Ms. Strauss said in order to have their approval by April, she would ask everyone to read the plan carefully and get comments back to them by January 29<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Kaplan-Macey said the draft plan is their best attempt to reflect all the conversations they have had. Obviously the comment period goes until March 13<sup>th</sup>, so they can continue to comment on things, but what they are really looking for by the 29<sup>th</sup> are comments on major issues, or if there is something that's wrong and really needs to be changed. If there is a big material change, they will bring it back to the group and they will have another meeting.

Ms. Strauss said there are recommended zoning changes in the plan, and Steve Kleppin is looking at those carefully and doing visual research and will get back to them with any comments or changes. They will go to Zoning immediately after the plan is adopted. Ms. Kaplan-Macey noted that the plan outlines a framework for zoning, but not detailed zoning text amendments. Those would have to be developed further as a zoning amendment.

3. Draft Plan document overview.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said Norwalk Center is a historic civic center of the city. There are a lot of elements to the vision, but the idea is that this is a healthy and vibrant city center that has a strong economy and is driven by innovation and collaboration, and is accessible, authentic, lively and affordable. What makes this plan different from other plans they have had for this neighborhood is the people aspect. It is the institutions, the businesses that have been there forever, the hospital, Norwalk 2.0, the Wall Street Theater, and all the physical places which are obviously the building blocks and the essential pieces, but they don't connect and they don't become something without the people piece in it. So this isn't just about historic buildings and civic spaces, it's what happens in those spaces and how those things leverage one another and build on one another to create a vibrant neighborhood, which is the focus of this plan.

They have prepared an executive summary that sums up what the plan is about. Chapter 1 gets into the historical context and talks about the boundary and how they selected the boundary, and then it talks about all of the meetings the Working Group had over the summer and fall where the plan was discussed extensively and all the feedback they got from that process. The plan was not only informed by the data analysis, but more strongly informed by all the conversations and all the input they had, all the qualitative things that you are not going to get by just looking at census data. In addition, there is an appendix to the document that goes through all the meetings they

had, what all the different stakeholder groups said and how they brought that together into a vision for the future of the neighborhood, which is an important piece in conveying to the commissions and people dealing with the voting side of this that there was a process, they were a group that steered the conversation and it was a lot larger than just the people around the table.

Chapter 2 is a quantitative analysis. They looked at land use, historic structures, zoning, flood risk, infrastructure, all the physical pieces of the built environment, and there is an appendix that goes with that. And then Chapter 3 is the Vision for the Future and Guiding Policies, and they spent a lot of time working with the group to get their insights, and they got input from the stakeholder engagement piece and how that informed the vision for the plan, and everyone has been a part of shaping that. And then the guiding policies are a collection of ideas that are meant to achieve certain policies, so as the City and all of its partners go forward and try to figure out what to implement and how, they can look back to those guiding policies to see if what they are spending their money on lines up with those policies, so it is a very helpful framework and something that came out of the conversations they had with the group.

Ms. Lightfield said the preexisting Wall Street plan had some very specific recommendations for promoting the arts within the area, and while there is a paragraph that mentions support for the arts in this plan, she would like to see some policy recommendations, particularly regarding tax incentives, the overlay of the arts district and some specific requirements of having arts housing, because that was something that was in the 2004 plan that has not yet been implemented.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said she is sorry she missed that, but will definitely go back and take a look, and will incorporate that into the policies, and also strengthen the recommendations on the arts.

Chapter 4, Implementation Actions, they have incorporated the 2012 Connectivity Master Plan and put in the images particular to this neighborhood that are relevant. There isn't a lot of talk in the Connectivity Plan about Maple Street, and that connection between the hospital and West Avenue is really critical. It is not a far distance from the hospital to West Avenue, but visually it is a very far distance, and there are six lanes of traffic to cross, so they have added some graphics showing the corridor improved with landscaping, lighting and wider and more attractive sidewalks.

As to the opportunity sites, they took a stab at what they think the direction should be for the Library, the Transit District, and the Pulse Point based on what they heard around the table. And then Collaborative Planning and Investment, there are so many amazing opportunities and it's really just surfacing more and more and having the collective conversations that are necessary to leverage all the mutual benefits of working together. The Financing Tools came directly from the Redevelopment Agency and are ideas that the Agency is thinking about as to how to incentivize, new tools that don't necessarily exist today that could be used and brought to bear in this neighborhood.

