

## Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association's Coverage by Media



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February 16, 2006

The Hour

### Ex-Gibbs site project gets OK

By Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Developer Michael F. DiScala vowed to spruce up the waterfront of his proposed luxury housing development for the former Katharine Gibbs College site on East Avenue, after residents questioned Wednesday night the development's impact on the Norwalk River.

Zoning commissioners approved the development with several conditions after several residents spoke during a public hearing at City Hall Wednesday night.

"I was very pleased to see the Gibbs property development had been improved to meet the village district criteria. ... I wish every developer would take the time to make such commendable changes. However, my focus here is on environmental protection," said Sarah Hunter, an Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association board member. "It's not just about public access. It's about the environment."

Hunter and others asked commissioners to require an independent environmental impact assessment of the proposed housing development.

Laurel Lindstrom, Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association president, said zoning commissioners approved the development with three conditions: Make the retaining wall an earthen color; add landscaping near the boardwalk and retaining wall; and include planters and rest stops along the boardwalk.

Dianne Witkowsky praised the architecture, but questioned the boardwalk and stone retaining wall "right on the river's edge." Al Raymond, also of the Spring Hill/Norwalk Hospital Area Neighborhood Association, asked for more parking to accommodate residents wishing to use the public boardwalk.

"There should be more parking than 72 spaces," Raymond said.

M.F. DiScala & Co. needed Zoning Commission approval to proceed with the development, which will raze the former college building and construct two 3.5-story buildings, each with 18 residential units and 2,700 square feet of office space, a plaza between, 72 parking spaces and a public boardwalk at 142-144 East Ave.

David F. Waters, the Norwalk attorney representing M.F. DiScala, labeled Hunter's description of the project as "an eyesore" to anyone on the river as hyperbole. He said the project meets all regulations set forth by the city.

"The developer, I can assure you, took your prior comments to heart when they looked at what had been proposed before and came back and said ... let's start with a clean slate," Waters said. "Quite frankly, I think it's a gorgeous project."

Residents frowned upon DiScala's earlier plan to keep the college building. The new plan provides views to the Norwalk River, as set forth in East Norwalk Village District regulations. Both buildings will be set perpendicular to the river, so as not to block views of the water from East Avenue.

Like residents, zoning commissioners also focused on the boardwalk Wednesday.

"Are there any provisions for seating or rest stops along the boardwalk?" asked commissioner Karen Spencer. "If it's going to stretch all the way down from Wall Street, maybe (the public) would like some places to rest."

The city hopes to eventually have public access along the entire riverfront.

A consultant for M.F. DiScala said changes can easily be made to the boardwalk. DiScala, speaking afterward, promised to change the color and construction type of the retaining wall and nearby landscaping.

"We've made some amendments that the retaining wall is going to be enhanced from the riverside," DiScala said.

DiScala said he hopes to begin construction shortly and complete the development by year's end or early next year. "We're getting started and hope we can deliver some (housing) units this year," DiScala said.

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February 15, 2006

The Hour

## Zoners to eye East Ave. housing plan

By Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Zoning Commission will hold a public hearing tonight on a proposed luxury housing development for the former Katherine Gibbs College site on East Avenue.

M.F. DiScala & Co. plans to raze the former college building at 142-144 East Ave. and construct

three dozen residential units in two buildings. The plan also calls for a public boardwalk along the river with access from East Avenue. The proposal requires Zoning Commission approval to move forward.

"We really want to know exactly what people think of the project. We want to hear everything they have to say, so we can make good decisions about the project," said Dorothy Mobilia, commission chairwoman.

The public hearing is scheduled for 7:30 tonight in the Common Council chambers of City Hall, 125 East Ave.

M.F. DiScala last year submitted a plan to keep the college building and construct residential buildings behind it. Some neighbors protested that the plan obstructed their view of Norwalk Harbor. Zoning commissioners were not pleased either.

"I think the sense of the commission was that it was not really a scenic building, especially in the village district that we passed a year ago," Mobilia said.

The revised plan calls for taking down the existing building and building two 3-1/2-story condominium buildings. Each building would feature colonial-style architecture and 18 residential units. There is also 2,700 square feet of general office use.

"Views to the river were the primary reason why we changed our plan completely. We had a real challenge trying to adapt the existing Katherine Gibbs building. ... It blocked a considerable amount of your view," said M.F. DiScala President Michael F. DiScala. "These two buildings will run perpendicular to East Avenue. You're opening up four corridors of site to the river, including a public plaza."

A public boardwalk along the river would be accessible from East Avenue and someday reach to Wall Street, as part of the city's plan for boosting public access to the harbor, DiScala said. The parking plan includes roughly 75 parking space. Of those, two would be made available for public access to the harbor.

Last Wednesday, the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association hosted a presentation by DiScala on the proposed development.

"The questions they raised will hopefully make the public hearing shorter," said David F. Waters, the Norwalk attorney representing M.F. DiScala. "We've been able to create a boardwalk that is Americans with Disabilities Act compliant from north to south. In addition, there is a ramp that runs down from the parking lot. We now have ADA compliance at all points."

