



## Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association In the News



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March 17, 2008  
Festival, plantings affirm Norwalk 's commitment to trees

By Press Release  
NorwalkPlus

Norwalk intends to plant at least 100 to 150 trees this year as part of a progressive approach to urban forestry that has already accorded the city the elite distinction as a " Tree City U.S.A. "

The arboreal initiative also extends to the second Norwalk Tree Festival May 3 (Saturday) at Shady Beach, an Arbor Day Celebration April 25 at Rowayton Elementary School and a revitalization of a network of volunteers called neighborhood tree liaisons.

A maple sugar sampling, games with chestnuts patterned after the British rite known as "Conkers," a puppet show and a strolling musician in woodsy garb have been added to the tree rope climb for kids that was so popular at the inaugural festival of family fun last year in Lockwood Mathews Park.



Dave Tracy, president of the Norwalk Tree Alliance, tall measurement of Norwalk state championship sourwoc in Riverside Cemetery .

There is no charge for admission and no charge for hamburgers, hotdogs, soda and popcorn to be dispensed by the grilling team furnished by the Norwalk Exchange Club. On site, there will also be displays of the latest tree-care tools and demonstrations on how to plant and nurture trees.

Tree plantings projected for the spring and fall are consistent with the numbers jointly conducted with c

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funding over the past 2 1/2 years by Hal Alvord's Public Works Department and the Parks and Recreation Department where the director Mike Mocciaie has been a fixture for 24 years.

They enhance the city's streets, 75 parks and the property of private homeowners.

Usually the nursery-grown transplants are eight feet to 12 feet in height --dogwoods, London planetrees & zelkovas, a form of the elm that has virtually disappeared in America because of Dutch elm disease.

The species are augmented at strategic locations by magnolias, sycamores, red oaks, sugar maples, lila cherries, crabapples--and by 37 varieties of shrubs.

The sites are identified in part by a network of volunteers like landscape architects Mike Mushak and Ni Overall who serve as neighborhood tree liaisons representing two of Norwalk 's 18 neighborhood associations. In terms of the municipal land mass, the neighborhood associations cover less than half.

Both Mushak and Overall have been liaisons for three years or so and the Norwalk Tree Alliance and the Norwalk Tree Advisory Committee—the co-sponsors of the Shady Beach festival and other tree enterprise are looking for volunteers like them to give the city more complete coverage and a push towards restoring the urban timber stands.

An 85-page "Guidebook for Volunteers showcasing 35 species of trees and 15 shrubs—all illustrated with photos--has been compiled for those without backgrounds in trees and urban forest preservation. Anyone interested in volunteering can obtain additional information by contacting Alvord, the city's tree warden (203) 854-7791 or online at [halvord@norwalkct.org](mailto:halvord@norwalkct.org).

Mushak represents the Golden Hill Neighborhood Association and lives in the historic district. He says the reforestation is helping to re-establish "the cathedral-like tree canopy that once enriched the neighborhood creating an intimacy that softens the urban edges like curbs and driveways."

"Trees," he says, "add a lot to any neighborhood, esthetically and ecologically. They cool the streets and temper the urban heat by diffusing the sun's reflection off the asphalt. They cleanse the air by trapping dust. They convert CO2 to oxygen. They have an inherent primal attraction." And they define property lines & elevate property values.

Adds Overall, representing the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association: "It's one facet where I can contribute. My background in landscaping enables me to help improve the community in a reasonably effective manner."

Under contract with the city, the Almstead Tree & Shrub Care Company oversees the plantings. The work extends this season to 26 trees and 87 shrubs in Lockwood Mathews Park, bordering the initial section of Norwalk River Valley Trail, a 10-foot-wide strip of asphalt that runs about a mile now between Union Park and the Maritime Aquarium. Essentially the trail is designed for recreation, configured for bikers, hikers and in winter, cross-country skiers.

Ultimately, says trail advocate Dan Landau, the vice president of the Norwalk Tree Alliance and a cyclist himself, the intention is to extend both ends—north to the Wilton line and eventually south to Calf Pasture Beach.

The beach and adjoining Shady Beach —where the tree festival is to be reprised Saturday, May 3—are locations identified for the type of revitalization that has gained Norwalk acclaim from the National Arbor Day Foundation as "Tree City U.S.A." for three years running. Only 11 other Connecticut communities qualified for the recognition in 2007.

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The festival activities unfold under open tents from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. rain or shine, with hourly door prizes a list of exhibitors such as the Stamford Museum and Nature Center, American Chestnut Foundation, Norwalk Land Trust, DoubleTree Hotel, CL&P and others. Information is available by calling (203) 854-320

U.S. Arbor Day activities—organized around a tree-planting--precede the Festival April 25 at Rowayton Elementary School, starting at 1:45 p.m.

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October 10, 2007

### Revaluation subject of tax assessor's information session

#### **NORWALK**

By MAX HADLER  
Hour Staff Writer

Tax Assessor Michael J. Stewart and others are scheduled to explain the 2008 property revaluation and fi questions during a meeting of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association at City Hall tonight.

