

March 25, 2005

The Norwalk Citizen-News

A Clarification

-Letter to Editor

In the March 11 Norwalk Citizen-News Winthrop Baum, president of the new East Norwalk Business Association, writes that the ENBA "wishes to distance itself from a plan recently floated up by a certain neighborhood group that seeks changes to the retail centers of Ludlow Shopping Center and Liberty Square.

As president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, the neighborhood group that Mr. Baum refers to in his letter, I am responding representing the ENNA.

The ENNA is well known in the community for our creative approaches to engaging the community in neighborhood improvement and preservation. Anyone who has participated in our neighborhood cleanups, or followed our advocacy work at public hearings, knows that Mr. Baum's letter can't be based on accurate information in regards to the ENNA.

For readers who saw the letter, but aren't familiar with our activities and haven't seen the ENNA plan, I want to clarify several inaccuracies in Mr. Baum's reading and interpretation of our plan.

Based on several conversations we've had over the years with area merchants and residents, we drafted a proposed revitalization plan. The examples were provided as a way to spark ideas and dialogue, not to present a finished plan or to trigger the surprising reaction that came from the president of the newly formed business association.

The ENNA strongly believes in bottom-up planning. We intentionally have presented the draft as an unfinished plan to allow for revitalization ideas from the community since this is community-driven and not a Norwalk Redevelopment Agency project.

The historic designation that the ENNA is seeking is specific to the cemetery property the original burial ground of the first settlers of Norwalk and not for the Ludlow Shopping area that Mr. Baum claims.

Contrary to Mr. Baum's assertion that our plan will result in leveled land and the utilization of eminent domain, the ENNA has been openly opposed to that approach in other areas of Norwalk. The plan that we propose would work to prevent such an occurrence.

We hope that the plan will inspire property owners to look at their properties through new eyes and to find ways to initiate improvements that allow the existing small-scale shops to thrive while keeping the unique characteristics that make East Norwalk a special place to live, shop and do business.

The ENNA seeks to work constructively with everyone in the community. The plan is posted on our Web site at <http://eastnorwalk.org>. We welcome your ideas.

Laurel Lindstrom, President
East Norwalk Neighborhood Association

March 19, 2005

The Hour

Many people, organizations care about city's future

-Letter to Editor

In Friday's Hour, a writer echoes an earlier lament that no one really cares about the "destruction of Norwalk's small-town atmosphere." Another writer laments the ugliness of the new condos on the river (Norwalk's "House of a Thousand Gables").

These writers would be surprised how many people and organizations around town care passionately about saving Norwalk's uniqueness, and how much they can help. First, here's why you are seeing so much development:

- Norwalk has rapidly changed from the "hole in the doughnut" to a nationally-known, red hot real estate market.
- As in most cities, downtown zoning is set up to entice needed development, not to maintain a small-town scale.
- Federal (and therefore State) funds to aid cities have dried up, forcing cities to rely more on new development for tax revenue.
- Projects that "suddenly" destroy views or clog up waterfronts have been in the works for up to 20 years, including those endless condos.

What can ordinary citizens do? Here are some practical suggestions:

- Join your local neighborhood association. Under Mayor Knopp's active encouragement, neighborhood associations are rapidly growing in numbers and gaining influence. You can find a list of them in the League of Women Voters brochure "Know Your Town" (printed by The Hour as a public service), soon available at the Library or City Hall, and available now at the League's website at www.lwvct.org/norwalk/, and at our website, www.eastnorwalk.org.
- Fight for regulations with teeth that will preserve historical structures and neighborhoods. Historic preservation is a crucial tool for keeping Norwalk's unique character.
- Fight for "down-zoning" where appropriate. The Zoning Commission is empowered to make zoning more restrictive. You can help by providing compelling arguments.
- Fight for "affordable housing." This is not public housing (which we also need). It is housing for the children of long-time residents, who like other solid middle class citizens are being driven into the remote suburbs by skyrocketing property values.
- Fight for better schools, to attract and retain families that will set roots in Norwalk.
- Attend and speak out at public hearings on planning and zoning, which are listed in The Hour. A lot of attention from the public can sway developers and public bodies. Don't assume every project is a "done deal."

Above all, join a neighborhood group, to find out what's going on. Your views count much more when you are informed. Belonging to a neighborhood group can help you gain your rightful voice as a concerned citizen.

Laurel Lindstrom
Gordon F. Tully

East Norwalk Neighborhood Association officers

January 22, 2005

The Advocate

Group seeks to revitalize - *Changes proposed for East Norwalk* by Lisa Charnoff - Staff Writer

NORWALK -- Neighborhood activists are hoping to spark revitalization in East Norwalk's center and have given an extensive improvement plan to city officials and business owners.

