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The Advocate:

E. Norwalk residents voice ideas on city development

By John Nickerson
Staff Writer, The Norwalk Advocate

April 21, 2004

NORWALK -- East Norwalk residents told the city last night there should be a pedestrian walkway across the Interstate 95 Yankee Doodle Bridge, better access to city streams and ponds, smaller developments and a new community center.

The city is updating the 12-year-old Plan of Conservation and Development, and the Planning Commission met with East Norwalk residents last night to hear their suggestions. It was the first of four hearings scheduled with residents across the city.

Last night, the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association presented the commission with a detailed 27-page report itemizing dozens of recommendations designed to preserve that area's residential character and historic and natural resources.

"It is time to shift the emphasis from roads to neighborhoods, and this vision runs through our recommendations as a theme," said association President Laurel Lindstrom, who presented the commission with the report at the East Norwalk Library.

Lindstrom said East Norwalk residents, looking to live in quiet and safe neighborhoods, are faced with endless trucks and cars darting through their streets.

"Are we a place to live, or are we a part of the roadside scenery?" Lindstrom asked.

Lindstrom said the report, which will be considered when the commission prepares the new master plan later this year, was developed during two years of monthly meetings held with residents and neighborhood groups across East Norwalk.

She also recommended that the city develop a pedestrian-friendly approach to slow traffic at pedestrian crossings and intersections by using speed humps, changes in paving and traffic circles.

Lindstrom said the association also was concerned with overdevelopment along the harbor. She suggested increasing the amount of space required between buildings and the water.

To preserve the character of East Norwalk, the report called for the creation of historic districts in the Wall Street area, Norwalk Green and surrounding streets and Liberty Square.

"The things we think are appropriate will be taken and incorporated into the master plan," said Walter Briggs, chairman of the Planning Commission, after the meeting.

Last night's hearing was the first time in two years that the commission met with residents and neighborhood groups to update the city's plan of development.

Planning Director Michael Greene said during those two years, the commission has been busy reviewing the city's current plan to decide what should be kept or removed.

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As part of its effort to hear neighborhood recommendations, the commission has split the city up into four sections and will hold three more hearings before drawing up the plan over the summer. Greene said the plan should be ready for Common Council approval in the fall.

West Norwalk residents will have an opportunity to give the commission their recommendations May 11.

Though recommendations may make it into the Plan of Conservation and Development, that doesn't necessarily mean they will be enacted, Greene said.

"One of the things the plan has to include is a capital budget. There were lots of things in the last plan that didn't get done for lack of money," Greene said.

Third Taxing Commissioner Paul Coggins said the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association came out with lots of great ideas.

"The challenge is to prioritize these recommendations. Putting them into action, creating improvements and then managing them will cost money," Coggins said.

Councilman Fred Bondi thanked Lindstrom and the association for putting work into the plan to try to make East Norwalk a "wonderful place to live."

Knopp said that the association's work is an example of the type of partnership between the city and neighborhood groups he has tried to foster.

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April 20, 2004

The Hour:

Residents can air views on city's master plan

By Robert Koch
Hour Staff Writer

Norwalk -- Traffic, development and park space could emerge as topics tonight when Planning Commission's Land Use Committee invites residents of southeast Norwalk to a public workshop on the city's unfolding master plan.

The commission hopes to finish updating the city's Plan of Conservation and Development by the end of the year. So far, the commission has finished compiling comments heard at earlier neighborhood meetings.

Tonight's workshop at the East Norwalk Library is the first of four new meetings to revisit neighborhood concerns before pressing forward with the master plan. The workshop will begin at 8 tonight in the Community Center of the library, 51 Van Zant St.

"We have formulated a list of items which reflect the major issues pertaining to Norwalk's neighborhoods," wrote commission Chairman Walter O. Briggs in a memorandum to interested parties. "For discussion purposes we have listed them below in general categories. Clearly there will be overlapping interests so these should not be considered as fixed units."