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February 15, 2006

The Hour

## Norden site construction gets Planning Commission support

By Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Planning Commission lent its support Tuesday night to Spinnaker Cos.' plan to build 328 apartments and condominiums on the eastern half of the Norden site in East Norwalk.

"They've come in line with what we wanted from that point of view," said commission Chairman Walter O. Briggs, referring to Spinnaker Cos. boosting the affordable-housing portion of the development from 12 to 15 percent. "I'm recommending that we approve this."

Spinnaker Cos. spin-off Norden Place LLC needs Zoning Commission approval to move forward with the housing development on property between NordenPark and the Westport border. The land is now zoned for restricted industrial use.

The Planning and Conversation commissions also must weigh in.

Briggs recommended that the Planning Commission endorsement include caveats, such as ensuring that the development — given its large size — can be adequately served by the Fire Department and other city services.

The Zoning Commission has scheduled a public hearing for March 6. The Conservation Commission, which is awaiting an independent consultant's report on potential wetlands impacts, plans a public hearing on Feb. 28.

Last week, an economist hired by Spinnaker Cos. predicted that the development would add at most 107 students to the city's public school system. A traffic consultant has recommended adding a traffic light at the intersection of Beacon Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue to handle added traffic.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said residents are left to review the wetlands, traffic and economic impact studies before the March 6 public hearing.

"It's a lot to absorb. You have all these studies coming in this month," Lindstrom said.

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February 15, 2006

The Advocate

## Affordable units added to proposal

By John Nickerson  
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- More affordable housing slated for a proposed 328-unit condominium development at NordenPark helped the Planning Commission approve the project last night.

In a unanimous vote, the Planning Commission gave a thumbs-up to a proposed zoning amendment that would allow multifamily housing on the 80-acre property currently zoned for industrial use that straddles the Norwalk-Westport line just south of Interstate 95.

Before the amendment goes to the Zoning Commission for final approval early next month, the

Conservation Commission is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the proposal Feb. 28 and another public hearing in front of the Zoning Commission on March 6.

Last month, NordenPark owners Spinnaker Cos., Greenfield Partners and Summit Development offered to make 12 percent of what was then a 316-unit proposal affordably priced to families earning less than 80 percent of the state median income.

The city has no regulations requiring affordable housing to be part of residential developments. But an 11-member task force charged with examining expanded uses of industrial properties that could stimulate economic activity urged more affordable housing be put on the Norden site.

The Industrial Zones Committee, led by Walter Briggs, who also heads the Planning Commission, called for 15 percent, or 49 units, to be affordable.

Last week, NordenPark owners agreed to the 15 percent mark.

That means 5 percent of the units, which would cost a family of four between \$300,000 and \$500,000, could be purchased for \$178,000. The remaining 10 percent of affordably priced units would target families earning less than 80 percent of the state median income and would cost \$239,000 for a family of four.

"They came in with what we wanted. I would recommend that we approve this," Briggs said before the Planning Commission voted last night.

After the vote, Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said the Planning Commission should have discussed the amendment further.

Lindstrom said affordable housing was not the most important part of the proposal. She said the development would affect traffic, city schools and police and fire protection.

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 Discovery travel company and Pepperidge Farm Inc. They also discussed the possibility of a housing development.

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.

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February 12, 2006

The Hour

Traffic safety issues addressed

By Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — For years, East Norwalk residents have pleaded to the city to do something about speeding on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

"There are so many children who walk. It takes one car to error and it's going to careen into kids. It is a definite problem. There's Naramake Elementary School, there's Norwalk High School and there's Nathan Hale Middle School," said Pine Hill Avenue resident Diane Hatchman, co-president of the Nathan Hale Parent-Teacher Organization. "I definitely think something needs to be done before somebody gets hurt."

At roughly 40 feet wide, Strawberry Hill Avenue south of Interstate 95 is a speeder's paradise. Drivers regularly exceed the posted 25-mph speed limit. The proposed construction of 316 apartments and condominiums on the eastern half of the Norden site, according to East Norwalk residents, will exacerbate the problem.

Now, after years of complaints, help is on the way, according to the Department of Public Works. Department Director Harold F. Alvord has requested \$3.2 million over the next four years to design and install various traffic-calming measures on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Because Strawberry Hill Avenue is designated as an emergency response route for police, ambulances and fire trucks, city officials advise against installing speed bumps, as has been done elsewhere.

"What we would be looking at are textured patterns at intersections, maybe narrowing the roadway. You might do curb extensions," said Richard P. Linnartz, principal engineer at the public works department. "We're looking at a bike route on both sides. We can also look at timing the lights to slow people down."

The exact measures would be spelled out in engineering and design study. Alvord has requested \$80,000 in his 2006-07 capital budget submission to launch the design work. He is seeking an additional \$3.1 million through 2009 to construct the traffic-calming measures. Whether the Common Council will approve the expenditures, as it adopts a 2006-07 capital budget in April, remains to be seen. Alvord is among more than a dozen city department heads — and the school district — competing for limited dollars.

Thomas S. Hamilton, city finance director, has recommended against the \$80,000 sought for the coming year, as well as the nearly \$3.1 million through 2009.