Citing the need for such projects as facade improvements and more walkways, the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association's 11-page plan focuses on the area around Liberty Square and Ludlow Square, two main retail spots in the area where Norwalk was first settled in the 17th century.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the group, said the plan developed from conversations among residents and merchants. It contains concerns that were brought up during a walking tour of the area with Mayor Alex Knopp last spring and recommendations the neighborhood association made for the update of the city's Master Plan of Conservation and Development.

"Right now the whole idea is just to get it out to as many people as possible in the community and start getting some feedback," Lindstrom said. "We as the neighborhood association have thought a great deal about what could be done to improve East Norwalk."

Much of the plan, which the association sent to Knopp and Norwalk Redevelopment Agency last month, centers on making the area pedestrian-friendly by improving cracked sidewalks, creating kiosks with directions and historic information and installing crosswalks.

Lindstrom said crosswalks are especially necessary on streets such as Route 136 between Veterans Memorial Park and Liberty Square on Seaview Avenue.

"There is no way to cross safely at that location," Lindstrom said.

The association's plan, which can be viewed at www.eastnorwalk.org, also recommends aesthetic changes, with the possibility of a unifying look and the addition of benches and planters.

With proper signs, Liberty Square could be utilized as a gateway to East Norwalk, according to the plan, and Ludlow Square, the area between Winfield and Van Zant streets, could become a "destination retail center."

Lindstrom said she would like the neighborhood association to work with local business owners whom she hopes will initiate improvements.

"Until we actually get a lot of community support and interest, it's not going to go anywhere," Lindstrom said. "IF one or two (property owners) say yes, we want to go ahead with that."

Though the city is not taking action on the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association's plan, funds might be available through the city's Redevelopment Agency/

The city plans to apply to funds through the CDBG program and set aside the money. Neighborhood association would then apply through the city. The funds -- possibly more than \$40,000 in the first year -- would likely be available beginning in July, Johnson said.

Some business owners expressed concerns about the plan.

Winthrop Baum, head of the recently formed East Norwalk Business Association and owner of commercial space at 25 Van Zant St., said it would be unfair to force merchants with limited funds to make changes to their facades. Members also are concerned the proposals for revitalization could bring about the city's power of eminent domain.

"As a property owner in the area, I don't think we can impose somebody else's view on what our property should look like," Baum said.

Lindstrom said the plan is simply meant to serve as a springboard for discussions.

"Individual stakeholders would initiate improvements on their own property," Lindstrom said.

January 18, 2005

The Hour

Rekindling interest in E. Norwalk

by James Walker - Hour Staff Writer

An idea to revitalize a portion of East Norwalk that has been talked about for years in finally taking shape with the recent release of a comprehensive plan that has been unveiled for discussion.

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association presented a 10-page report to Mayor Alex Knopp and state Sen. Bob Duff D-25, in hopes of rekindling interest in revitalizing two retail centers in the historic district where Norwalkers first settled in 1651.

Munro Johnson, coordinator of the Community Development Block Grant program for the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, has also been provided with a copy of the report.

The proposed plan will concentrate around Ludlow Square and Liberty Square, where the association recommends improvements that include upgrading facades and lighting fixtures, providing additional walkways, along with planters and benches, and adding signage and kiosks.

The historic East Norwalk Cemetery, the city's first burial spot where former Gov. Thomas Fitch is buried, the library and the new train station are incorporated in the proposed plan.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the association, drafted the plan "based on information we gathered over the last three years as a neighborhood association.

"Unless our community looks at it in a focused way, it will become less and less of a place that's people friendly," she said.

The proposal encompasses improvements that address retail and residential factors, and also incorporate the needs of local church parishioners, Ludlow Commons seniors' complex and Playloft Early Learning Center.

It provides for enhancements to the east bank of the harbor, pocket parks, traffic islands and additional pedestrian crossings.

Lindstrom said Liberty Square is a "gateway" from South Norwalk and an asset that should be utilized to welcome and direct visitors to destinations within the east community. She said whether it's coming off the Stroffolino Bridge or Route 136, gateways into East Norwalk are crucial to revamping the neighborhood.

"There is a need to create a sense of entering a special place like there is when you enter SoNo," she said. "The more people who offer ideas will prevent the neighborhood from becoming just an extension of the expressway."

Lindstrom said many historic buildings in the neighborhood have vanished and those remaining are deteriorating and in need of repair or refurbishing.

Lindstrom's long-term vision sees a vibrant neighborhood with attractive shops where people would shop on a regular basis, along with bike paths, walkways and landscaped locations where "people want to go and congregate."

"Many feel something should be done, but prior conversations have gone nowhere," Lindstrom said. "We want to hear feedback from merchants, residents and stakeholders, such as churches and officials."

Lindstrom hopes to have enough feedback to begin having small group discussions by March to review and add to the plan and gather support.

What happens after that will depend on feedback.

"We want more people to start recognizing the opportunities and possibilities," she said.
"We have so much to gain."