

Minutes of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations Meeting

**Monday, April 10th, 2006
City Hall, Room A333, 7:30 PM**

**Next Meeting: Monday, April 8th, 2006
City Hall, Room A322, 7:30 PM
(THIS WILL BE ANOTHER ROOM CHANGE)**

Attendees:

Dan Grundman (NASH)	Maribeth Becker (ENNA)
Jill Montesanto (Save Cranbury)	Al Raymond (Spring Hill/Hospital)
Diane Lauricella (ENNA/LWV)	Diane Witkowsky (Spring Hill/Hospital)
Dick Vicenzi (Shorefront Park)	Diana Paladino (Spring Hill/Hospital)
Ernst deFlines (RCA)	Don Nelson (TAC/Clean and Green)
Joseph Sette (West Norwalk)	Bob Wagman (West Norwalk)
Laurel Lindstrom (ENNA)	Barbara Felter (Broad River)
Tony Doumele (Silvermine NASH)	Sue Sweitzer (Norwalk Redevelopment Agency)

The meeting was called to order at 7:35p.m.

Minutes of the March 13th, 2006 meeting were approved.

West Ave Redevelopment Plan – Sue Sweitzer from the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency (NRA) gave us an overview of the current status of the West Ave Redevelopment Plan and answered any questions from our group. The Planning Committee of the Common Council had West Ave on their agenda for April 6th, but had to postpone any discussion and vote on West Ave until a later date due to a very full agenda that evening. In the meantime, they may arrange a pre-meeting and a walking tour of the area.

Once the NRA plan gets approved, then Mr. Seligson can petition to become the preferred developer of the parcel and he will create a conceptual plan that will have to go through the same process (including multiple public hearings) as the NRA plan did – i.e. going through the NRA, Planning Committee, and ultimately Common Council. The conceptual plan would be more specific than the NRA plan and would start to flesh out design, parking, financing and other details. Once the conceptual plan is approved, Land Disposition Agreements would be negotiated. This process could take approximately 18 months from approval of the NRA plan – with multiple opportunities for public input along the way.

Once again, the NRA encouraged associations to speak in support of its plan to their elected Common Council officials (phone calls, emails, letters, etc). Sue explained that if the NRA plan is approved, it gives the City control over the project and ultimately gives our group a better chance to have a “place at the table” as the project moves through the various stages of the project.

Even though many associations seemed to accept what Sue said, several members still had several concerns that they had previously expressed - namely eminent domain, a vague definition of blight, the amount of public subsidies, and the parking garage. Tony Doumele will draft a letter requesting the rationale supporting the City's request for state funds.

Based on input from those present at the meeting, Maribeth Becker will send a draft of a proposed letter to be sent to Common Council officials from the Coalition that gives a ‘qualified go-ahead’ to this project. Each association should discuss the letter with their members to ensure that any specific concerns have been addressed. Common Council officials would need to be contacted prior to the May 4th meeting of the Planning Committee. No decision was made as yet as to whether the letter would be sent representing the Coalition or sent by the individual neighborhood associations.

Zoning Task Force Update – Task Force members in attendance (Jill Montesanto, Bob Wagman, Maribeth Becker, Diana Paladino, and Dick Vicenzi) gave an update of this newly formed committee. So far the group has had two meetings. They are on a ‘fast track’ – aiming to have recommendations to the CNNA by June.

On March 30th the group met to determine desired outcomes, process and timeline. It was decided that they should focus on positive ideas for zoning changes that encourage “smart development” and neighborhood preservation. Rather than tackle all of the possible issues, it was decided to focus on areas where the greatest impact could be made in the shortest amount of time. The group is meeting with ‘enlightened’ developers to hear what zoning changes would need to be made to encourage more sensitive neighborhood development.

On April 6th, the group was joined by David Tilly - the developer of Summerview Place, a townhouse development on West Main Street that preserves and reuses 3 historic buildings and is designed to have the new building fit the character of the area. Neighborhood and preservation groups have seen the plans and are in support of the plan – which required numerous variances from the ZBA. Mr. Tilly provided several ideas for potential zoning changes.

The group is going to meet with a few more developers over the next several weeks and will compile the various suggestions and present to the CNNA. They will meet with officials from Planning and Zoning to see what might be possible and determine the appropriate process.

A discussion ensued on the topic of “special exceptions” that seem to allow someone flexibility to build something other than what is in written plans. How does it differ from a “special permit” that Spinnaker has requested for the Norden project. Maribeth Becker will follow up with Mike Greene about this.

Update on Proposed B-Zone Changes – Maribeth will follow up with Mike Greene about this.

New Business –

1) *CNNA’s role as an organization* –

As a young organization, we are still looking for ways to improve our process to better serve the needs of our members. We welcome any ideas and feedback.

We discussed sharing a wide variety of pressing issues – taxes, the budget, traffic, schools, crime, zoning, etc.

We talked about being positive and not adversarial as we tackle issues of development and zoning. We want to be perceived as being for “good development” rather than seen as “anti-development”.

Our voice is only as powerful as the number of organizations that comprise it, so it is important that all organizations send at least one representative to each meeting. We need to be clearer on our process for group consensus. When we have issues that might require us taking a position on an issue, we should consider indicating on the agenda that it is an “action item”. Associations can talk to their members prior to our CNNA meeting to know what their position is and be prepared to vote accordingly. It is imperative that members come to meetings knowing what you can and can’t say to reflect their organization. Some members are authorized to speak for their organization, while others have to run it by their board or members first.

People felt that if an association did not send a representative to a meeting, they should not be able to speak out against any decisions reached in that meeting. Another idea was to list the “minority report” that lists who was opposed – or absent when a decision was reached. We also talked about having a policy of dealing with the press as an organization so that any statements are voted on and arrived via group consensus. But we also acknowledged that sometimes an “emergency response” might be warranted and we need to have a system in place for that.

To try to ensure that we are representing the voice of all parts of Norwalk, Al Raymond has agreed to be our membership chairperson, assisted by Diane Lauricella and Maribeth Becker. Al will reach out to member associations to determine why they are not attending our monthly meetings and encourage them to join us in the future. We will be doing a survey to assess what issues are of importance to our members so that we are covering them as an organization. Please be open and honest and share your ideas for our organization so that we can improve.

We discussed the possibility of changing the structure of the organization. It was proposed that the current board become the "Executive Committee" and all of the member associations become "Board Members". Maybe this will make people feel more a part of the organizations and the decisions that we make.

2) *"Keep Norwalk Beautiful"* –

Don Nelson distributed handouts outlining this year's clean-up. All neighborhoods North of I-95 will be on April 29th (District 1). All neighborhoods South of I-95 will be on May 6th (District 2). This cleanup will concentrate on litter (not bulky waste). After bagging the litter, place it in a secure location at your site so that DPW crews can pick up on Monday morning.

Please contact David Shockley (dshockley@norwalkct.org or 854-7810 ext 6782) with the following info:

- 1) Your group's intended cleanup location(s)
- 2) Number of gloves and bags you will need
- 3) Site location where you will place your bags and
- 4) Name and contact info for your cleanup team leader

If you haven't done so yet, please submit your association's tree liaison info and your boundaries to Maribeth Becker ASAP. The Tree Advisory Committee is currently compiling the list for this year's tree planting. Don't be left out!

Adjournment was 9:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

MB