Those general categories are buildings, environment and quality of life. Specifics include modifying zoning

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regulations to reduce the height and bulk of single-family homes; creating an open-space acquisition fund by a property transfer tax; and forming village districts, based on public input from meetings more than a year ago.

"The neighborhoods have done a lot of work (since then), and that's wonderful. We'll take the information and incorporate as much of it that makes sense into the master plan," said Briggs, referring to the four workshops. "These are very important meetings."

So far, at least two East Norwalk neighborhood groups plan to attend tonight's workshop -- scheduled by the commission -- to ensure that their concerns are incorporated into the master plan.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said her group intends to present a 30-page draft of its "mini-master plan."

Lindstrom said the draft plan offers many recommendations on larger "livability" issues facing East Norwalk residents. She named traffic, zoning and development, sidewalks and acquiring land for pocket parks among the recommendations addressed in the neighborhood mini master plan.

"You don't want to just talk about specific streets and potholes (tonight). It's really the larger issues," Lindstrom said.

Also expected to attend the workshop are members of the East Norwalk Improvement Association. "We still want to keep our voices known," said Terry Rooney, former president of the association.

A similar workshop for the Norwalk's northwest quadrant is scheduled at 7 p.m. May 11 at the Dolce Norwalk Center, 32 Weed Ave.

April 18, 2004

The Hour:

Spring Cleaning

Volunteers remove litter, scrub sidewalks in E. Norwalk

By Amrita Dhindsa
Hour Staff Writer

Norwalk -- As a follow up to Mayor Alex Knopp's bus ride and walk through East Norwalk last week to identify problems in the area, the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association organized a cleanup of streets and shoreline on Saturday.

Carrying brooms, rakes, and disposal bags, nearly 30 volunteers picked up litter from the streets, scrubbed sand off sidewalks, and collected garbage from Veterans Park, and around the Long Island Sound.

The volunteers met at 7:30 a.m. at Veterans Park to carry out their four-hour cleanup. Thirteen areas around East Norwalk were targeted as problem areas that needed immediate attention.

Volunteers South Norwalk Inner City Cleanup (SONICC) including Director David Shockley, the Third Taxing District including Commissioner David Brown, and employees from the Department of Public Works picked up bagged litter and loaded them on to trucks. Ed Holowinko from Norwalk Conservation Commission, Diane

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Lauricella, an environmental consultant, and residents also took part in the cleanup.

Several trucks were used to pick up larger household waste including television sets, refrigerators, and sofas, that residents left on the sidewalk.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association which organized Saturday's cleanup, said fliers had been sent to homes in the area informing them that trucks would pick up their large disposal waste on Saturday morning.

As the group worked its way up from the shoreline at Veterans Park up to East Avenue, residents from neighborhoods joined the volunteers in the cleanup.

Chris Hadin, a resident of Cottage Street, spent the morning scrubbing sand off sidewalks, pulling out weeds, and picking up litter to prevent it from clogging city drains and entering Long Island Sound.

"This garbage has accumulated over the winter and we're conducting a spring cleaning of Norwalk," said Hadin. "I received a flier from Laurel and I am very excited to be part of it."

At Mill Pond, SONICC volunteers spent a considerable amount of time cleaning up accumulated waste around the pond.

"I can't emphasize enough the importance of getting residents involved in their neighborhood cleanups," said Shockley. "It's this kind of volunteerism that makes things happen, and brings out the best in people."

Brown, chairman of the Third Taxing District Commission, called Saturday's cleanup historic.

"This hasn't happened in East Norwalk for 20 years and it's great," said Brown.

At Liberty Square last week, business owners conducted their own cleanup to spruce up their area. On April 7, city employees, including Knopp, embarked on a bus tour and walked around East Norwalk to identify such problems as broken sidewalks, speeding traffic, and residential and commercial zoned violations.