At the end of the document is a good summary of all the different actions that need to be taken, and they will continue to flush that out as they make changes to the document, but it says what the action is, how long they think it is going to take to do it, and who is responsible and who should really be taking the lead, who are the partners to make all this happen. A lot of the timeframes are only one to three years. There are a few things that are further out, but it's really a question of time resources as much as money, the ability to get all these things to happen, but she thinks they have a really strong foundation for what can happen in the future.

As to zoning, there are three sub areas in the Central Business District (CBD), A, B and C, and as shown on page 26, the majority of the area is CDB-A or CDB-B, which are very similar, and they talked about combining the two CDB zones into one CDB zone, but then there is a parcel hanging out in between that is industrial, so the thinking is to rezone that to CDB also and to encourage redevelopment there that is more reflective of a downtown. The Central Business District has a mix of uses that include retail, restaurants, and mixed use buildings with housing and hotels. What's important is the activation of the spaces on the ground floor and the architecture of the building façade that is transparent so that you're not looking at a brick façade with no windows, but a welcoming space. They talked about what retail is going to look like in the future in light of the mall and how we buy things today, and they need to have a new plan of what should happen on the ground floor on West Avenue, which is really about getting people in and out of the buildings and on the sidewalk, creating more activity, and this plan should enable the zoning that allows for a very vibrant neighborhood.

Ms. Lightfield said the whole premise of having ground floor retail wasn't just to support economic activity, it was to make it pedestrian friendly and to encourage pedestrian activity, but when you look at the West Avenue corridor from the mall with its 4,700 parking spaces to the Waypointe conglomerate that is continuing the fortress design, there is nothing that truly activates pedestrian activity, so they should not impose more pedestrian activity when it is not going to jive with how the corridor is actually functioning.

Ms. Strauss said she thinks they still need to encourage it. It's an urban center with more and more people living and working there and being entertained there.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said those are important questions to grapple with, but those conversations need to happen at the Redevelopment Agency and the planning staff.

Ms. Lightfield said, referring to page 26, it would be helpful if they switched from a satellite map to a street map with street labels so they can see the specific boundary changes, and where they have identified the Industrial-1 boundary in upper High Street and Knight Street with the neighborhood businesses, she thinks they should blow that up so you can actually see what the changes are.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said she thinks it is on the onus of the city and the Redevelopment Agency to take a really close look at the maps, because they reflected as much as they could based on the data they had, so if it's not accurate they need to know that so they can change it.

Ms. Lightfield said in the past they have drawn lines in the middle of streets. For instance, on West Avenue, the redevelopment plan governs one side of the street but not the other, so if you're making a neighborhood, both sides of the street should be represented and reflect what the plan is trying to accomplish and not put lines in the middle of streets. The goal should be a single zone for their downtown area without distinctions so there is no confusion regarding an existing zone boundary.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said, again, she thinks it is really important that they have the most recent zoning maps, because that will clarify things, but in terms of a vision, do they want to recommend rezoning that industrial property or leave it the way it is. Obviously the people who operate the businesses there are not going to want to change anything, but the point of this

exercise is a vision for what they as a group want to recommend, but if they are not comfortable with that recommendation, then they shouldn't include it in the plan

They have talked about the waterfront and the industrial uses and the existing CBDC zone and how they relate to the waterfront and to the broader neighborhoods and to the economic tax base of the city, and she wants their feedback on something that is new and different that has never been done in Norwalk before, but it's done in a lot of other places to great success, which is the idea that you leave the zoning the way it is but you put in an overlay zone, so that it's on top of the existing district. This would allow for new uses, development incentives and design guidelines for this area, while retaining the existing underlying zoning for the properties and therefor the current land use rights of the property owners under the existing zoning. They have talked a lot about strengthening the identity of the waterfront and the idea that you want to have a working waterfront. They recognize that they have a lot of brownfields there so redevelopment is going to be challenging, but there is an identity that you want to strengthen, and you want to support existing industrial businesses, that that is an important thing for the city.

Ms. Lightfield said since the 80s the plan for the upper harbor has been to deindustrialize it and not support commercial waterfront industrial activity, and they are in the process of the Walk Bridge replacement which is predicated on the idea that we actually will be continuing with industrial uses up the river past the Walk Bridge. If the intent is to deemphasize that maritime commercial activity, the future of those businesses isn't in the upper harbor anymore, and they should embrace the fact that this area needs to change into something else.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said, with those questions in mind, she wants to set an intention for the right uses, knowing that they are not going to affect what DOT is going to do with the Walk Bridge as part of this project.

