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Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association's Coverage by Media



December 18, 2005

The Hour - Op Ed page

Neighborhood Associations give residents a voice

A letter recently printed in the Hour (sent in by a resident unhappy with city services) seemed unfair to a mayor who has only been in office 3 weeks. Clearly the writer is mad as a hornet, and my guess is that he, like so many in Norwalk, is finding it very hard to pay skyrocketing property taxes.

For those who share this frustration, there is something you can do. All across town, neighborhood associations are helping residents have a voice, and they are being listened to. For example, quite a few East Norwalk residents came to the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association's board meeting this month, where the new Mayor spoke.

Mayor Moccia answered a number of questions we had posed, then listened and responded as residents voiced their concerns (mostly about speeding traffic). State Representative Chris Perone was there, as well as a member of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency.

As Mayor Moccia made clear, Norwalk is facing a large increase in fixed costs (debt service, pensions, benefits), while the Federal government is shutting off funding for one civic program after another (Weed and Seed is the latest casualty). We in Norwalk will have to be very creative to avoid another rise in property taxes.

At a recent gathering of mayors, he heard from mayors of large cities and small, all of whom are facing exactly the same problem. They were unanimous that only a close collaborative effort among the city government, business leaders, non-profit organizations, and neighborhood groups will pull us through.

Neighborhood groups like the ENNA are already digging in to help, and we can do more –

ENNA Press

much more – with more citizen participation. Find out about your own neighborhood group, and if there isn't one, form one! Contact Bob Wagman at the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations, at <http://www.norwalkneighborhoods.com>.

For those east of the river and south of Route 1, visit the ENNA website at <http://eastnorwalk.org> where you'll find many issues discussed, such as speeding and snow plowing. The ENNA meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month, and everyone is welcome.

Laurel Lindstrom, president
Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association

December 18, 2005

The Advocate

NordenPark condo plan could get boost

By Brian Lockhart
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- NordenPark condo plan could get a boost

A long-delayed report on the future of dormant industrial properties may be issued in time to boost a developer's plans to build one of the city's largest condominium projects at NordenPark.

Walter Briggs, chairman of the Industrial Zones Task Force, said the group -- which hasn't met since the spring -- expects to issue a report in January.

The task force was formed by former Mayor Alex Knopp in October 2004 to consider expanding uses at some industrial properties to stimulate economic activity.

The group, which was unable to meet during the summer, needs to have at least one more meeting. He said the report will make recommendations for NordenPark, whose owners earlier this month filed an application with the Zoning Department to build a 316-unit condominium project there.

The application requires the Zoning Commission to amend the regulations to allow multifamily housing on 38 acres of the 80-acre industrial site off of Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Briggs said he was reluctant to divulge details about the task force's report. He said while the committee is not considering housing for some smaller industrial properties in neighborhoods like South Norwalk, NordenPark is "a large industrial site with a huge bunch of acreage, so it will be treated differently."

The report would be adopted by the Planning Commission, which Briggs also leads, as part of the ongoing update of the 10-year Master Plan of Conservation and Development.

Briggs said he had suggested NordenPark's owners -- The Spinnaker Cos., Greenfield Partners and Summit Development Co. -- hold off on making an application until the industrial zones report was issued.

"I just thought it would be more appropriate if we finished our study," he said.

Clayton Fowler of the Spinnaker Cos. said the partners tried to cooperate but had to move forward after several months of hearing nothing from the task force.

"We've been holding off for six to nine months," Fowler said. "The time was right."

If the report is issued in January, it will still be out before the Zoning Commission's public hearing on the multifamily housing proposal, tentatively scheduled for February or March.

"We don't know if the industrial report will be ready, but if it is, it fits in perfectly" with the approval timeline, Planning and Zoning Director Michael Greene said.

Fowler said he is optimistic Briggs' committee will come out in favor building housing on the site. "I think the merits of the situation are fairly self-evident," Fowler said.

Zoning Commission Chairwoman Dorothy Mobilia said the task force's position on the future of NordenPark "could have an influence on how we look at the application."

"To ignore it might be irresponsible," Mobilia said.

Spinnaker began lobbying for other uses at the Cold War-era industrial complex soon after the company, Greenfield Partners and Summit Development Co., purchased NordenPark and an existing, 660,000-square-foot building from MetLife five years ago for \$40 million.

For 40 years, Norden Systems had built radar and other electronic systems for the military. The new owners re-signed Norden's lease but also renovated vacant portions of the building to attract nonindustrial tenants such as Gibbs College, Tauck World Discover travel company and baker Pepperidge Farm Inc. They also discussed the possibility of a housing development.

In an effort to further their goals, Spinnaker and its partners a few years ago commissioned a study on the state of industry in Norwalk, which they submitted earlier this year to Briggs' task force.

The study found that while overall employment in the city fluctuated between 44,000 and 48,500 from 1993 to 2001, manufacturing employment declined steadily from 12,030 jobs to 8,480.

It also concluded that in 2002, only 16 percent of the 418,000 jobs in Fairfield County were in manufacturing -- down from 33 percent in 1983.

The study emphasized the city needs to be more flexible at its industrial sites and, not unexpectedly, pointed to NordenPark as an example of what could be accomplished.