Linnartz said the city would seek local and federal grants to offset the costs. Some grant programs, he said, could cover 80 percent of the costs.

Linnartz said the width of Strawberry Hill Avenue encourages speeding. The speeders, for the most part, are local residents, he said.

Police Chief Harry W. Rilling described the public works' capital request as the engineering leg of a multi-faceted approach to curbing speeding: education, enforcement and engineering. Rilling said the mayor's Slow-Down Week, slated to begin March 20, will address education and enforcement, and be repeated three to four times annually. Each event, he said, will focus on a particular problem, such as speeding, wearing seat belts, talking on cellular telephones, turning and aggressive driving.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said her organization will focus on speeding on Strawberry Hill Avenue in March. The mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee has discussed installing 20-mph signs along those sections of Strawberry Hill Avenue near schools, he said.

Lindstrom said no one measure will eliminate speeding. She said many drivers simply need a reminder — either another speed-limit sign or traffic ticket — to slow them down to the posted speed limit.

"It's going to be a combination of things," Lindstrom said. "If you're going to have 20-mph signs, you absolutely have to have enforcement."

Mark Palmer, deputy police chief, said speeding has been a problem on Strawberry Hill Avenue throughout his three decades service with the police department. He also stressed education, enforcement and engineering. "There is no one answer to speeding," he said.

On enforcement, Palmer said police do issue warnings and citations to speeders along Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Hatchman isn't so sure. She said she hasn't seen one driver pulled over and issued a ticket in the eight years that she has lived in the neighborhood.

For Hatchman, stop signs and traffic lights are the only sure solution to curbing speeding. She said the traffic light installed on Strawberry Hill at Norden Place last year has slowed drivers.

"If you're going to slow down traffic, you've going to have to stop it," Hatchman said. Linnartz, meanwhile, reminds that some drivers ignore stop signs and traffic lights.

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February 12, 2006

## The Advocate

### Moccia seeks to bump speed-hump program

By Brian Lockhart  
Staff Writer

NORWALK -- The city's speed-hump program may have reached the end of the road.

Mayor Richard Moccia will ask the Board of Estimate and Taxation tomorrow to approve using the \$100,000 budgeted for devices to slow traffic on city streets to instead repave a portion of East Avenue.

"They don't work," Moccia, a Republican elected in November, said of speed humps. "They're not good on short streets, the plows have trouble, they are a hazard to the undercarriage of cars, and some of these bigger SUVs like to use them as launch ramps. The more important issue is to get East Avenue paved."

East Avenue would be repaved from Interstate 95 to Winfield Street for \$150,000, \$50,000 of which remains from last year's repaving project on the other end of East Avenue.

The capital budget change also requires Common Council approval.

Moccia has the support of Public Works Director Harold Alvord, who agrees the humps create problems for snowplows and emergency vehicles.

The speed-hump initiative began about six years ago as a pilot program. They were installed at the Roodner Court public housing complex in South Norwalk and the Colonial Village public housing complex in the central part of the city.

Former Mayor Alex Knopp and the Common Council expanded the program after the 2001 election, including \$100,000 in the annual budget for the \$3,000 devices.

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 must support the installation.

As the list of streets requesting the humps grew to more than 60, council members began questioning the program's future. One public hearing in 2004 on the program drew more than 100 residents.

Other council members wondered if the humps simply shifted traffic onto neighboring streets, causing those residents to appeal to the city for the speed-control devices.

Although an additional \$100,000 was budgeted in the 2005-06 budget, Alvord made it clear last year that he wanted to review the humps' effectiveness and consider other traffic-slowing strategies. The last speed hump was installed in July along Delaware Avenue.

But Alvord's effort to create a citywide plan faces its own hurdle. Finance Director Thomas Hamilton did not include a \$125,000 capital budget request to develop a citywide traffic-slowing plan in a list of budget recommendations issued Feb. 2.

Alvord, however, can still convince Moccia, the Planning Commission and Common Council to support the expenditure.

In the meantime, he finds himself occasionally having to disappoint residents.

"When I get letters or e-mails saying, 'We requested speed humps years ago, where are they?' I tell them we have to wait for the study," Alvord said. "Your street may or may not warrant some traffic calming measure, which may or may not be speed humps."

Common Council President Michael Coffey, a Democrat, agreed the city's speed-hump policies warrant scrutiny.

"I can't say I think they're the answer or not the answer," Coffey said. "There needs to be a multifaceted approach to calming traffic and speed enforcement."

But Coffey added that there should be public comment before the city decides to make "a sudden policy change" and move the \$100,000 to paving.

"In the past, the community has been in favor of" speed humps, Coffey said.

Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association President Laurel Lindstrom has been a vocal

supporter of speed humps and other traffic-slowing measures. She said she recently complained to Moccia about speeders along Strawberry Hill Avenue and wondered why he could not find the paving dollars in another account.

"(East Avenue) is difficult to drive on. There's large ruts so it badly needs paving," Lindstrom said. "But why traffic calming? Speed humps do work. They aren't the total answer, but you can't simply say 'they don't.' "

Eloise Pendergast signed a petition to install the humps along Delaware Avenue and believes they have made a big difference.