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The ENNA Neighborhood Cleanup



Volunteers at Veterans Park with bags of litter taken from the shoreline. From left: Ed Holowinko, Conservation Commissioner; Marie DeLeo, ENNA board member; Diane Lauricella, environmental consultant; and Chris Hadin, Cottage Street resident.
Photograph by Laurel Lindstrom, ENNA president

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April 16, 2004

The Norwalk Citizen-News:

<http://www.norwalkcitizen-news.com/Stories/0,1413,99%257E4581%257E2088993,00.html>

Letters to the Editor

Particularly Significant

Last week the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association led Mayor Alex Knopp and the members of the Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee on a bus and walking tour through the neighborhoods of East Norwalk. In addition to pointing out remedial quality-of-life concerns like broken sidewalks and possible zoning violations the ENNA emphasized revitalizing the East Norwalk village center and maintaining the current width of East Avenue.

In connection with the revitalization of the East Norwalk village center the ENNA called on the mayor to appoint a committee including East Norwalk residents to work with him beginning this spring. As president of the ENNA, and active in traffic calming initiatives for several years, I cautioned that any widening of East Avenue would be contrary to the revitalization of East Norwalk because widening the street would increase the speed and volume of through traffic, and would also result in loss of some property for the established neighborhood businesses that front East Avenue. I further emphasized that creating easier egress at a key intersection at East Avenue and Fort Point Street would be a necessary part of the revitalization effort to reduce the number of vehicles cutting through residential streets. The ENNA strongly urged the city not to wait for the state to start work on the railroad bridge before making improvements that would dramatically improve the quality of life for the residents of East Norwalk.

To encourage public participation in long-range planning, such as the example above, the Planning Commission of the City of Norwalk has scheduled a public workshop for residents living in the southeast quadrant of Norwalk for Tuesday, April 20, at 8 p.m. at the East Norwalk Library at 51 Van Zant St. This workshop is the first in a series that will take place in the city's four quadrants so that neighborhood concerns will be accurately reflected in the Plan of Conservation and Development (Master Plan) that the commission is currently updating.

The ENNA board members are drafting a document of Master Plan recommendations for presentation to the Planning Commission, and are encouraging residents to attend the workshops. Since the section of Norwalk that the ENNA covers is the southeast quadrant that the April 20 workshop addresses, this workshop is particularly significant to the members of the ENNA. The letter of invitation from the chairman of the Planning Commission, along with the summary list of neighborhood concerns the commission has received thus far, is posted on the ENNA Web site. To find a copy of this information log on to CalmTraffic.org and click the link to the ENNA Home Page. From there click on the link to the Calendar Page, where there is a link to the indicated file. While on the Calendar Page take note of ENNA upcoming events and meetings open to all.

Laurel Lindstrom

President - East Norwalk Neighborhood Association

April 8, 2004

**The Hour:
E. Norwalk concerns addressed**

By Harold F. Cobin

April 21

Hour Correspondent

Broken sidewalks, speeding traffic and residential and commercial properties possibly violating health and zoning ordinances made the list of complaints heard Wednesday during a tour of East Norwalk organized by the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

Led by the association's president, Laurel Lindstrom, representatives from the city's departments traveled by bus and then walked through portions of the city's southeast corner, scribbling down concerns of the association's members on the tour.

Tour participant Mayor Alex Knopp said, "We need to catch small problems early," adding that correcting problems in East Norwalk would result in more people investing in its neighborhoods.

Having moved here from Boston five years ago, architect Gordon Tully said that based on his observation of Knopp, "There's a real possibility of getting something done" in East Norwalk.

Tully praised the city's examples of historic architecture.

Knopp said that observations from neighborhood tours are reviewed monthly for corrective action.

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<http://www.norwalkadvocate.com/news/local/scn-sa-nor.enna2apr08,0,27694.story?coll=nor-news-local-headlines>

East Norwalk neighborhood group shows Knopp area eyesores

By Lisa Chamoff
Staff Writer, Advocate

April 8, 2004

NORWALK -- East Norwalk residents pointed out areas in need of revitalization and traffic problems to Mayor Alex Knopp and city officials during a bus and walking tour of the neighborhood yesterday morning.

The tour was the fourth in a series conducted by the Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee since last year.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, guided leaders from the city's public safety, planning, building and public works departments on a route from Veterans Memorial Park along Van Zant Street, East Avenue and First Street. Along the way, she pointed out litter, cracked sidewalks and illegally parked cars.