Briggs said his task force "appreciated the work they did," but members did not rely solely on Spinnaker's input in formulating their report.

The task force during its meetings in January, February, March and April also heard from other industrial property owners, the president of the Waterbury-based Manufacturing Alliance of Connecticut and the president of the Rocky Hill-based Connecticut Development Authority, according to Norwalk Senior Planner Dorothy Wilson.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said the planned NordenPark housing could overwhelm the area and strain infrastructure.

NordenPark housing could overwhelm the area and strain infrastructure.

Lindstrom said she is eager to view the Industrial Zones Task Force report, but added its supporting housing for NordenPark would not necessarily allay her fears.

"A committee can get quite insular and cut off from the public," she said, adding she would prefer more time between the release of the industrial zones report and the NordenPark multifamily housing application.

"It just doesn't sit right with me that these studies are just about to come out and the public hasn't had a chance to process the results and there's been no discussion," Lindstrom said. "It's too much to take in all at once."

December 11, 2005

The Advocate

Support to curb multifamily home building increases

By Brian Lockhart
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- Support to curb multifamily home building increases

Momentum for a moratorium on new multifamily housing is gaining in City Hall, with the law and planning and zoning departments researching how it can be done.

Residents have voiced increasing concerns in the last few years about the loss of neighborhood charm as older homes and buildings are being razed in favor of more intensive development. Hot spots have appeared across the city, from sets of 19th century homes near the old city centers to the former Fitch School site in East Norwalk.

The push for the moratorium began in late summer when a developer proposed demolishing a handful of late 19th century rowhouses on Stuart Avenue to make way for five six-unit townhouses.

"The thing that really brings this to a head is Stuart Avenue," Bob Wagman, coordinator of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations, said.

Marija Bryant, a member of the city's Historical Commission, said the proposal, which is permitted under zoning regulations, "was like a perfect storm" -- demolition of old houses, which hurts the neighborhood's character, to be replaced with condominiums that will increase Stuart Avenue's density.

There is also frustration that Norwalk's update of its 10-year Master Plan, which community groups have hoped would address concerns about density, has been moving at a slow pace as projects like Stuart Avenue proceed.

Former Democratic Mayor Alex Knopp and the Planning Commission were developing mini-revitalization plans for new housing and commercial space along Wall Street, West Avenue, portions of South Norwalk and other urban neighborhoods.

Planning Commission Chairman Walter Briggs said he wants to have a final draft of the master plan ready for review early next year and will focus on neighborhood concerns such as density this winter.

Neighborhood leaders see the moratorium as a way to protect their streets from overdevelopment until the Planning Commission turns its attention to them.

"I definitely want to see things on hold until we have the master plan in place," said East Norwalk Neighborhood Association President Laurel Lindstrom, a moratorium proponent. "Six months or 12 months -- I have no opinion," Wagman said. "I'm in favor of it until the city gets its act together and decides how these (multi-family developments) should be, where they should go, and what the need is."

But the form a moratorium would take is still unclear, and has left interested parties and observers on both sides of the issue eager for details.

"I've heard of it," former Democratic Mayor Frank Zullo, a prominent land-use attorney, said. "I don't know what they mean by it. A moratorium on every single parcel of land in the city? I'd hope not."

"It's this vague thing," said another land-use attorney, David Waters. "What is the purpose? It can't be to say 'We don't want development, period' . . . There may be a specific, legitimate purpose, but it needs to be expressed."

Lindstrom wants to see specifics because "we don't want something in place and find there are loopholes developers are scrambling to get around."

Timothy Sheehan, Norwalk's director of redevelopment, said with the city still debating the merits of controversial Common Council legislation limiting Norwalk's powers of eminent domain, a public discussion of a vague housing moratorium could further impede efforts to revitalize urban neighborhoods such as Wall Street.

"As a city we need to be very careful with the messages we put out to the development community," Sheehan said. "There needs to be more clarity as to what this is going to be and the implications of the changes being considered . . . Anything exceeding a six-month period would have significant ramifications on projects in the planning stages."

Although a moratorium has bipartisan support, proponents such as Mayor Richard Moccia, a Republican, and Common Council President Michael Coffey, a Democrat, have set different goals.

Moccia, who suggested he would support some type of moratorium on condominiums during his campaign, said in a recent interview he wants to provide a few months for neighborhood groups concerned about density and development to reach some consensus.

He said it is not the mayor's place to get involved in specific zoning issues.

Coffey, however, takes the moratorium proposal a step further and wants officials to use the time to consider zoning changes to curtail some residential multi-family growth in the ongoing update of the Master Plan of Conservation and Development.

But two officials who may have to be at the forefront of drafting and passing any moratorium --

Briggs and Zoning Commission Chairman Dorothy Mobilia, both Democrats -- are themselves urging caution.

"I always have reservations about moratoriums because it takes away people's property rights," Briggs said. "I want to be careful how it's used. I don't want every time somebody gets upset about something they come flying in and ask for a moratorium."

Mobilia said she is also concerned a moratorium would conflict with other efforts, which she supports, to build more affordable housing throughout the city.

"There are developers who maybe want more density (to) put affordable housing in," Mobilia said, adding she does not understand the push for the moratorium.