"I'm telling you it was like a hot rod street. I didn't have young ones, but there are children up here riding bikes," Pendergast said. "They did a good job and I really think it's much better."

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February 9, 2006

## The Advocate

### Critic changes views on plan for East Avenue site

By John Nickerson  
Staff Writer

February 9, 2006

NORWALK -- A revised plan to redevelop the old Gibbs College building on East Avenue into condos and office space has won over its staunchest critic.

Courtenay Austin, who moved into a home across the street 34 years before Gibbs arrived in 1974, hired a Bridgeport attorney to block plans that included a facelift for the brick-box college and two new buildings.

One of the new buildings would block her view of the river.

That plan was scrapped last fall and the whole project redesigned.

After seeing drawings of the two new clapboard and shingle buildings proposed for the site at a meeting last night, Austin gave her consent.

"I think it is much nicer. I can live with this," Austin said after the meeting, hosted by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association at City Hall.

The plan, proposed by building owners Michael DiScala and Albert Phelps, would locate 36 condominium units and 5,400 square feet of office space in the two new buildings.

DiScala said last night that the Colonial-style buildings topped with cupolas would "fit the Colonial fabric of East Avenue."

The Zoning Commission has scheduled a public hearing Wednesday on the proposal.

Between the two identical buildings, which would rise 21 1/2 stories above East Avenue, would be a private courtyard and public plaza.

DiScala's attorney, David Waters, said the placement of the buildings will preserve views of the river.

"Instead of a building that spans the property, you will have two buildings that run front to back," Waters said.

As part of the plan, a raised boardwalk next to the river, measuring 12 feet wide, will connect with an existing walkway to the north and one planned to the south, Waters said.

A retaining wall as tall as 10 feet high will run the length of the boardwalk, which will be handicap accessible, Waters said.

Above the boardwalk, planters are planned.

Landscaping around the building was being designed to include native species of plants and pervious surfaces to reduce water runoff into the river, Waters said.

Proposed swirl chambers in catch basins around the property are supposed to remove 80 percent of soils and oil from water runoff, Waters said.

Common Council member William Krummel, who attended the meeting, said he was impressed by the plan and the use of native species of plants around the property.

But he said he was concerned that tearing up ground to remove invasive species would cause sediment to flow into the river.

Waters said the plants would be suffocated with plastic and the property replanted without damaging the river.

Neighborhood association member Marjia Bryant the plan was "very nice" but she was concerned that the boardwalk would remove a natural aspect of the riverfront. She suggested that public access to the river be given in certain spots but not along the entire property.

Waters said the boardwalk was called for by zoning regulations that eventually plan for a bikeway around the entire harbor.

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February 7, 2006

## The Hour

### Developer to showcase plans for ex-Gibbs site

By ROBERT KOCH  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Residents can weigh in Wednesday night on a proposed luxury housing development for the former Katherine Gibbs College site on East Avenue.

The Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association will host a presentation by developer M.F. DiScala & Co., whose latest plan calls for razing the former college building at 142-144 East Ave. and constructing three-dozen residential units

and constructing three dozen residential units.

"It's a chance for the public, if they would like, to look at the plan in advance of the public hearing," said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the neighborhood association. "This is a time where anyone who is interested can look at the plan and ask any questions."

The presentation is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in Room A333 of Norwalk City Hall, 125 East Ave. A question-and-answer period will follow.

The Zoning Commission has scheduled a public hearing on the development for Feb. 15. M.F. DiScala needs a special permit from the commission to proceed with the development.

Michael F. DiScala, president of M.F. DiScala & Co., said the redesigned proposal, which calls for razing the former Gibbs College building and constructing two condominium buildings perpendicular to the river, leaves better views of the river and more open space than the original plan submitted last year.

"Because of the way the buildings are shaped — east to west — you have improved views to the river," DiScala said. "Before you had the Gibbs building and all blacktop. Now you'll have more open space."

"It's much improved over the previous plan. It's two buildings now with a plaza in between. The buildings don't block the view of the river. That's part of what's recommended with the East Norwalk Village District," Lindstrom said.

DiScala said the proposal now under consideration by the city's Zoning Commission calls for two 3.5-story buildings that would appear lower because of their location set below East Avenue. Each building would feature colonial-style architecture with some brick construction and blend well with the neighborhood. A plaza would be situated between the buildings, he said.

Each building would contain 18 residential units and 2,700 square feet of general office use, according to David F. Waters of Lepofsky, Lepofsky & Lang, the Norwalk law firm representing M.F. DiScala & Co.

DiScala said Waters will give a presentation on the proposed development at Wednesday night's meeting. DiScala will answer questions about the development.

The development proposal for 142-144 East Ave. also calls for a public boardwalk along the Norwalk River. DiScala said the boardwalk would be accessible from East Avenue, comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and someday reach to Wall Street, as part of the city's plan for public access to the harbor.

In March 2005, the Common Council approved M.F. DiScala & Co. as the selected developer for the harborhead area within the city's Wall Street Redevelopment Plan.