"This is their (neighborhood association) meeting, but we're making a presentation to them," Stewart sa "We're going to talk about different aspects of the revaluation process. I generally talk about the proce scheduling and essentially the need to get good data."

Also expected to speak and answer questions are Director of Finance Thomas S. Hamilton and a representative from J.F. Ryan Associates, the appraisal firm hired by the city to assist with the revaluation

The revaluation is aimed at determining accurate values for Norwalk's 29,300 real estate parcels and th city's Oct. 1, 2008, Grand List.

Tonight's presentation is scheduled for 7:30 to 8:30 tonight in Room 333 of City Hall 125 East Ave. The neighborhood association's regular meeting will follow the event.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the neighborhood association, said association board members and East Norwalk residents are very interested in the revaluation, which got underway this summer and will wrap next year.

"Reval(uation) is always a very stressful and hot topic. I'm hoping that what (residents) can do is be abl get questions answered right from the source," said Lindstrom, referring to tonight's speakers. Residents ' going to be able to get facts and at the same time have their input."

While tonight's presentation and question-and-answer session are targeted at East Norwalk residents, al Norwalk residents are welcome, according to Lindstrom.

"I think that a lot of the questions are general and will apply to everyone everywhere," Lindstrom said.

Stewart said the city's official home page at [www.norwalk.com](http://www.norwalk.com) with representation of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhoods

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Stewart said the city officials have met with representatives of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations. In addition, Hamilton's office mailed letters to the individual neighborhood associations, inviting them to host presentations on the 2008 revaluation, Stewart said.

During the city's last revaluation, completed in 2003, city officials held a series of presentations, followed by question-and-answer sessions in various neighborhoods.

Stewart said tonight's presentation and those that will follow are coming earlier in the revaluation process. "This is a little different in that (the 2003 revaluation presentations) tended to be after the numbers were pretty much done," Stewart said. "This is trying to get ahead of the game and get the best numbers we can by getting the best data."

The 2008 revaluation got underway this summer with appraisers from J.F. Ryan inspecting selected properties.

Not all properties will be physically inspected as part of the revaluation. Roughly 15,000 properties have been inspected since the 2003 revaluation. As such, appraisers will physically inspect a quarter, or roughly 7,250 properties, as part of the new revaluation, according to the assessor's office.

The assessor's office will rely on its existing records, as well as on information collected through the inspection and from "data mailers," asking property owners, among other things, the number of rooms in their houses and apartments in their building.

In July, appraisers began inspecting selected properties along Strawberry Hill Avenue in July. Inspections elsewhere in East Norwalk will not be done until next March or April, according to Stewart.

Stewart said appraisers have been unable to gain access to some properties. In those cases, property owners soon will be able to visit the tax assessor's Web site and schedule an appointment. A link at the Web site will become operational in about a week, Stewart said.

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September 4, 2007

## City growth, redevelopment driving infrastructural change

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)  
Hour Staff Writer

Developer Stanley M. Seligson's request for the city to issue \$104 million in municipal bonds to pay for improvements related to his West Avenue project has illustrated how growth and redevelopment stand to impact roads, sewers and other infrastructure used by all residents.

Mayor Richard A. Moccia describes the improvements related to the West Avenue projects as the "large infrastructure changes" upcoming in Norwalk.

At the same time, they're hardly the only improvements that will be needed as Norwalk's skyline and population grow.

"The infrastructure of the city, outside of the West Avenue plan, is going to need sizable investment coming up in future years, and it's going to be a balancing act again," said Moccia, referring to various priorities competing for limited city dollars. "The good thing is we're winding down with our school (renovation) projects."

projects.

Paying those off will give us a little flexibility in bonding. But we're going to have to look hard."

At present, the city, private developers and residents are often tackling infrastructure improvements on a case-by-case or neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis using a variety of forecasting and funding mechanisms.

While infrastructure improvements related to core areas of the city, such as West Avenue, rest upon year-long plans and studies, fixes needed for other residential neighborhoods often don't become apparent until it's too late.

Over the last two years, many East Norwalk residents learned the drainage systems in their neighborhood were inadequate. Tired of flooded basements, they pressed the city to invest in larger drainage pipes. The city, in response, has begun committing more capital and operating budget dollars to that end.

"Traffic was going to be our big effort. Then, all of a sudden all this flooding took place," said Director of Public Works Harold F. Alvord, noting the shift in spending priorities.

In related areas, the city's Water Pollution Control Authority, Moccia noted, recently approved a hook-up for developers tapping into the city's sanitary sewer system. The fee is intended to pay for the "increase in system burden" on the sewer system, including the city's wastewater treatment plant.

To modernize storm drains — a major concern to neighborhoods that flood — the city may create a stormwater authority. The authority could levy funds to improve those drains.

In the area of roads, Hamden-based engineering firm Vollmer Associates last year completed a Master Transportation and Pedestrian Plan for central Norwalk.

The report and recommendations focused on critical intersections in the Wall Street area, West Avenue corridor and South Norwalk, while assuming 1.5 million square feet of development by 2010 and 5.3 million square feet of development by 2015.