"What's really bothering them? Big buildings? Do they care how many people are in a building? Is it the traffic?" she said. "Maybe I live in a neighborhood where condos are acceptable. There's landscaping and setbacks."

This is not the first time Norwalk has imposed a moratorium on certain multifamily development.

In 1990, the Planning Zoning commissions passed a one-year moratorium on multifamily developments of 12 units or more in certain residential zones, restricted business and executive office zones as they worked out the last Master Plan.

The ban was later extended until 1992.

While some have sought a moratorium to target new condominium complexes, Planning and Zoning Director Michael Greene said that the measure would affect all proposed "multi-family housing" development.

The previous moratorium excluded elderly housing and a handful of neighborhoods that at the time were targeted for redevelopment -- something Moccia has said he would propose in a current moratorium to allow plans to revitalize Wall Street, West Avenue and the Reed -Putnam area to move ahead.

Before officials can begin debating the criteria of a new moratorium, they have to settle confusion over which governmental entity is responsible for enacting one and also consider any changes in state or federal laws that have occurred in the past decade.

Coffey believes the council's Ordinance Committee, which he runs, would be responsible for pursuing a moratorium. That is the same committee which, at Coffey's urging, has been considering controversial, tighter regulations on the city's ability to seize property for private developers using eminent domain.

But Greene said it historically has been the Planning and Zoning commissions because a moratorium represents an amendment to zoning regulations.

Norwalk Corporation Counsel Peter Nolin has begun researching the matter at Coffey's and Moccia's request, along with any legal guidelines that need to be followed for passing a moratorium on development.

Former long-time zoning commissioner Joseph Santo, a member when the first moratorium was passed in 1990, said "the Common Council has nothing to do with it."

"It's all up to the Zoning Commission whether or not they want do a moratorium," Santo said.

Greene, anticipating the debate, has been gathering data on Norwalk's previous moratorium

It appears to have taken Norwalk nearly two years to decide to pass its initial one-year moratorium on multi-family housing construction.

Greene and his staff have also been gathering information on Danbury's recently completed one-year moratorium that postponed building permits for any property in areas zoned for multifamily housing.

Danbury officials said while residents and developers voiced opposition to the move, the moratorium did not face a legal challenge and allowed them to craft tougher regulations intended to preserve the character of neighborhoods. Those included: establishing open-space requirements in new construction; design guidelines; and a prohibition on buildings being placed sideways in lots.

In extending Norwalk's original moratorium city officials did make an exemption for proposed projects in which all units would be affordable.

Such an exemption could satisfy Mobilia, who, as Zoning Commission chairwoman, has begun pushing the Planning Commission to consider recommending some affordable housing policies in the master plan update.

"There has to be some kind of balancing act," Mobilia said. "I don't think there should be high density everywhere. The city should be varied. But I worry about people who say 'not in my neighborhood'."

Waters argued a moratorium could have the unintended effect of stifling a neighborhood's improvement. He said an unnamed client will soon propose rehabilitating vacant homes for multi-family housing.

"They'll remain vacant and derelict for the period of the moratorium," Waters said. "That won't help them either."

December 9, 2005

The Hour

Norden presents plan for multi-family homes

By ROBERT KOCH Hour Staff Writer NORWALK –

November 29, 2005

The Hour

Norden Place to build 316 units

By ROBERT KOCH Hour Staff Writer NORWALK –

NORWALK — Norden Place LLC has submitted to the city's Planning & Zoning Department plans to build 316 townhouses and condominiums between NordenPark and the Norwalk Westport

to build one townhouse and condominiums between Norden Park and the Norwalk-Westport border.

"It is a large new community designed for home ownership. It's a large site, so we think it's appropriate," said Kim Morque, principal with Spinnaker Cos., the real estate arm of Norden Place. "The community will be moderately priced for our area. There are two product types. One is townhouse type development. The other is flat-over-flat."

The "Norden Park Proposed Multi-Family Residential Community" calls for 316 housing units built in "villages" on the eastern half of the 78.6-acre Norden site, which lies between Norden Place; the Westport border; Interstate 95; and the Metro-North Railroad tracks, based on plans submitted to the city Nov. 17.

Lot 2, already developed as NordenPark, is home to Northrop Grumman Norden Systems and Gibbs College. The multi-family housing development is planned for Lot 1, the 38.4-acre parcel to east of NordenPark. It is now largely wooded with numerous wetlands and a tennis court. The land is zoned Restricted Industrial.

"(They're seeking) a zoning amendment. The Restricted Industrial Zone does not currently allow multi-family," said Michael B. Greene, the city's planning and zoning director.

On Monday afternoon, Greene and others in his department reviewed the application, which includes surveys, aerial photographs, site, lighting, landscaping, drainage and utility, sedimentation and erosion control plans.

Shown are three villages, each with four-story condominium buildings and parking beneath, and also two-and-a-half story townhouses. A swimming pool complex and 5,938-square-foot clubhouse round out the proposed development.

While the plans call for an emergency entrance/exit into Westport, the main entrance/exit would be onto Norden Place in Norwalk, according to Spinnaker.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, was at City Hall Monday afternoon reviewing the plans. She said it would be premature for the Zoning Commission to act on the zoning change request before the city finishes updating its Master Plan of Conservation and Development.