Ms. Lightfield said it would be interesting if the City took the position that it wants to create a public park along the waterfront which would keep in line with the FEMA regulations and the 500 year flood plain, and not to develop to the shoreline but to have that as a buffer zone, which would then protect the investment in to the properties that are slightly uphill from that.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said as part of the overlay district, they would recommend adopting design guidelines very specifically, such as the idea of a continuous waterfront access. They talked about the activation of the edge of the waterfront and ground floor uses that are active and public and what those facades look like when they're facing the waterfront. They need to be mindful of the flood plain, but there are porous ground covers, such as rain gardens and roof gardens, and all the techniques for stormwater management will be important here. They also want to think about opportunities for public art along the waterfront, and perhaps provide density and height bonuses. Right now the height restriction in the CDBC zone is four stories, but you can go to six with certain incentives.

Ms. Bradley said she would like to skip ahead to the library on page 51. The library is currently undergoing a strategic planning process and have identified sites that are redevelopment opportunities. One of them is the library block, but there are other things around. And the connectivity with Union Park is really important. They made use of it a couple of times, but it is owned by the First Taxing District and it has been difficult to get permission to use it. Ms. Strauss said they have had discussions with the First Taxing District regarding that and have tentatively talked to them about doing a design that would provide better amenities for the park.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey suggested that as the planning is happening with the library, perhaps those conversations could happen together so that the programming that happens at Union Park is consistent with the needs of the library and the interests of the library.

Ms. Bradley said she also likes the connectivity to the Norwalk River Valley Trail, but to go from Union Park to Matthews Park you have to cross West Avenue at the old YMCA building and there is nothing compelling about doing that. Ms. Lightfield said a decision was made that the walking trail should cross West Avenue and go on next to the connector, but in any other city you would continue the walking trail along the river side as it is a more interesting walk.

Ms. Bradley said back in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century libraries were white buildings with steps, like the Carnegie Buildings, but her dream has always been to extend the library along Belden Avenue with a building that has a lot of open glass so people can see what's going on inside and be invited in. The four lanes of traffic on Belden Avenue is another issue, but as they develop along this corridor they need to make places where people can gather and where you can have an event outdoors. Places for gathering are important. The library is the library for the whole city, but it is also a neighborhood place, and she really saw that with the summer concerts. Neighbors will not interact with each other unless they have an opportunity to gather. Ms. Kaplan-Macey said this whole conversation is really helpful to her and the comment that you're not an organization.

She said they talked a lot about how the Pulse Point transit hub functions today and that you can come into the Pulse Point and connect to all points in the city. The overhang and the clock were attractive improvements, but there's idling and people don't love spending time in this space with the way the Yankee Doodle Garage looks today and the way the office building on the corner looks, but there is a real opportunity where you have a significant transit hub in the neighborhood that exists as a piece of infrastructure. They have talked a lot about different objectives of what people want to see in terms of transit. Obviously there's been a lot of talk about a new train station in this neighborhood, but in light of the \$4.3 billion worth of cuts they just heard about last week from DOT, they need to look at other ways to achieve that objective. They have put ideas out for a bus rapid transit idea similar to CTfastrak that goes from New Britain to Hartford, or maybe there is a lighter rail opportunity, and those things won't be determined in this plan, but what this plan will say very clearly is that there is a direct connection that is desired to the main line.

They have also had a lot of conversations about whether the Pulse Point operates where it is, or perhaps relocating it closer to the South Norwalk Train Station. There is an opportunity with the office building that's on the corner of Burnell and Belden to rethink that space, and what a new 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transit Hub might look like. There are a lot of shuttles running from these new developments and people aren't using the bus as a way to get to the train station, so how can they encourage them to do that.

Mr. Liotta said they have had several conversations with the City, the State and the developers of all these condominiums and high rises. They are meeting with Waypointe next Monday, and the goal is to get them away from their private shuttles that they've contracted. The Transit District has proposed shuttles and have had cost models and talked with residents who were very clear that they don't want to ride a regular bus, so they are looking to do customized buses that run approximately every 15 minutes from one side of Wall Street all the way down to the train station, not connecting to the hub. It would be a separate connector service, which is basically

what people are looking for. The state is all for it and are actually going to help them work with the developers to do this.