After factoring in traffic signal and other improvements, Vollmer Associates concluded that traffic operations in 2010 would be "very similar to existing conditions."

Of 19 key intersections, levels of service would decrease at only two: Wall Street and East Avenue, and Fairfield Avenue and Washington Street.

"With the planned improvements along West Avenue south of I-95 in place, (status quo) or better conditions can be achieved in the majority of area locations during the busiest time periods," Vollmer Associates concluded.

Widening roads to speed traffic, however, is no longer en vogue among urban planners, as evidenced by Wall Street and West Avenue redevelopment projects.

For the Head-of-the-Harbor portion of Wall Street, developer M.F. DiScala & Co. plans to turn St. John's Park into a European-style piazza with pedestrians crossing Wall Street on textured crosswalks.

Seligson Properties, meanwhile, envisions West Avenue becoming a landscaped boulevard with wide sidewalks.

"You want people to understand they're coming into a pedestrian environment," said Redevelopment Agency Executive Director Timothy T. Sheehan. "If you're going to go through the central business district you are not going to move through the way you're moving through it now ... 45 miles per hour. Our hope is that you're going through that corridor at more like 20 or 25 miles per hour."

Sheehan said ramps, intersections and traffic signals will be improved to handle the added traffic. At the same time, the various redevelopment projects will be interconnected.

For instance, a new north-south artery is envisioned by connecting Wall, Isaacs, Academy, Crescent, North Water and Reed Streets.

Ultimately, the state Traffic Commission must review and approve the planned road improvements for the larger redevelopment projects, Sheehan added.

Michael B. Greene, the city's planning and zoning director, believes infrastructure is keeping pace with development. He pointed to Connecticut Avenue before it became home to big-box retail stores.

"Millions of square feet of additional retail space and development (later), and traffic flows now better than it did 15 years ago. (Before) it was only one lane in each direction," Greene said. "If you look at the level of service, roads are keeping up with development."

In March, the Common Council approved Seligson's conceptual master site plan to fill out the 19.8-acre site bounded by West Avenue, Chapel and Academy Streets with 350 new residential units, 75,000 square feet of office space and 393,174 square feet of new retail space in the core area. Seligson is seeking \$104 million in municipal bonds to pay for road and other related infrastructure improvements.

The money would be repaid through parking fees and taxes from a special services district.

Jeffrey Kaplan, director of marketing and communications for Seligson Properties, said the city and Redevelopment Agency have commissioned several important studies addressing growth and infrastructure.

"As one of the developers of the downtown area, we are working hand in hand with the City of Norwalk department heads and the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency to implement the improvements described in these studies," Kaplan said. "Our collective goal is to design and build a new neighborhood whose infrastructure is intelligently designed to keep pace with future growth."

Matthew T. Miklave, chairman of the council's Planning Committee, said traffic, market and other studies have been done over the last six years with respect to the redevelopment projects. In the area of road improvements, he noted that Metro-North Railroad Danbury Branch Bridge in the Reed-Putnam area will be replaced in order to extend Reed Street.

"We are physically raising the train tracks," said Miklave, pointing to the magnitude of that project.

At the same time, Miklave said infrastructure goes beyond roads and bridges to schools and housing.

"Housing for working families. That's an infrastructure improvement (because) we're talking about getting cars off the highways and people living where they work," Miklave said.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said the city's nearly completed Master Plan of Conservation and Development recommends that development occur only within

adequate infrastructure is in place.

As such, she describes the master plan as a solid document and conceptual framework for future planning.

At the same time, Lindstrom doesn't consider the plan the end-all in planning.

"We need to tweak and make adjustments as we go forward," Lindstrom said. "We've got to make use and remember the broad concepts. But then we've got to be prepared to do further work as we go forward."

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August 8, 2007

## Zoning Committee to consider permit for 29-unit condo

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A planned 29-unit condominium development for the former Fitch School on Strawberry Hill Avenue is entering its final lap before the city's Zoning Commission.

On Thursday night, the commission's Zoning Committee is scheduled to perform its final review of DT Development Co. LLC's request that the city boost its cap on planned residential developments in B Residence zones to permit 29 new units, and approve the site plan for the property at 61, 63 and 73 Strawberry Hill Ave.

A public hearing before the full Zoning Commission is planned for Aug. 15.

Some East Norwalk residents viewed a similar plan, brought forward several years ago, as a threat to traffic and the character of the neighborhood. Residents are now weighing in on the revamped plan.

"A couple years ago, the residents really did not like the idea of having the condominiums in there, but I haven't heard as much from them this time around," said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association. The association "is going to discuss it (this) evening and make a decision as to what our position will be."

"There are so many varied responses throughout the neighborhood," Lindstrom said. "We'd really prefer to have the residents, who feel they are the most impacted, to come and speak to the commission (Aug. 15)."

David W. Park, a Strawberry Hill Avenue resident, however, said most East Norwalk residents oppose having condominiums in a neighborhood that is largely home to single-family houses. Park plans to be at the public hearing and present commissioners a petition signed by residents opposed to the plan.