"This definitely will have an impact on traffic and an impact on (city services)," Lindstrom said.

Lindstrom said the Zoning Commission's Plan Review Committee will review the plans Dec. 8. She plans to attend.

Summit Development Inc. last week showed Westport officials conceptual plans for the Westport side of the border. One plan showed eight houses and 111 condominium units, of which a portion would be priced affordably.

"Both Norwalk and Westport seriously need to look at what these towns can bear in terms of density," said Matthew Mandell, who represents District 1 of the Representative Town Meeting in Westport. "You add to that Pepperidge Farm. We haven't even felt the impact of that, and we're looking at more development."

Norwalk's approval of FF Realty LLC's plan to build 235 luxury apartments and condominiums on the Pepperidge Farm property at 595 Westport Ave. is under appeal by two neighboring condominium associations.

November 29, 2005

The Advocate

316 condos proposed at NordenPark site

By John Nickerson Staff Writer

NORWALK -- One of the largest condominium projects ever proposed in the city is trying to find a home at NordenPark.

NordenPlace LLC, a company affiliated with developer Spinnaker Cos., has proposed a 316-unit condominium project for part of the 80-acre NordenPark site.

The lush 38-acre property, one of the largest undeveloped tracts in the city, is bordered by the Penn Central railroad tracks and the south side of Interstate 95 near the Westport border.

The site, with a 620,000-square-foot building, was purchased from Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. five years ago by Spinnaker Cos., Greenfield Partners and Summit Development Co. for \$40 million.

Current tenants at NordenPark include radar manufacturer Norden systems, a Gibbs College campus, the headquarters of Tauck World Discovery travel and several smaller firms.

Zoning commissioners will get their first look Dec. 8 at the project, which would be split into three "village" complexes.

Because the site is zoned as industrial, the Zoning Commission will be asked to approve multifamily housing there.

Plans include building 32 affordable housing units as part of the development.

The project will include 36 townhouses, 60 multistory townhouses with 120 residential units and four midrise buildings that contain 160 units.

This is the second housing proposal for NordenPark. Earlier this year, Summit Development Co., proposed building 111 housing units on part of the NordenPark property on the other side of the Westport border.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said the condominium development could overwhelm the neighborhood and strain infrastructure.

"Without a Master Plan in place, it's a concern that we are looking at possibly permitting such a large development of condominium units because we may not be able to accommodate so many people," she said.

Lindstrom said she wants the Zoning Commission to table the proposal until the city's Master Plan is amended.

An amendment to the plan should be finished before June, Planning Commission Chairman Walter Briggs said.

"To evaluate this plan before a Master Plan is in place doesn't make sense," Lindstrom said.

Mayor Richard Moccia, who said he would support a moratorium on condominium development during the recent campaign, said he wants to talk with Corporation Counsel Peter Nolin and Planning and Zoning Director Michael Green to determine whether Norwalk can put one on the books.

"I don't want to stifle new development, but I also understand the concerns of neighborhoods who have those condominium developments dropped on them," Moccia said.

But he said it was doubtful that a moratorium would affect developments such as NordenPark or the 261-unit project proposed at the Pepperidge Farm site on Westport Avenue. The projects are proceeding through city boards. "I don't think the moratorium would cover those projects retroactively," Moccia said.

A traffic study of the NordenPark proposal by the consulting firm Tighe & Bond of Shelton, indicates that traffic will be better than in was in the mid-1980s.

Norden Systems had a much larger operation at that time, building radar and other electronic systems for the military.

Peak morning traffic in 1985 produced 2,135 cars going into the plant and 295 going out. Peak afternoon traffic caused 2,135 to leave and 295 to enter.

The new development, including traffic at NordenPark, is expected to produce 517 vehicles coming in during the morning and 189 departing, the report states. In the afternoon, 448 vehicles will leave while 291 will return, the study said.

November 16, 2005

The Hour

Task force: Tear down old police station

By PATRICK R. LINSEY Hour Staff Writer NORWALK -

NORWALK — Tear it down. This was the consensus of a task force charged by the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations to consider future uses for the old police station at Mathews Park.

The task force released a report Sunday recommending the city restore the property to its previous condition as green space, to complement the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion.

It will likely not be feasible to renovate the building for other purposes, Mayor Alex Knopp said Wednesday. This would leave it up to the city whether to designate the property open space or build a new structure.

ENNA Press

While the task force holds no statutory authority, organizers hope it will provide a clear voice for Norwalk's neighborhoods in the decision-making process.

"This was more or less the voice of the citizens on what might be needed," said Diane Witkowsky, a task force member.

Copies of the report were sent to Knopp and Mayor-elect Richard Moccia, said Robert Wagman, a coordinator for the coalition.

"Why should that ugly building stay there with really no reasonable future applicable use?" Wagman asked, rhetorically. "It's an old building. It's got asbestos, probably. It's architecture is inconsistent with everything else down there."

Knopp had originally hoped the building could be turned into an arts center, but changed his mind after reading a report prepared by Department of Public Works engineer Alan Lo.

"That report just indicated that the structure of the building had a lot of flaws and it would be quite expensive to rehabilitate," Knopp said. "My preliminary conclusion is that it would be probably too expensive and too difficult to build a new structure, given our other capital needs, and therefore it probably makes sense to go ahead and implement the original park plan."