There, to the north, DiScala plans 20 townhouses in four-story buildings facing Main Street; retail, restaurants and 61 residential units in a six-story building on Wall and High Streets; and a 294-space parking structure built between them.

Between Smith Street and the Norwalk River will rise a five to seven-story condominium building with 80 units and 156 parking spaces. A 15-foot-wide boardwalk is planned for along the river

with 50 units and 150 parking spaces. A 15-foot-wide boardwalk is planned for along the river for public use.

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February 1, 2006

## The Hour

### Residents: Norden Place to add to traffic headache

By ROBERT KOCH  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Residents scoffed Tuesday night at projected traffic counts for the 316-unit housing development under consideration for the eastern half of the Norden site.

"We already have trouble going out of our lot," said Norden Place resident Lizzie Scott, speaking during an informational meeting at the East Norwalk Library. "You go by the book. We go by reality. (The housing) is not built yet. You do not have the reality of traffic coming out of there."

At issue is Norden Place LLC's plan, now under review by the city's Planning and Zoning commissions, to build 316 apartments and condominiums 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.

Norden Place LLC — a joint venture of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC, Greenfield Partners and Summit Development — submitted to the city last fall plans for "Norden Park Proposed Multi-Family Residential Community. For the development to move forward, the city's Zoning Commission must approve a zoning amendment allowing multi-family housing on property zoned for restricted industrial use; the Conservation Commission must consider wetlands impacts.

Spinnaker has offered to price 25 of the 316 units for persons or families earning 80 percent of the state median in-come. Thirteen of the affordably priced units would be reserved for those earning 60 percent of the state median income.

Frank N. Zullo, attorney for Norden Place LLC, reiterated a draft report by the city's Industrial Zones Committee. The report recommends allowing multi-family housing on the property and allowing the city to request that 15 percent of the units be price affordably.

Tuesday night's informational meeting, hosted by the East Norwalk Business Association and the East Norwalk Improvement Association, drew about 70 people. Many of the roughly 20 speakers expressed concern over traffic; others said the development will overload schools.

Candace Schafer, project manager with Spinnaker, walked residents through plans, renditions and a three-dimensional model showing the apartments and townhouses.

A wetlands consultants hired by Norden Place LLC said the development will replace invasive plants with native species and enhance wetlands on the property.

Norden Place LLC hired Tighe & Bond, a traffic consulting firm, to study existing traffic near

Norden Place, and then project additional vehicle trips from the development.

"This project is going to generate new traffic," said Joseph C. Balskus, traffic engineer with Tighe & Bond. "What I'm telling you is that (the proposed development) will accommodate the traffic."

Tighe & Bond recommends adding a traffic light at the intersection of Beacon Street and Strawberry Hill. Gallagher said 100 vehicles would leave the development during the morning rush period and 100 vehicles would return during the afternoon rush period.

"There's 300 units. How can it be 100 cars?" asked Al Raymond, vice president of the Spring Hill/Norwalk Hospital Area Neighborhood Association.

"Not everybody leaves at the same time," answered Balskus.

Addressing noise on Interstate 95, Spinnaker Principal Clayton H. Fowler said Norden Place LLC would like to build a noise barrier.

John Lombardi, a former common councilman, challenged the developers to drive the streets near his home. "I defy you to come to William Street or Derry Farm Road and take a left turn," he said.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, predicted traffic will become more congested. She encouraged Spinnaker officials to tie the development into train and shuttle service.

Fowler, speaking afterward, said Norden Place LLC will look at other intersections mentioned by residents to see if they warrant additional study.

"We respect the fact that the traffic is a serious neighborhood concern, and we'll do everything we can to mitigate it," Fowler said.

Kevin Emro, president of the East Norwalk Improvement Association, said his organization typically doesn't take positions on developments.

Winthrop Baum, president of the business association, however, said his group supports the development "because Norwalk desperately needs affordable housing."

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January 31, 2006

## The Hour

Housing plans for Norden on view

## Developer to outline the project for East Norwalkers tonight

By ROBERT KOCH  
Hour Staff Writer

## ENNA Press

NORWALK — Norden Place LLC will roll out to East Norwalk residents tonight its plans for 316 apartments and condominiums on the eastern half of the Norden property.

"We'll have our traffic people and environmental people and our counsel," said Clayton H. Fowler, principal with Spinnaker Cos., a partner in Norden Place LLC. "We'll present the program of the project, the architecture, the thinking behind it, and talk about some of the traffic and environmental issues, and the community benefits of the project, which is affordable housing."

The informational meeting, which was requested by several East Norwalk organizations, is scheduled for 7 tonight in the downstairs hall of the East Norwalk Library, 51 Van Zant St. In November, Norden Place LLC — a joint venture of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC, Greenfield Partners and Summit Development — submitted to the city's Planning and Zoning Department plans for "Norden Park Proposed Multi-Family Residential Community."

The development, now under review by the city's Planning and Zoning commissions, 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.

Norden Place LLC needs a zoning amendment from the Zoning Commission to permit multi-family housing. The Zoning Commission has scheduled a public hearing for March 1. The Conservation Commission, which has hired an outside consultant to study wetlands impacts, plans a public hearing on Feb. 14.