"I have lived directly across the street from the proposed condominiums for 22 years, and I believe I am representing the majority of my neighbors in opposition to condominiums at the former Fitch School on Strawberry Hill Avenue," Park said. "There is no grayness to our opposition. It doesn't matter what 'color' you paint the buildings. We don't want condominiums."

Park said boosting the cap would set a bad precedent, which other developers would be eager to follow. Zoning commissioners ultimately will decide whether to boost the cap and approve the development.

"The commission, as a whole, is reluctant to allow an increase in the planned residential developments," Jackie Lightfield, Zoning Committee chairwoman. "However, in this particular application, because of the efforts (the developer) is making in terms of preserving open space, this is a pretty good application for the property."

Lightfield said the developer has made arrangements allowing continued access to Fitch Park, which lie immediately north of the proposed development, and plans to make the residential units fronting Strawl Hill Avenue look like single-family homes.

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August 5, 2007

## Court's ruling seen having limited impact on local cases

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

August 5, 2007

NORWALK — A recent Connecticut Supreme Court decision that found the Fairfield Plan and Zoning Commission wrongfully rejected a residential subdivision by considering off-site traffic, has drawn the attention of Norwalk planning and zoning officials.

Norwalk, they say, has never rejected a subdivision request because of anticipated off-site traffic — additional traffic to nearby roads and intersections as a result of new development.

At the same time, such traffic regularly figures into the discussion of subdivision and development applications in Norwalk.

"We still can require the developer doing the subdivision to give us a traffic count. However, based on that decision, we cannot take that into consideration when we're talking about whether to accept or reject a subdivision," said Walter O. Briggs, chairman of the Norwalk Planning Commission. The Fairfield decision was on a subdivision for single-family homes. It is not clear that that applies to things like multi-family housing.

In the Fairfield case, a trial court had concluded that the town Plan and Zoning Commission had rightfully considered off-site traffic in rejecting an application by Pansy Road LLC to subdivide a property to build a five-lot, residential subdivision. A cul de sac, connecting to Pansy Road, would serve as the entrance to the subdivision.

Last month, however, the state high court reversed the decision by finding that the commission "improperly denied the plaintiff's subdivision because of the existing traffic congestion on Pansy Road."

Among the issues raised in the Fairfield case was whether the commission had acted in an administrative or legislative capacity. The high court concluded that the commission was acting in its administrative capacity and thus had no choice but to approve the subdivision application, if it conformed to zoning regulations.

"This is exactly the way the (Norwalk) has enforced its regulations for years," said Michael B. Greene, Norwalk's director of planning and zoning. "We've been doing it correctly for the past 20 years. But that's why it's an important decision too. If we were doing it incorrectly, we would be concerned."

Of concern to Fairfield residents, according to attorney Richard H. Saxl, who represented the town before the high court, was the fact that the proposed subdivision lies nearby Osborn Hill School.

"It's right next to an elementary school. You've got a parent's drop-off a few feet away from a proposed road," Saxl said. "It's good planning to take into account off-site traffic, but according to the Supreme Court it's bad law. We have regional planning everywhere for everything and the only thing you can't do it for subdivision?"

Ken Flatto, Fairfield first selectman, said he believes the town Plan and Zoning Commission "did an excellent job" in rejecting the subdivision "on its merits." He is disappointed with the high court decision. Said Flatto: "This development was literally proposed 50 feet from a school." Traffic concerns are hardly unique to development near schools.

In Norwalk, residents have raised the specter of office parks, residential subdivisions and other development clogging intersections block away.

East Norwalk residents, for instance, cited traffic concern in asking Zoning commissioners last year to reject a 328-unit, multi-family housing development then proposed for the eastern half of the Norden site. "(Off-site traffic) came into play for the Norden property, but that (development) got stopped for conservation purposes, not for traffic purposes — it never got that far," Briggs said.

Developers, aware of traffic concerns, often submit with their applications traffic reports, giving existing and projected post-development service levels at nearby intersections during morning and evening peak periods.

Norwalk land-use attorney Frank N. Zullo said lower courts had "sort of been nipping away" at the law by allowing planning boards to take off-site traffic into consideration when considering subdivision requests. If the state Supreme Court decision reverses that trend, he said.

"The Supreme Court came back with both feet right on the ground, stating very clearly the extent to which off-site traffic can be considered in regard to any zoning action," Zullo said. "It always been the law, but a couple cases chipped away at it."

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said she is not surprised by the court decision. She said residents must work to change their zoning regulations rather than "generally say the traffic is bad and is going to get worse."

Lindstrom said many developments, particularly smaller ones, are viewed "in isolation," when they have a cumulative effect on traffic. She would like to see more attention given to traffic impacts on neighborhoods.

Saxl, meanwhile, believes that a change in the law is in order.

"If everybody is upset about this as the people living around Pansy Road are, they (should) tell their representatives to change the law," Saxl said.

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July 25, 2007

## Council moves closer to mulling feasibility of park amphitheater

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Common Council authorized Tuesday night paying a development advisor \$6,100 toward what could lead to an amphitheater at Veterans Memorial Park in East Norwalk.