That plan, written in 1998, calls for the area to be returned to "green space." The Norwalk Police Department moved to its new location in South Norwalk last spring.

The task force has been considering possible uses for the building since August. Its membership consists of Witkowsky and Al Raymond from the Spring Hill Neighborhood Association; Ralph Bloom and Carol Ann Falasca of the Norwalk Historical Commission; and Maria Bryant from the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

Members toured the old station with Lo, and agreed that it was not feasible for conversion to alternative use.

Witkowsky hopes the area will not be designated for a specific recreational purpose, but rather exist as a parcel of grass and trees to beautify the area.

"In light of the slated redevelopment of West Avenue and Reed-Putnam, we just felt like green space would be especially critical between two developments of that size," she said. "Sort of a respite for the eyes."

The Lockwood-Mathews Mansion was built in 1864 by LeGrand Lockwood, a native Norwalker who made it big on Wall Street, becoming an early railroad tycoon. But Lockwood died of pneumonia in 1872, prompting his family to sell the property to Stanley Mathews, a Staten Island importer.

Over the next 70 years, it eventually fell into disrepair, and was sold to the city in 1941. Until the 1950s, the mansion was surrounded by approximately 30 acres of open space.

"Before the highway, I-95, it was a beautiful country house on the river, with landscaped gardens and an arboretum and all the things you could imagine at a house of that price," said Tod Bryant of the Norwalk Preservation Trust.

Approximately eight acres were sold for the construction of I-95 in the 1950s. In the following years, the police station and Stepping Stones Museum were built at Matthews Park.

"It was a lovely area," Witkowsky said of the original configuration. "It was very complementary to the mansion ... Right now (it) is cramped on such a small area."

October 5, 2005

The Hour

Neighborhood mulls Liberty Square

By PATRICK R. LINSEY Hour Staff Writer NORWALK -

The Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association is holding a public meeting tonight to consider the future of Liberty Square. The group is forming a plan to apply for some of the \$80,000 of federal grant money Norwalk has set aside to revitalize neighborhood centers.

Laurel Lindstrom recently toured Liberty Square with neighborhood residents and members of the ENNA. Together they put together a wish list for neighborhood improvements. "We may be able to do landscaping improvements," Lindstrom said.

"Some minor improvements to make it more pedestrian-friendly and inviting to the neighborhood." Other suggestions include updated facades for the historic buildings of Liberty Square and improved sidewalks. But Lindstrom is also thinking big. "We thought of a pedestrian bridge over Route 136 to make it safer for pedestrians to cross," she said. "This is a state road, so we have a lot of roadblocks, and it would be a very expensive process."

While it is unlikely such a large-scale plan could be funded by the neighborhood center improvement grants, Lindstrom said it is important to consider a range of possibilities. "This is all about dreaming and coming up with ideas," she said. "Even if some of the ideas are very expensive and may not be implemented with this program, at least the ideas will be floated and will be out there."

The ENNA has been considering plans to improve Liberty Square for some time. Last year the association created a revitalization plan for the entire neighborhood. Now it is working to limit the scope of the plan to apply for grant funds. "We're reviewing what was in our old plan that we drafted about a year ago and comparing it to the eligible area," Lindstrom explained.

Only areas eligible for Department of Housing and Urban Development grant money can receive funds under the Norwalk program. In addition to being in an eligible area, neighborhood associations must also demonstrate additional sources of funds to complete the projects. That can be a challenge, Lindstrom said. "What we need to do is show matching funds," she said. "The property owners don't have (many) extra funds available."

On Sept. 20, the Neighborhood Centers Improvement Program was announced by Mayor Alex Knopp and Michael Moore, community development project manager. Any Norwalk neighborhood association in an eligible area can apply for funds. The Golden Hill Association also is planning to redevelop its neighborhood center.

The program is planned over four years, with this year's funds supporting planning expenses, such as architects' fees and parking studies. Lindstrom also hopes for input from residents of the community, to help the ENNA further refine the plan. "I thought this is the right time to invite the public," Lindstrom said. "If anyone comes up with any ideas, this is the perfect time." The meeting will be held tonight at 7:30 in Room 213 at City Hall.

Staff writer Patrick R. Linsey can be reached via e-mail at plinsey@thehour.com.

September 21, 2005

The Hour

Norwalk announces \$80k for neighborhoods

By PATRICK R. LINSEY Hour Staff Writer NORWALK -- Norwalk officials invited neighborhood associations to apply for \$80,000 in grant money for redevelopment projects at a Tuesday night meeting. The Neighborhood Centers Improvement Program will target the small business hubs and gathering places of Norwalk communities.

"Tonight we are moving our working partnership between City Hall and Norwalk's neighborhoods one giant step ahead," Knopp said. "The neighborhood business centers are the small business gateways to Norwalk's neighborhoods ... They are the places where 'everyone knows your name.'"

All funds will come from Community Development Block Grant money, provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Common Council voted to release \$80,000 this year for the initiative. The program is planned to continue for two additional years. The first \$80,000 will fund architectural and engineering planning, necessary for getting projects off the ground. Future grants will pay for actual improvements.