For now, residents and several East Norwalk organizations are monitoring the development proposal. Hosting tonight's informational meeting are the East Norwalk Business Association and the East Norwalk Improvement Association.

"(The proposed development) has impacts on what's happening in East Norwalk — on traffic, schools and many things," said Terry Rooney, past president of the improvement association. "People might want to ask questions."

Plans submitted by Norden Place LLC show 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.

Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said she has attended at least a dozen meetings addressing the Norden development.

On Aug. 18, Spinnaker officials gave board members a tour of the site, she said. Lindstrom considers tonight's presentation — although not a public hearing — the first opportunity for the public to ask questions.

"I have heard from about a dozen or more people by phone and by e-mail, who are concerned about the size of the development and the impact," Lindstrom said. "It's important for the residents to have an opportunity to hear about the proposal and asked questions before the public hearings take place."

Lindstrom said the ENNA board of directors wants to hear public comments before taking a stance on the housing development.

For now, Lindstrom said board members have concerns similar to those voiced by residents. She added that the board supports "building more affordable housing, but not if the density that the developer would expect to have approved by the Zoning Commission is destructive to the existing neighborhood."

Spinnaker Cos. officials say the plan will provide housing for a variety of income spectrums on land that now is underused and likely will not be developed with industry — for which it is now zoned — given changing economic patterns.

A draft report approved last week by the city's Industrial Zones Committee recommends allowing multi-family housing on the Norden property and requiring that 15 percent of the resulting units be priced affordably.

Spinnaker Cos., in response to zoning commissioners, boosted from 10 percent to 12 percent the number of affordable housing units within the development. That translates to 38 units. Of those, 25 would be priced for persons or families earning 80 percent of the state median income; the remaining 13 units would be reserved for those earning 60 percent of the state median income.

Earlier this month, traffic consultant Leonard A. Liss of Tighe & Bond, the firm hired by Norden Place, presented the results of traffic counts performed in early June. Liss concluded that the intersection of Beacon Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue posed the only problem. There, he recommended a traffic light.

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January 20, 2006

## The Hour

### Neighborhood groups sound off on Master Plan

Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — More than a dozen residents weighed in on Norwalk's unfolding master plan during a public workshop at City Hall on Thursday night.

The updated Master Plan of Conservation and Development, slated for completion this summer, ultimately will guide development. Over the last several years, it has garnered plenty of input from residents and neighborhood associations.

Thursday night's workshop before the Land Use Committee of the Planning Commission was no exception.

"Norwalk is not just Silvermine or South Norwalk or Rowayton or Golden Hill. It is all of them. Each of them has their own special character," said Robert Wagman, coordinator of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations. "Future development in any neighborhood ... must be done with a sensitivity."

"We have to protect the character of our neighborhoods," Wagman said.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, asked that the Planning Commission include in the final master plan a section addressing individual neighborhoods.

On Thursday, Wagman, Lindstrom and others critiqued the draft planning principles that will be worked into the updated master plan. Most speakers praised the commission for its work, while pointing out what they consider to be omissions.

Among their requests: Mind the impact of development on infrastructure; set a timeline for achieving master plan goals; curb construction of "McMansions" on small lots; require parks and open space with multi-family housing; add language on the Norwalk River and harbor; and eliminate illegal housing.

"It is so tough to enforce the zoning laws that we do have on the books. We've been fighting illegal apartments for a long time," said James Del Greco, president of the Golden Hill Neighborhood Association.

District E Councilman Douglas E. Hempstead, who has been critical of the slow progress on the master plan, pointed out what he found to be discrepancies in the planning principles. He then turned to his major concern: The impact of development on road, schools and other infrastructure.

"I have to ask how much growth can Norwalk can take under the present infrastructure, and at what point do we (reach) critical mass and pour a lot of money into the infrastructure?" Hempstead said.

Torgny Astrom, Land Use Committee chairman, said the Planning Commission hopes to finish the master plan update by August.

Astrom outlined progress to date, including reviewing the 1990 plan, tapping residents, associations and city departments for input, holding neighborhood public workshops, and hiring urban planning consultants for areas of the city.

Walter O. Briggs, commission chairman, said there will be three more public hearings before the Common Council and mayor adopt the plan. The commission will hire an outside consultant to put the master plan together.

Astrom invited residents to submit further comments on the draft planning principles to the Planning Commission by Feb. 15.

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January 19, 2006

## The Hour

### Public's views sought on master plan

Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Neighborhood input into the city's unfolding master plan will be the topic of a public workshop at City Hall tonight.

"With all of the neighborhood associations, we've distilled what we think they said," said Walter

O. Briggs, Planning Commission chairman. "Now we're going back and having a conversation with them. 'Did we get what you said?'"

The Land Use Committee of the Planning Commission will hold the workshop to discuss planning principles that will be worked into the Master Plan of Conservation and Development. The workshop is scheduled for 7 p.m. in the Community Room of Norwalk City Hall, 125 East Ave.

The Planning Commission is entering the final phase of updating the master plan. The update — mandated every 10 years by the state — will shape zoning regulations that will guide development and quality-of-life issues for residents.