East Norwalk Neighborhood Association members and residents, including Rich Brousseau Jr., listed their concerns, such as abandoned vehicles, and cars parked near intersections obstructing views.

"We're really trying to clean up streets with abandoned cars," Brousseau said. "It increases with residences turning into two-family."

At Roger Square, near the historic East Norwalk Cemetery, the large group left the bus and walked north on East Avenue. Lindstrom said the high traffic area was in need of a facelift, including facade improvements to shopping centers and repairs to crumbling curbs.

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"This is really the village center," Lindstrom said. "What we'd like to do is encourage the businesses here to do some improvements."

The area near Fort Point Street and East Avenue was of particular importance because of future plans to widen East Avenue while the state modifies the ramp configuration for Interstate 95.

Lindstrom said widening East Avenue would increase traffic, but lowering the street level under the railroad bridge there would allow access for large tractor-trailers that now use narrow residential streets.

Proving the point, the group squeezed onto the sidewalk to walk along Fort Point Street and avoid the large trucks passing by.

East Norwalk resident Michael Askew said cars parked on the side of Fort Point Street made it even narrower, creating a risk because school buses drop children off there.

"It's a lot of traffic and confusion with the buses coming, and it could be a really big hazard," said Askew, who lives on nearby Pleasant Street.

Knopp, who is an East Norwalk resident, said he understood the neighborhood association's concerns, especially in relation to traffic.

"We get especially heavy beach traffic during the summer," Knopp said. "In general, East Norwalk gets a lot of recreational use during the summer."

Knopp said that in East Norwalk, industrial zones are interspersed with residential, so the city has to be aware of the particulars in managing those areas.

The neighborhood association plans to conduct a clean-up April 17 to remove debris from streets and surrounding areas.

At the conclusion of the tour, Lindstrom called for the mayor to form a committee that would look at the revitalization of East Norwalk in a way similar to that of the Mid-Harbor and Wall Street plans. Some of the problems brought up during the tour will be addressed by city officials at a committee meeting next month.

Gordon Tully, a member of the neighborhood association, said he appreciated the cooperation of city officials in helping to improve East Norwalk.

"It's the sense we have that we can actually do something," Tully said. "It's worth it to have the city involved."

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April 3, 2004

The Advocate:

East Ave. building plan rejected for 2nd time

By John Nickerson
Staff Writer, Advocate

April 3, 2004

NORWALK -- A proposed East Avenue office building presented by a development group that includes state Sen. Robert Genuario, R-Norwalk, was rejected yesterday for the second time in 10 months.

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The developers were seeking an exemption under city zoning regulations to build a three-story building with rooftop parking that would be double the size of what is permitted on the property and violate setback regulations.

The Zoning Board of Appeals unanimously denied granting the variance, saying the applicants had failed to prove sufficient hardships to justify the proposal.

Genuario, a minority owner in Modest Properties LLC, had argued that the building must be constructed from one side of the property to the other on Smith Street because of the parcel's rough landscape. The topography quickly drops 30 feet to Smith Street and would require the back of the building to act as a retaining wall and its sides to act as buttresses to ensure the wall stays in place.

The development group, which owns the property at 94 East Ave. and an existing 15,000-square-foot building on the .63-acre parcel, had won zoning approval for the proposed building in 2001. But because Modest Properties did not obtain building permits for the structure within 180 days of approval, the ZBA decision lapsed.

Project architect James Jamieson told the ZBA the building had to be constructed from lot line to lot line in order for the side walls of the building to properly buttress the retaining wall. Narrowing the building's width and in the process conforming with the 10-foot side set-back zoning regulation would risk weakening the sides of an existing retaining wall currently on the parcel, Jamieson said.

Gordon Tully, an East Norwalk Neighborhood Association board member and a professional architect disagreed, saying because the retaining wall was built to support a parking lot at the rear of the 94 East Ave. building, it is not a natural topographical hardship and should not be considered when granting a variance.

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