Any neighborhood association based in an area eligible for CDBG funds is eligible to apply. The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency will accept applications Sept. 27 through Oct. 26. Michael Moore, community development project manager for the redevelopment agency, said his office will work with the mayor to decide which associations receive funds.

Several general guidelines will influence decisions on grant applications, Moore said. "We'd like to see a neighborhood association that's put some time and some thought into what they'd like to see," he explained. Moore said successful proposals should also include a full three-year plan for the neighborhood as well as additional financial resources to help fund projects.

Much of the impetus for the program came from improvement proposals pitched by the Golden Hill Association and the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association. Jim DelGreco, president of the GHA, said he hopes the program will benefit his neighborhood. "As a primary gateway to South Norwalk, we help give many visitors their primary welcome to the city,"

DelGreco said. Steven Christofor, a member of the Golden Hill Merchants Association, was excited by the program. "I've lived and worked in the neighborhood my whole life," he said. "So I have a special interest."

The GHA showed a Powerpoint presentation, featuring video and photographs of places members hope to improve their neighborhood. The association seeks money for traffic and parking improvements, upgraded facades, new sidewalks, street repaving and better neighborhood lighting.

Similar improvements have been proposed by the ENNA for East Norwalk. But Laurel Lindstrom, ENNA president, said her group and other associations need to find more additional contributors.

"What we're finding is that population owners don't have extra funds available," Lindstrom said. "That's what I think all neighborhood associations will be struggling with -- to get matching funds."

September 20, 2005

The Hour

Association changes its name for a more accurate description

To the Editor:

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association has undergone a recent name change. I am pleased to announce that the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association is now the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association but we are still the ENNA.

The name change evolved after hearing from several of the long-time area residents whose memories held firm to the historic boundaries of traditional 'East Norwalk', defined as 'south of the I-95' and synonymous with the Third Taxing District.

The boundaries of our association, and everything else, will remain the same. Replacing 'East' with 'Eastern' in our name creates a more accurate description of the section of Norwalk that we serve without creating a new neighborhood.

The ENNA continues to include the traditional 'East Norwalk' neighborhood and also the neighborhoods of East Wall Street, the Norwalk Green, Bettswood, Strawberry Hill Avenue and all other neighborhoods east of the Norwalk River to the Westport line and south of the Post Road to the Long Island Sound.

Laurel Lindstrom,
president Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association

Photo by ENNA Pres. Laurel Lindstrom

August 6, 2005

The Advocate

Firefighter treated for heat stroke Fire damages vacant building

By Peter Davenport
Norwalk Editor

NORWALK -- A firefighter was injured in a fire that damaged the former Fitch School on Strawberry Hill Avenue yesterday, authorities said...



"Witnesses said they saw some youngsters running away from the building," said Norwalk Fire Marshal Glenn Iannoccone...

At a recent meeting of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, residents said the property had become a blight and was used as a hangout for kids doing drugs...

August 2, 2005

The Hour

Greening up

Photo by Erik Trautmann with caption: East Norwalk Neighborhood Association President Laurel Lindstrom and ENNA member and landscape architect Nick Overall recently planted evergreens and perennials at the traffic island at Tierney Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue as part of the city's Adopt-a-Spot program.

**Newest ENNA Adopt-A-Spot on the traffic islands at the corner
of Strawberry Hill Avenue and Tierney Street**



ENNA member and Landscape architect, Nick Overall.

Thanks also to Erik Nees, Maribeth Becker and Marija Bryant for their assistance in preparing the site and dropping off supplies.



Other members Mary Oster, Jason Leventhal and Michelle Novak shown planting the smaller of the two islands at this location

Photos by ENNA President Laurel Lindstrom

July 31, 2005

The Advocate

On-the-spot gardening

Photo by Kathleen O'Rourke with caption: Nick Overall of Norwalk joins volunteers from the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association yesterday in cleaning up and adding new plants to the Adopt a Spot at the corner of Strawberry Hill Avenue and Tierney Street in Norwalk.

July 29, 2005

The Advocate

Adopt-A-Spot needs volunteers

NORWALK -- The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association will Adopt-A-Spot by beautifying a site at Tierney Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Volunteers have prepared the site for planting, which will start at 7 a.m. tomorrow.

Adopt-A-Spot is a community effort for beautifying neighborhoods. Volunteers are needed. For information, call Laurel Lindstrom at 855-7668 or visit eastnorwalk.org.

July 27, 2005

The Advocate

Speed humps go for a test drive City installs last of them before an effectiveness study takes off

By Lisa Chamoff and Brian Lockhart
Staff Writers

NORWALK -- Workers on Delaware Avenue yesterday were busy installing speed humps, the last to be placed on city streets before the public works department reviews their effectiveness and whether other traffic calming methods should be considered on city roadways.

"I'm not going to tell you we'll never put speed humps on another street in Norwalk," Public Works Director Harold Alvord said, noting his office has received requests from 60 other neighborhoods for the devices. "Some streets may, in fact, end up with humps as the most effective means."

But, Alvord said, with money in the 2005-06 budget to hire a traffic engineer and one additional staffer in the traffic department, he wants these new hires to begin considering a more comprehensive, traffic-calming plan.