The draft planning principles, a 27-page document posted on the city's Web site, lay out goals for land use and zoning, the environment and natural resources, economic development, housing, infrastructure, utilities, parking, transportation, community and cultural facilities, parks, recreation, open space and urban design.

As part of the update, the commission has tapped neighborhood associations for input, as the city engaged consultants for areas deemed by former Mayor Alex Knopp as subject to development pressures in the near future.

The Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association is among the groups paying attention to the unfolding master plan. In April 2004, the association submitted its "mini-master plan" to the city. Laurel Lindstrom, association president, said the group's board of directors met five hours Tuesday to discuss the draft principles in preparation for tonight's workshop.

"(The city) listened to everything the neighborhood associations said, but what the associations did not agree on, they left out. That makes for a very watered-down plan. You're not supporting anything unique to that neighborhood," Lindstrom said. "Overall, we're concerned. We definitely feel that there are things that need to be changed. We definitely see some things we're concerned about."

Traffic and development have long been concerns in East Norwalk. Lindstrom said the final master plan must not automatically call for widening roads, which she said results in speeding and local roads "that look like major highways."

Said Lindstrom: "If there is something missing now, or something we don't agree with, this is the time we point that out to (the commission)."

The draft planning principles may be found online at <http://www.norwalkct.org/CityDept/planzon.asp>.

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January 13, 2006

The Hour

City finds funds to finish East Ave.

Patrick Linsey  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The southern stretch of East Avenue will be repaved this summer, Mayor Richard A. Moccia announced Thursday, after the Department of Public Works located surplus funds to cover the improvements.

Norwalk delayed repaving the thoroughfare because the state had planned road work on East Avenue near the I-95 junction. The DPW recently repaved East Avenue from I-95 to Wall Street.

"After learning that the state is still in limbo on the Exit 16 exchange project, and that the East Norwalk Railroad bridge project may not begin until 2010, I have charged our DPW Director (Harold Alvord) to look at all of his projects to see where some additional funds might be available," Moccia said in a statement Thursday.

The department was able to locate surplus funds from the repaving of northern East Avenue, said Drew Berndlmaier, a DPW senior civil engineer.

"We thought we would need more extensive construction," Berndlmaier explained. "A lot of the time you have to reconstruct the road base as well, but we didn't have to reconstruct the road base on East Avenue due to the concrete base that is still sound and in place under the asphalt."

Moccia said the southern stretch of East Avenue was a source of many complaints. "The East Norwalk Business Association, individual constituents ... It has been a wide variety of people who have had concerns about that," Moccia said.

It's about time the road was resurfaced, said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association. Lindstrom said she was thrilled to hear the news.

"It's horrific. It's almost like not driving with paving at all," she said. "There's rough edges and it dips down and it's really uneven. It's very difficult to drive on at the moment."

The project is slated to start in June.

Said Moccia: "We don't want to tie people up using East Avenue for the schools."

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January 13, 2006

## The Hour

### [More affordable housing offered by Norden Place](#)

Robert Koch  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Spinnaker Cos. officials pitched to city Zoning commissioners Thursday night more affordable housing, as part of their planned 316-unit housing development for the Norden property.

Clayton H. Fowler, Spinnaker Cos. principal, told commissioners that the affordable housing portion of the project has been boosted from 10 to 12 percent.

The adjustment translates to 38 units, of which 25 would be targeted at those earning 80 percent of the state median income; 13 would be aimed at persons or families earning 60 percent of the state median income.

"The housing prices for those income (ranges) are \$239,000 for the 80-percent group and \$178,000 for the 60-percent group. Those are hundreds of thousands of dollars below our costs, not tens, and we're willing to do that. One, it's the right thing to do, and two, we can make it up," Fowler said. "The rest will probably cost in the \$400,000 to \$500,000 range."

In November, Norden Place LLC — a joint venture of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC, Greenfield Partners and Summit Development — submitted to the city's Planning and Zoning Department plans for 316 townhouses and condominiums between NordenPark and the Norwalk-Westport border.

In their first pass at the plans in December, zoning commissioners asked Spinnaker officials to boost the affordable housing component above the 10-percent mandatory requirement.

On Thursday night, reaction ranged from outright praise from commissioners Andrea Light and David Watts, to praise mixed with requests for further tweaks.

"I (had) asked you to possibly consider 15 percent (affordable housing)," said Dorothy Mobilia, Zoning Commission chairwoman. "You're talking numbers, but I'm talking families. This is a national problem."

Frank N. Zullo, former mayor and land-use attorney for Norden Place, described 36 affordably priced units as a large subsidy — the limit.

Michael Greene, the city's Planning and Zoning director, said developers including 15 percent affordable units receive development bonuses, but added that the additional units must be priced for those earning 100 percent of the state median income.

"I think that this project, at this particular time, is a step in the right direction," Watts said. The shortage of affordable housing "is a crisis here in this city, and we have to do something about it."

Earlier in the evening, traffic consultant Leonard A. Liss of Tighe & Bond, the firm hired by Norden Place, presented the results of traffic counts performed in early June. Liss concluded that the intersection of Beacon Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue posed the only problem. There, he recommended a traffic light.