## ENNA in the News

what could lead to an amphitheater at Veterans Memorial Park in East Norwalk.

Emphasize the word 'could.'

"This is potentially a very divisive development here," said Councilman William M. Krummel. "We've had concerns about recent events that have taken place in the park. There have been concerns expressed by the neighbors, and I want to make sure, as much as possible, that the thinking and the work done to investigate the feasibility of this amphitheater gets maximum public attention."

Krummel joined other council members in voting to pay Diana Harrington the sum — the final payment roughly \$36,000 contract, according to city officials — after receiving assurances that the council's Recreation, Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee will hold a public hearing on the topic of having an amphitheater in the park.

"If we don't have a meeting in August, it will definitely be at our September meeting," said Fred A. Bondi, parks committee chairman. "It will be a public hearing on this issue."

Said Krummel: "Good. It's on the record."

The Colombian Independence Day festival held at the park July 15 drew complaints from East Norwalk residents about music decibel levels, traffic and parking.

And, the prospect of an amphitheater being built at the park has alarmed some residents, according to Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

"Their concern really is ... there already is a lot of noise coming from the festivals," Lindstrom said. "The neighbors have accepted the fact that there might be a half-a-dozen concerts there. That's something to be expected. When it comes to actually putting an amphitheater in there, then the anticipation is that concerts will happen more frequently ... continual traffic, continual noise."

Michael A. Moccia, the city's director of recreation and parks, said Harrington surveyed whether there was interest in the community to "fund (a feasibility study) and to potentially fund the amphitheater."

"The conclusion is that the energy is very positive regarding the arts groups and their interests, and there is very good interest on the behalf of corporations," Moccia said. "The city can now decide with a master plan to have the potential corporate funds to fund the feasibility study."

Moccia distinguished between the amphitheater and noise from festivals.

"There's two different issues here. One is a permanent amphitheater, the other is the existing groups that have had events down there that drew some complaints from the neighbors," Moccia said. "You tighten existing rules regarding the events, the duration, the loudness and the parking issues."

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June 12, 2007

Hour

## East Norwalk condo project heads for review

## ENNA in the News

By [ROBERI KOCH](#)  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Some East Norwalk residents bristled last October when the city's Conservation Commission approved a 29-unit condominium development for the former Fitch School on Strawberry Hill Avenue. Seven months later, "Strawberry Hill Commons," as the project is called by DT Development Co., LLC, is headed to the city's Planning and Zoning commissions for review.

Tonight, Planning commissioners are scheduled to review and offer their recommendations. On Thursday night, the Zoning Commission's Zoning Committee will begin its review of the project.

To build the condominiums, DT Development needs two approvals from the Zoning Commission: A lifting the city's cap on planned residential developments in B Residence zones to permit new 29 units — then approval of the site plan to actually build the units.

"We're just making sure that we have everything right," said David F. Waters, the Norwalk land-use attorney representing DT Development, explaining the lag time in the plan resurfacing before the city. "Certainly think that the design of the units is consistent with the single-family nature (of the neighborhood) — certainly more so than the building that is there right now."

DT Development seeks to raze the former school and two adjacent houses at 61 and 63 Strawberry Hill Ave. to build the condominiums. The developer owns one of the houses and is under contract to buy the other, Waters said.

The site plan, prepared by William W. Seymour & Associates, P.C., and resubmitted to the city's Planning and Zoning Department, shows 29 condominium units in six buildings; 61 parking spaces; and a pool house at the back of the 3.3-acre property at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave.

The development plan also required Conservation Commission approval, because of a pond immediately to the south and a slope leading to that pond. In approving the plan last Oct. 10, Conservation Commission accepted the developers' assertion that the storm-water management plan will reduce flooding problems in the neighborhood.

For East Norwalk residents, the proposed condominium development has a long history.

An informational meeting about the development, held by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association in July 2005, drew at least 50 people, according to association President Laurel Lindstrom. "This was a hot item when the ENNA invited residents to a presentation on the plan a couple of years ago. It is still likely to be a hot item," wrote Lindstrom in a recent e-mail update to association members. "And anyone who wants to hear firsthand should attend the P&Z meetings this week — in particular the Thursday meeting since the Zoning Commission is the main approving body for this project."

This week's meeting on the proposed development, she reminded, are not public hearings. A public hearing is anticipated in July or August.

Lindstrom said ENNA board of directors has held off taking a formal vote on the development until the plan returned to the city for review. With that now happening, a position could be forthcoming.

"I think what we're gravitating toward is that we acknowledge that the residents that live in the vicinity have concerns, and we will support their involvement, participation and probably will end up supporting

(tmem)."

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June 7, 2007

Hour

## City seeks public voice on East Ave.

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — After a decade on the back burner, plans for widening East Avenue are again advancing the design isn't cast in stone and residents still will be able to weigh in on the project, according city off

On Tuesday night, Director of Public Works Harold F. Alvord told members of the Common Council's Public Works Committee that the city intends to coordinate the widening — from Exit 16 on Interstate 95 to the Metro-North Railroad underpass — with the state Department of Transportation's replacement of the underpass in 2010.