"We're not going to just make the assumption traffic calming is speed humps," Alvord said. "We're not solving the city's larger problems if we take cut-through traffic on one street and divert it to the next street over."

The city has installed speed humps over the past year on 10 city streets where neighbors have requested the traffic-calming measures for safety reasons.

After neighbors make a request, the city conducts a traffic study, measures the size of the roadway and checks to see whether it is an emergency route before determining whether humps can be installed. Two-thirds of neighbors have to approve the installation.

Speed humps cost about \$3,000 apiece with four speed humps installed on average on each street. Delaware Avenue, a small road, got two; larger streets have received up to six.

Since his election in 2001, Mayor Alex Knopp and the Democrat-majority Common Council have included \$100,000 in the city's annual budget for traffic calming, most of which has been spent on the humps.

Another \$100,000 was included in the 2005-06 budget which began July 1.

"Trying to reduce traffic congestion and improve safety is a major priority of mine," Knopp said yesterday morning.

One Delaware Avenue resident who supported the speed hump petition is Eloise Pendergrast.

"This street is very short, but people speed up it like it's a raceway," she said yesterday.

Speed humps also have been placed this year on Summit Avenue, Melrose Avenue, Crockett Street, Old Trolley Way, Glasser Street, Oakhill Avenue, Magnolia Avenue, Silk Street and Devonshire Road.

Glasser Street resident Mary Cadlett said she initially was concerned because the trenches city workers excavated in the street to build the humps were deep enough to trap a car.

But now that the humps are up, the street is quieting down.

"We had a lot of young people come through very fast . . . they didn't stop, they didn't slow down," Cadlett said. "It's better. They recognize those bumps."

Alvord, however, believes one problem with speed humps is they force traffic onto other roads, creating a new traffic issue.

"We haven't had the time or people to go back out and do an effectiveness study (of speed humps) but . . . my suspicion is on Delaware Avenue the cut-through traffic will drop off significantly and increase significantly on Hudson, the next street up," Alvord said.

Alvord said he hoped to have the two new traffic workers hired by August.

"Then we're going to sit the team down and outline their mission," he said.

Knopp yesterday agreed speed humps are "one part but not the only part" of traffic calming.

Laurel Lindstrom, chairwoman of Advocates for Calm Traffic and president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, which has advocated for traffic calming measures for the past few years, said she was pleased with the speed hump installation. But she said she hoped the city would look to alternatives, such as roundabouts, to deal with traffic.

-- Norwalk Editor Peter Davenport contributed to this story.

July 19, 2005

The Advocate

Renovation plan for Gibbs faces scrutiny tonight

By Ryan Jockers
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- A plan to renovate the former Gibbs College building on East Avenue and build 38 housing units on the riverfront site will be reviewed tonight by two city boards.

The plan calls for converting the 17,000-square-foot building into housing and commercial space. It also calls for building two residential structures, each 31½ stories tall, closer to the river.

Similar to nearby residential construction projects under way along the eastern edge of the Norwalk River, the Gibbs plan would include a public walkway at the river's edge.

The site, 142-144 East Ave., is in the East Norwalk Village District, created two years ago to preserve the neighborhood's character. A district regulation says no more than 18 housing units can be built on a single property.

The developers of the former Gibbs site have proposed amending the regulation to discard the

18-unit cap and add a rule requiring new residential projects to designate 10 percent of its housing as affordable.

The developers --Michael DiScala, who built the Gibbs building, and Albert Phelps, who developed the Merritt 7 corporate park -- have also proposed giving the city a piece of land along the river to be used for extending the public walkway they've proposed on the site.

The developers would pay the city's cost of creating a walkway in the 1,550-square-foot parcel, said their attorney, Frank Zullo, in a June 8 letter to Mayor Alex Knopp.

The plan's proposals to give the city the land and to amend the East Norwalk Village District regulations will be reviewed by the Planning Commission's Land Use Committee, at a meeting scheduled for 7:35 p.m. in City Hall, and by the full commission at 7:45 p.m. , in City Hall.

The Zoning Commission's Plan Review Committee reviewed the plan last Thursday. The committee did not vote on the plan.

DiScala unveiled the plan to the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association in April and said at the time he considered it an opportunity to give the plain, brick Gibbs building an "old, historical" look.

A renovated Gibbs building would include eight housing units and 7,000 square feet of commercial space.

West of the existing building -- toward the river -- the two new residential structures would be built on an existing parking lot. The larger one, 7,781 square feet, would contain 19 units; the other one, 5,410 square feet, would have 14 units.

The architect is Boston-based Cecil Group, which authored the city's plan to rejuvenate the Wall Street area. The city picked DiScala to develop the head-of-the-harbor parcel in the Wall Street plan.

The Gibbs site is located in an area that the city paid a planning firm \$50,000 to study and offer recommendations regarding its growth. The Common Council approved the Mid-Harbor Planning Study, proposed by Chan Krieger & Associates, of Cambridge, Mass., last week.

The study calls the 2.5-acre former Gibbs property "perhaps the greatest single site on the east side" of the river, offering panoramic views of the harbor.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said her group would take a close look at the plan.

"Even before the Mid-Harbor plan, that was a location we identified as important," Lindstrom said. "It was on our watch list."