Liss pitched a housing development as preferable to a large industrial development, which current zoning would allow. He said an 800,000-square-foot industrial building would generate 1,000 vehicle trips at morning and afternoon rush hours. By contrast, 316 housing units would generate 130 vehicle trips at morning rush hour, and 150 vehicles trips in the afternoon, he said.

East Norwalk residents, long frustrated with traffic, have reacted coolly to the proposed Norden site development, as well as the planned 235-unit housing development for the Pepperidge Farm property on Westport Avenue.

Attending the Norden presentation Thursday night was Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

EASTERN NORWALK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION.

"It's a big project and there's all those different aspects — the traffic, the affordable housing, the design and the site plan," Lindstrom said afterward. "It's fine that the Zoning Commission is looking for affordable housing, but they have to take the same energy and focus for all those other elements as well."

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January 13, 2006

## The Advocate

### Panel pushes for affordable units: Review continues of NordenPark plan

By Brian Lockhart  
Staff Writer

January 13, 2006

NORWALK -- Affordable housing dominated last night's review of a proposal to build 316 condominium units at

NordenPark, the Cold War-era industrial site off of Strawberry Hill Avenue that now houses a mix of uses and acres of open space.

Applicant NordenPlace LLC wants the Zoning Commission to amend the regulations to allow multifamily housing on 38 acres of the 80-acre property.

The commission's Zoning Committee last night concluded its preliminary review of the proposal, begun last month, and scheduled a special public hearing for March 1.

Although NordenPlace presented a traffic study, Zoning Committee members were more concerned with how many affordable units the developer could voluntarily include.

When the application was first submitted in late November, NordenPlace offered to make 32, or 10 percent, of the units affordable to families earning less than 80 percent of the state median income, or \$65,000, for a family of four.

But Zoning Committee members at their December meeting encouraged more units.

Last night, NordenPlace partner Clayton Fowler proposed an additional six units be considered affordable, bringing the number to 12 percent of total.

He said 4 percent of the units would be for families making less than 60 percent of the median income, or \$49,135 for a family of four.

"It's the right thing to do and we can make it up on the rest of the units" by pricing them from the low \$400,000s to the low \$500,000s, Fowler said.

Zoning Commission Chairwoman Dorothy Mobilia said she recognizes that Fowler has been involved in several developments in the city that voluntarily provide affordable housing because Norwalk currently lacks no set policies forcing builders to include it.

"We realize that, respect it, appreciate it, thank you for it," Mobilia said. But, she asked, would making 15 percent of the units affordable "really break you?"

"This is the biggest tract (of land) available. When it goes, it goes," Mobilia said.

"We feel we're going above and beyond," Fowler said, noting the city could encourage other developers to include affordable units in their projects.

He also said the project, which is expected to take three years to build, will generate \$3 million to \$6 million in additional tax revenue within five years and bring business to local merchants.

Zoning Committee member Jackie Lightfield suggested NordenPlace could reach that 15 percent more cheaply if it considered building a few studio apartments.

"Who's going to live in those?" Fowler said.

"Singles who work here," Lightfield said.

Committee member David Watts said it is crucial the city build more affordable housing, but also appeared willing to settle on NordenPlace's existing offer.

"Whether it's 12 percent or 15 percent, I think this project at this time is a step in the right direction," Watts said.

Earlier in the meeting, staff from NordenPlace's traffic consultant, Tighe & Bond, presented a study of the impact the housing would have on surrounding neighborhoods.

For 40 years, Norden Systems built radar and other electronic systems for the military within a 660,000-square-foot building at NordenPark.

The structure now houses a downsized Norden operation, as well as tenants such as Gibbs College, Tauck World Discovery travel company and baker Pepperidge Farm Inc.

Tighe & Bond's analysts concluded that with the addition of the condominiums, neighboring intersections would continue to operate well if the developer places a new traffic signal at Strawberry Hill Avenue and Beacon Street, widens NordenPark's central drive and creates left-turn slots in the entrances.

The study said that residential use would result in far less traffic than if the city insisted the property remain in the market for future industrial use.

The study was not questioned by Zoning Committee members, which concerned East Norwalk Neighborhood Association President Laurel Lindstrom.

"There are issues beyond affordable (housing)," Lindstrom said. "It's important but I want to make sure they don't lose track of everything else. They're a Zoning Commission. They can't just focus on one issue."

The condominium plan also is being reviewed by the Conservation Commission, which will hold a Feb. 14 public hearing.

The Planning Commission must also weigh in on the project, but awaits the results of a study

analyzing the city's dormant industrial properties and whether zoning changes such the one NordenPlace LLC is seeking to allow housing should be considered.

That study is due by the end of the month.

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January 11, 2006

## The Advocate

### Condo developer to pay fee for study -Panel to seek help reviewing Norden plan

Ryan Jockers  
Staff Writer

Excerpt: Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association President Laurel Lindstrom said she would withhold judgment on the proposal. "I'm interested to see if they've avoided the wetlands and if there's any issues there," she said. "So, I'm listening to the expertise here."

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