"We're going to have a brand-new railroad underpass with four lanes and two sidewalks, and we need East Avenue to fit into that scheme. In the process we intend to improve the intersection with Fort Point Street intersection with Fitch Street," Alvord said. "DOT will also have a series of public informational meetings and hearings on the railroad underpass. So when it's appropriate and where it's appropriate, if we can sync our timing with theirs, we intend to do those (hearings) in conjunction with their public meetings."

The discussion came as the committee recommended that the full council approve Phase One of a multi-phased contract with A. DiCesare Associates P.C. of Westport to provide engineering services for the project. Phase One, billed at \$50,000, would coordinate the city's plans for widening the East Avenue with the state rebuilding the underpass, Alvord said.

"The biggest property acquisition issues are going to be right there, between Fort Point Street and the railroad underpass, because widening from the current two lanes and one sidewalk to four lanes and two sidewalks," Alvord said. "There's a couple homes there with driveways that are at risk."

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said a preliminary design for the widening of East Avenue was done in the 1990s. She wants the city to hold public hearings on the road widening to hear residents' and property owners' concerns.

"There's a fair number of properties on East Avenue that would be affected by the road widening and two sidewalks that would be going in," Lindstrom said. "I have had heard from residents along there who are concerned about this. There are other ways of actually improving roads other than widening — although not necessarily saying that that's the case here."

"But it is certainly worth hearing from the public on this," Lindstrom added. The city had planned to widen East Avenue only after the state had replaced the underpass and rebuilt Exit 16 — thus avoiding having sections of a newly widened road torn up by the state.

City officials are no longer ready to wait for the state to reconstruct Exit 16.

"The reconstruction of Exit 16, as far as I can determine, is currently scheduled for infinity," Alvord said.

the reconstruction of Exit 10, as far as I can determine, is currently scheduled for 2011, Avord said.

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May 31, 2007

Hour

## Neighborhood groups speak out on Master Plan

By PATRICK R. LINSEY

*Hour Staff Writer*

NORWALK — Area neighborhood groups gave their feedback Wednesday night on the draft of Norwalk Master Plan for Conservation and Development at the Planning Commission's last public hearing on the document. Groups represented included the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, the Spring Hill Neighborhood Association, the Golden Hill Neighborhood Association and the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations.

The groups had largely similar remarks; they urged the commission to ensure the master plan preserves historic neighborhoods, encourages the use of mass transit, maintains and improves parks and open space, modernizes city infrastructure and ensures public participation throughout development projects.

Flooding was addressed by multiple speakers. Residents in several Norwalk neighborhoods have complained of worsening storm water runoff flooding in recent years. "Flooding is not only a nuisance but a health hazard," said city resident Diane Lauricella.

Speaking for developer Building & Land Technology, attorney David Waters said the cost of mitigating current flooding should be borne by the city — not future developers. "The city must plan fiscally and be responsible for current infrastructure replacement," Waters said. "You cannot expect somebody coming in to be responsible for deficiencies that currently exist."

The draft master plan is a roughly 60-page document which, when finalized, approved by the council and signed by the mayor, will serve as a blueprint for city zoning regulations.

Sections include Balanced Economic Growth; Environment and Infrastructure; Community and Cultural Facilities; Transportation; Governance; Open Space and Recreation; and Implementation. The section titled Implementation, which will prioritize and price out the plan, remains incomplete. State law requires municipalities to update their master plans every 10 years. Norwalk's update is several years overdue. In working to update the plan, the Planning Commission has taken input from residents, neighborhood associations and urban planning consultants, including Chan Krieger & Associates, the Cambridge, Mass. firm now assembling the final document.

The Planning Commission is also accepting written testimony from Norwalk residents and businesses, which can be submitted from now until noon on June 8.

The Planning Commission will then revise the plan and forward it to the Common Council's Planning Committee. The Planning Committee will hold its own public hearing on the master plan before sending the council for approval.

*Staff writer Robert Koch contributed to this report.*

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May 12, 2007

Advocate

## Mini-golf plan hits hazard

By Matt Breslow  
Staff Writer

May 12, 2007

NORWALK - Plans for a privately run miniature golf course at Veterans Memorial Park are on hold after Mayor Richard Moccia expressed concern about the would-be operator's proposal.

Moccia announced yesterday that a public hearing scheduled by the Common Council's Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs Committee for next week on the project was canceled at his request.

He cited concerns about traffic, parking, neighborhood opposition and appropriate usage of the park. The scope of the miniature golf course - 36 holes taking up nearly three quarters of an acre - also concerned

"At this time, I do not believe that we should proceed any further," Moccia said in a statement.

Moccia said in an interview that the project didn't seem to have much support.

"Basically, as of right now, it's not happening," he said.

Parks Committee Chairman Fred Bondi said he doesn't believe the project is dead, but he doesn't want to decide how to proceed until talking to Recreation and Parks Director Michael Moccia, who was on vacation this week.

The city requested proposals last year for a miniature golf course at Veterans Memorial Park, Bondi said.