July 15, 2005
The Hour

Lawmakers urge East Norwalkers to speak up
They support East Norwalk residents who are opposed to
development on Strawberry Hill

development on strawberry hill.

By Jeanne Hoff
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- Local legislators say they support East Norwalk residents' demands for input into proposed developments that may affect the quality of life in their area.

The proposed development of the 2.7 acre former Fitch Elementary School/Lea Manor Health Care Center on Strawberry Hill Avenue prompted two contentious public meetings among developers and members of the East Norwalk Improvement Association and the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

During a meeting of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association Wednesday, residents voiced disapproval for what they considered a project too dense for the area...

July 14, 2005
The Hour

Opposition voiced to Strawberry Hill development

By Jeanne Hoff
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- Members of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association vehemently voiced opposition to proposed development concepts for the former Fitch Elementary School/Lea Manor property.

During the association's monthly meeting held in the Common Council chambers Wednesday, the majority of about 50 area residents indicated in an informal poll that they did not welcome the concepts of Madaket Beach Builders of Greenwich, which is seeking to construct either 26 residential units or 15 single-family detached homes on the 2.7 acre lot, at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave....

July 14, 2005
The Advocate

E. Norwalk residents oppose plan for condos

By James Lomuscio
Special Correspondent

NORWALK -- Dave Fagan considers the old Fitch School at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave. a blight on his East Norwalk neighborhood....Fagan and about 30 members of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, which held its monthly meeting at City Hall last night oppose a plan to demolish the building and construct 26 condominiums on the 2.7 acre site.

the building and construct 26 condominiums on the 2.7 acre site...

July 11, 2005

The Hour

Resident concerned over fate of Lea Manor property

By Jeanne Hoff
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association is urging all resident who live in the area of Strawberry Hill Avenue to attend its monthly meeting Wednesday to learn more about a proposed plan to raze the Lea Manor Health Care Center.

Located at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave., "the building also used to be Fitch elementary school and there is a playground and pond next to the property," said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

Lindstrom is concerned about whether the building will be replaced by something that will seem out of place.

"Apparently, the building is not in good condition, so it's going to be demolished, but the concern of the neighborhood is: 'Is what they're putting in going to fit in the streetscape of the neighborhood?'"

Residents are also concerned with the density of the project, which could worsen area traffic.

During the meeting, which will be held in City Hall room 322 at 7:30 p.m., locals will have the opportunity to directly address David Waters, attorney representing the proposed developers for the site.

"Our third concern," Lindstrom said, "is that the pond and playground be incorporated into the development in a way that can be used by the whole neighborhood."

The developers would like to construct either 26 residential units or 16 homes on the property.

Waters first went before the Plan Review Committee of the Zoning Commission June 23 to present the two proposed development designs.

The committee, thereafter, told Waters to meet with both the East Norwalk Improvement Association and the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

"So often people complain after (the fact). So this is really the time to come forward and make your voice heard," Lindstrom said. "If enough of our neighbors come forward and say they want something, or they don't want something, it's going to carry a lot of weight...So I'm hoping that before an application is submitted to the Planning and Zoning Department some of our concerns or most of our concerns would have been addressed."

July 9, 2005

The Hour

Harbor study goes to council Tuesday

By Robert Koch

Staff Writer

NORWALK -- A \$50,000 planning study that recommends boosting tourism, maintaining a working harbor, and sprucing up Oyster Shell Park is headed to the Common Council on Tuesday.

On Thursday night, the council's Planning Committee recommended that the council adopt the Mid-Harbor Planning Study, as prepared by Chan Krieger & Associates of Cambridge Mass., following a debate of its worth...

Walter O. Briggs, Planning Commission chairman and Mid-Harbor Development Committee co-chairman, said the revised study addressed 75 percent to 80 percent of the concerns raised by the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

The association agreed with many study recommendation, including keeping regional and truck traffic out of neighborhoods near the harbor; but also suggested language revisions to, for example, protect historic architecture at Liberty Square.

Briggs reminded that the development committee rethought building setbacks along North Water Street. The study, as headed to the council, recommends 30-foot setbacks for non-water-dependent uses. Chan Krieger had recommended 100 feet, but the development committee concluded that many existing buildings would not meet the tougher threshold.

July 8, 2005

The Norwalk Citizen-News

East Norwalk Neighborhood Group to Meet

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association will conduct its monthly meeting on Wednesday at 7:30 PM at City Hall in Room 322.

Guest presenters will address two agenda items of special significance to the neighborhood.

Recreation & Parks Director Mike Mocciae and Common Council President Fred Bondi, who is the chairman of the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs Committee, will provide information and answer questions on Norwalk parks, with an emphasis on parks within the association area.

David Waters, the attorney for the owner of 73 Strawberry Hill Avenue, will present a proposal for demolition of the former Fitch School/Lea Manor, next to Fitch Playground, to be replaced with 26 units of housing. An application has yet to be filed with the Planning & Zoning Department,

ENNA Press

so this is an opportunity for public input early in the planning process.

For more information call Laurel Lindstrom at 855-7668 or visit the ENNA website at <http://eastnorwalk.org>.

Note: similar meeting notices ran in the Hour (7/9) and the Advocate (7/11).

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