The train station itself is a disaster right now, and continues to get worse. On an average morning, besides their shuttles that they run in and out to service businesses, there are anywhere from five to fifteen individual shuttles pulling in there to drop people off every ten or fifteen minutes. Add to that the Norwalk taxis, the private Ubers and Lyfts that just park there trying to drum up business, it has become an overcrowding issue. He doesn't disagree with moving the Pulse Point out of Belden Avenue, just because there's nothing on Belden Avenue, and maybe find a place in the West Avenue area, maybe the old YMCA. The train station doesn't give them any flexibility to do anything because you need to have plenty of space for all the buses to pull in and out, and you need to have a safe transfer area for everyone, but they would love to have some type of an indoor place where people could wait indoors for the buses.

Ms. Lightfield said nobody wants to ride mass public transit anymore. They should understand that people want on demand real-time for their transportation opportunities. The only reason there are shuttles is because they have made bad planning decisions over the years of increasing density that is not next to their transit hubs, and building office parks completely away from the center of town.

Mr. Liotta said when you're talking about people who want to use Lyft and Uber, you're talking about people with middle class salaries. When he is sitting in the public hearing sessions and talking about raising the fares from \$1.75 to \$2,00, which is nothing to the people that ride Uber, it's a lot of money to the people that are making \$12.00 an hour working at Walmart, and they fight tooth and nail for us to raise it 25 cents. So there is still a large demographic of people riding buses. If there wasn't, we wouldn't be having 5,000 riders a month on that system

There are two demographics right now that they are dealing with in the transit business. One is the general public that still continues to use this local service. The other is the new incoming demographic, which are moving into Waypointe, the SoNo Pearl and Maritime Center. These people are looking for a quick way to get to the train, they want leather seats on the bus and wifi, etc. The Transit District is looking to try to create that type of option for them, which is why they are meeting with the developers who are under contract with the private shuttles, to let them know they can offer something as good if not better, and at that point they can convert it from one demographic into a different one, which is the commuters going to the train station. Once the mall opens, there's 3,000 full time equivalent positions in that building per day. These companies are not hiring full-timers, they're hiring part-timers, so that 3,000 will turn into 5,000 to 6,000 people coming into town every day to go to work at that mall, and they are not going to be able to park at the mall. They are going to need to be able to get in and out of that mall and they will do that with a circulator service that they are looking to put in, which will basically be a shuttle/circulator service that will run from 6:00 a.m. until midnight, maybe later, because after that mall closes, you have South Norwalk Friday nights and Saturday nights, and it is a very hopping area. People are looking for rides to just go from the restaurants back to these housing developments. What gets lost in all this discussion is everybody is focused on millennials, but people come to Norwalk and live in Norwalk and stay in Norwalk because of its diversity.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said this conversation is great because they haven't really talked about transit at any of the meetings, and that transit is actually trying to do two very different things. You

have the high income earners and the low wage workers and how do you accommodate the different needs and different priorities.

Mr. Liotta said they are at the point where they are investing in buses that are not normal buses anymore. They are looking at exterior sitting that the millennials can relate to that maybe has a table where they can put their laptop down for the 5 or 10 minute ride and type a quick email, or they can connect into wifi, because god forbid they have to put their phone down for 5 minutes. And this also works with all the students that are going to NCC as well. There's a shuttle that they run right now to service them as well. So there is a lot of forward thinking on this. They are in the process of starting to replace some of their buses, and are looking at technology to have inside displays on the buses to do local announcements, like the weather, and to have wifi in the buses. They are looking to partner with companies that offer wifi services to get them to sponsor their buses, and in turn they would wrap part of the bus with Verizon, or whatever, but they are looking at all these technologies to try to meet people that have smart phones or don't have smart phones and still want paper schedules because they don't have a phone, so when you hear that, you know you're dealing with two very different sets of demographics.

They brought Dennis O'Connor on to help grow some of this ridership, which is what he is going to be focusing on. They have maps already done that show the kind of routes they are focusing on, and he would be happy to share them.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said they didn't get through everything she had hoped, but she wants to be respectful of everybody's time, so she would ask that they read as much of the document as they can, and focus on the pieces where you have the most expertise, and really be critical and give us some good feedback. This is a working draft. And in particular they would like to get squared away with zoning as soon as possible, and make sure they have the right maps and understand what exists today so they can figure out what they should be recommending. She thanked everyone for helping with this very large undertaking in the short amount of time that they had.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Pacchiana