"We thought that would be a nice item down there, to make this a family-type park," he said.

Jerry Petrini - who would build the miniature golf course at his own expense, run the operation and pay for it to the city - could not be reached yesterday.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said her group helped park neighbors collect about 300 signatures on a petition opposing the miniature golf course and an amphitheater being discussed for the park.

The association was concerned partly about whether the city had a long-term plan for the waterside Eastern Norwalk park. The group wanted environmental studies on Veterans Memorial Park, the site of a former landfill dump, and the impact of a miniature golf course, Lindstrom said.

Fencing off part of a park for a private business is "not in the spirit of what public parks should be about," Lindstrom said.

The city received two responses to its request for proposals, Bondi said. He said Petrini, who owns the My Three Sons family amusement center on Wall Street, was the only responder interested in partnering with the city.

Bondi said his committee is always seeking projects to raise money to supplement the Recreation and P. Department's budget because the city cuts it every year. Petrini's lease for the miniature golf course like would have brought the city \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year, Bondi said.

The course would be built in the park's playground area, mostly behind a building housing restrooms, concessions and storage space, out of view from Seaview Avenue, Bondi said.

He said Petrini's design includes rock formations, small ponds and landscaping. Light poles would not be high off the ground, and lighting would be "subdued."

"It's a nice plan. It's very tasteful," he said.

A traffic study likely would be necessary if the city decides to proceed with the project, Bondi said. He said he would have liked to have heard the public's opinion.

A public hearing is only an initial step, because the project would require land-use approvals, then approval from the parks committee and full council, Bondi said.

Lindstrom said she was disappointed the hearing was canceled, because it would have given residents a chance to express their visions for the park.

"They should be included in the whole process, and right now they're not being included," Lindstrom said.

Moccia said the city will discuss an overall plan for the park, considering issues such as Moccia's desire to build a bandshell for concerts.

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May 12, 2007

Hour

## Vets Park mini-golf plan dead — for now

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Plans for a 36-hole miniature golf course at Veterans Memorial Park hit a sand trap Friday. Citing concerns over the size of the proposed course and resulting traffic, Mayor Richard A. Moccia announced Friday that he had canceled next Wednesday's public hearing on the plan.

"After consulting with the chairman of the Recreation, Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee, Councilman Frank Bondi, and reviewing the proposed plans for a miniature golf park at Veterans Park, I have asked Councilman Bondi to remove the item for discussion from the May 16, 2007, meeting of the committee," Moccia said Friday. "I said in the past that I wanted to await the actual plans before commenting on the matter. After reviewing the plans, I have concerns about the scope of the plan and how it would affect the overall operation of the park."

Moccia said the golf course could create the "perfect storm of traffic." He said he could foresee traffic backing up on Seaview Avenue on warm summer nights, when visitors leave nearby SoNo and combine

traffic from East Norwalk.

"In taking everything in and talking to Fred Bondi, it was not the right plan at the right time," Moccia said. Under the plan, now apparently dead, Jerry Petrini, owner of My Three Sons Family Fun Center on Wall St would build a 36-hole course on 1.5 acres on the east side of the park between the restrooms and the baseball area. Petrini would operate the course under a lease with the city.

Michael W. Moccia, city parks director, has characterized the miniature golf course plan as is in keeping with the city's long-range plan to make Veterans Memorial Park a family friendly park.

"You need to do it tactfully and tastefully. It's time we start looking at partnerships, because it's going to decrease taxpayers' (contributions). It's going to bring people there for a reason. That's going to reduce problems that are in the park. It's going to bring families in the park," Moccia said last month.

Bondi, another backer of the plan, urged opponents to withhold their judgment until a formal plan came forward. On Friday, upon learning that the mayor had canceled the public hearing, Bondi said "we're not going to pursue (the miniature golf plan) at this point."

"I don't know how it's going to work," said Bondi, when asked if a different plan might come forward, "if we have to put another request for proposals out."

East Norwalk Councilman Nicholas D. Kydes welcomed Moccia's decision.

"I worked with Mayor Moccia on this issue along with the Republican Team and am happy to tell you that the initiative has been stopped," Kydes said.

Over the last several months, East Norwalk residents mounted a vigorous campaign against the proposed miniature golf course, which they deemed commercialization of public property.

Vantage Point Condominium Association launched a petition against the plan in February. The Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association posted a petition titled "To Stop City from Commercializing Vet's Park With Proposed Miniature Golf Course and Amphitheater."

Recently, a coalition of opponents launched a Web site — [www.savevetspark.com/](http://www.savevetspark.com/) — opposing the proposal. Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said she was pleased that Moccia "has seen the light on this," but added "there's so many other issues involved here."

"It looks like this may not happen, this miniature golf, but what's to stop them from continuing with the amphitheater, batting cages or any number of things?" Lindstrom said. "It's any number of proposals that could be put forward and it's that the public hasn't been involved in the process."

Said Seaview Avenue resident Art Santella: "We've consulted our environmental attorney. We did 600 meetings and 400 handouts. People in the outer harbor are also concerned about the concerts. Our associations, Vets Park and the ENNA, are going to be vigilant."

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May 6, 2007

Advocate

Field study: Opinions divided on effect of former dump on parks project

By Tim Stalock

## ENNA in the News

by TIM STELTON  
Staff Writer

May 6, 2007

NORWALK - City old-timers probably know something about Veterans Memorial Park that more recent transplants don't: It sits on a former city dump.

But exactly what was dumped there is more of a mystery, as is the potential effect on the baseball field: that were laid on top of it.

This is because Veterans Park was never environmentally tested.

Now, the city's parks department is pushing for a project that would add a miniature golf course and an amphitheater to the park.

Parks Director Michael Mocciaie said he assumed the state's environmental agency tested the park when baseball fields were revamped more than 20 years ago. But Mocciaie said neither he nor anyone else in parks department has seen results of those tests.

The state Department of Environmental Protection does not have any record of park testing, nor do the federal Environmental Protection Agency's regional offices in Boston and Stamford.

And it is unclear if Jerry Petrini, the Norwalk business owner who is planning the golf course, will have his acres tested if the city approves his proposal. Petrini did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Michael Greene, director of Norwalk Planning Department, said there is no standard environmental test administered before such a project, although the city's Planning Commission would review its impacts on coastal waters.

Some residents are uncomfortable that the old dump has not been investigated before the city began moving forward with the golf course and amphitheater plan.

"Who knows what's leaching and oozing out of the park," said Nick McCormack, who lives nearby at 1 Osborne Ave. "I think if this town goes further (with development plans), they should be informed of the liability."

McCormack is worried about old garbage from the dump ending up in the harbor.

On a recent afternoon, he plucked more than a dozen ancient-looking broken bottles out of the park's southern shoreline during low tide.

"This is like a bottle collector's dream," he said, wiping caked mud from large green and blue shards.

David McKeegan, an environmental analyst with the state DEP's Waste Management Bureau, said park waters could be eroding the park's shores and uncovering waste.

Although it is unclear whether these bottles are from the dump, they highlight how little is known about landfill's legacy.

"The environmental side of this has got to be considered," said Laurel Lindstrom, the head of the East Nor Neighborhood Association and an outspoken critic of the park proposal. "The city shouldn't be taking a on this unless they've done their homework and have assessed" the park, she said.

## ENNA in the News

Mocchia, however, said that because the dump was a place for people to toss junk like mattresses and boxes, an environmental investigation is unnecessary. Parks Committee Chairman Fred Bondi agreed.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with the soil," he said. "It hasn't been a concern in the years that I've been around."

But City Historian Ralph Bloom said it is not entirely clear what was dumped there.

More than a century ago, Bloom said, there were no baseball fields at Veterans Park. There were no parking lots, and there was no oyster festival; it was all marsh.

But beginning in the early 1900s, the marsh was turned into a city dump.

This was long before state environmental regulations required landfills to use special liners and collection systems for contaminated water. It also was before more modern capping systems were used to close dumps.

Back then, said McKeegan, garbage was often dumped and burned, leaving behind ash and nonburn materials.

McKeegan said opinions are divided as to what does less harm to the environment. Modern landfills might keep contaminated runoff from bleeding into groundwater and soil, but they also can act as "dry entombments," where waste does not decompose, he said.

When the Washington Street bridge was built on the south side of Veterans Park in the early part of the 20th century, the city demolished some buildings along Seaview Avenue to build approaches to the bridge, according to Bloom. He said it is possible that the remains of those buildings were hauled to the dump.

He said he also remembers cars dumped there.

"It was municipal, and it was very disorganized," Bloom said. "But what's down there? I don't think anyone really knows."

Dumping continued until the 1960s, when the landfill began to resemble a park, he said.

Because the state DEP does not have data on the park, McKeegan could not say what problems, if any, the dump's remnants may pose.

Though these problems are not likely, he said he would want to check for gases from decomposing waste that could creep through the soil. He said he also would look for problems with future construction, such as foundation cracking because of different waste decomposition rates.

One instance where a recent park renovation went awry was in Stamford, McKeegan said.

As the city was working on new additions to Kosciuszko Park - which also is the site of a former city dump - it used contaminated soil dug up from the park to prepare new baseball fields, McKeegan said.

That dump operated during the 1960s and '70s, and was mostly used for building debris. It had been permitted by the DEP, according to McKeegan, but the city was never authorized to close the landfill or to turn it into a park without properly sealing it.

The contaminated soil was discovered in 2002 - after the city decided to spend \$3 million on new ball fields and parking. The park finally reopened last weekend, after the city set aside more than \$1 million for

## ENNA in the News

and gazebos. The park finally reopened last weekend, after the city set aside more than \$1 million for remediation work.

The DEP did not exist when Veterans Park was a dump - or when that dump most likely closed - so there no state permitting process, and Norwalk was not required to get approval from the DEP, as Stamford w

But McKeegan said that even when that's the case, his department can require that it oversee a projec such as the one at Veterans Park.

"One could make the argument that this is a closed landfill, and even though we didn't permit it, we mi still have jurisdiction over it," he said.

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