



Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association In the News



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May 21, 2006

Advocate

City hears the gripes, and replies with more efficiency

By Lisa Chamoff
Staff Writer

May 21, 2006

NORWALK -- Since opening at the beginning of this year, the city's customer service center has seen a steady increase in business and officials say complaints from residents are being handled more efficiently.

On average, the center receives 100 phone calls a day, and the number of walk-ins to its office in Room 224 of City Hall increased from three when it officially opened its doors in January to 120 people last month.

Officials say the numbers speak to the success of the center, a place for residents to log complaints for problems ranging from clogged storm drains to uncollected garbage, and a place for them to find information such as how to obtain a beach sticker.

"I'm getting nothing but compliments from residents that I talk to," said Public Works Director Harold Alvord. "It's clearly accomplishing what we want to accomplish."

Before the center opened, many residents called the mayor's office or the Public Works department, but they often did not receive a quick response. Alvord said the department would take more than 300 calls per day.

"By the time a complaint got to my desk . . . they were complaining that no one was getting back," Alvord said.

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The center's three staff members, one of whom is bilingual, were selected from the city's busiest departments -- public works, the tax assessor and planning and zoning. They handle the calls and e-mail from residents. They also generate reports with statistics for city departments.

Aside from being an information clearinghouse, the center helps arrange service calls to neighborhoods. Since implementing Cityworks software, the Public Works Department now has a formal procedure to generate service requests to respond to residents' problems. For example, if a resident calls to report a clogged storm drain on their street, Customer Service Coordinator Connie Blair generates a service request for a specific part of the city and the person in charge of that section generates a work order.

Before the center was established, public works employees would generate service requests on their own but, Alvord said they often didn't have time to look for problems.

Blair also keeps up with road-paving schedules since most calls regard the condition of roadways.

Laurel Lindstrom, head of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said she often refers residents who e-mail her with problems to the customer service center.

Lindstrom said the center is particularly adept at helping residents with problems in which more than one city department is involved, as well as ones that concern state agencies.

Blair said one of the center's strengths is that it is able to connect residents with the proper state official: since they receive a lot of calls about non-city issues, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, passport and electrical problems. The customer service staff actually submits the requests to the correct state agency directly. Before the center was established, residents looking for information regarding the state would be told "it's not a city issue," Blair said.

"That's where it's been really useful, to the residents who might not know where to go," Blair said.

Center workers each have the call center program on their computer and when they get a caller's name they can look up the address and see if similar complaints or requests have come in from neighbors.

City officials say the center has been helpful for their departments as well.

Thomas Closter, the city's chief environmental officer, said the Health Department has been investigating complaints referred by the center. The number of complaints to the health department has increased, Closter said, but residents benefit because once the complaint is resolved, the customer service center is informed and there is a record.

The center also helps the Health Department by providing residents with important information, Closter said. For example, people often call to report dead birds when they think West Nile Virus may be involved. But this year, the state has stopped testing birds.

"We've let the complaint center know that there will be no testing," Closter said. "They'll get a lot of those calls, and can pass on the information."

Some improvements to the center are necessary and anticipated. Blair said she expects that, at some point, they may need to hire additional call center staff. They are also looking to improve service during snow or other weather emergencies. Many people call the Public Works garage about street plowing during storms, she said, and they are hoping to be able to place staff members in the garage to handle those calls so they can be managed more efficiently.

Hour

Neighborhood group backs West Ave. project

By ROBERT KOCH
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association has lent its support to the West Avenue Corridor Redevelopment Plan.

"The Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association has in the past been vocal in expressing our concerns regarding the size and design of the proposed West Avenue development," reads a letter submitted to the Redevelopment Agency Thursday by ENNA President Laurel Lindstrom on behalf of the association's board of directors. "Our concerns were heard, and the project was scaled back over the years, resulting in the current project proposed by the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency."

The plan now allows for up to 350 new housing units; 393,174 square feet of new retail; and perhaps a parking garage in the core portion. That represents a 20-percent paring. Limited development would be allowed on the west side of West Avenue. The Harbor Avenue neighborhood would become a preservation zone.

If the Common Council approves the plan, a private developer — likely Stanley M. Seligson Properties — may request to become the city's selected developer.

"Since the proposal that you are currently reviewing for approval is a conceptual plan, there will be many opportunities in the months ahead for the public, Common Council and commissions to have input in the design of the project as site plans are drafted and changes to specific properties are addressed," Lindstrom said.

With details of the development still ahead, Lindstrom described the board's position as a "qualified endorsement" of the redevelopment plan. A similar letter from the ENNA board went to council member earlier this month, she said.

Redevelopment Agency officials consider Lindstrom's letters a sign that the public-input process in shaping the redevelopment plan has been a success.

"We spent a lot of time with these people to the benefit of the plan," said Susan Sweitzer, economic development project manager for the agency. "I think they understand the value of the plan in enabling them to participate in the development."

Maribeth Becker, coordinator for the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations, could not be reached for comment on where other neighborhood groups stand on the redevelopment plan.

During a public hearing at City Hall Thursday night, about a dozen people — including West Avenue property owners and their attorneys — expressed concerns about the possible use of eminent domain. Others questioned whether the neighborhood is deteriorated and substandard, as Redevelopment Agency staff maintain, based on raw data provided by police and health officials.

"I find that the crime data is overstated on its own, and there is tremendous further bias in the selectivity. The descriptions are misleading, contradictory and sometimes just wrong," wrote Norwalk resident Tony Doumlele, in a letter to the Redevelopment Agency.

With the public hearing completed, Redevelopment commissioners will review the public input to date, reconvene and take action on the redevelopment plan before the council's Planning Committee reconvenes June 1.

May 17, 2006

Hour

Commission: Thumbs down to Norden

By PATRICK R. LINSEY
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Citing concerns over possible harm to wetlands, the city's Conservation Commission Tuesday denied a developer's application to build a 273-unit residential development on the Norwalk/Westport border.

The motion of denial was passed 6-1, with Andrew Kydes comprising the dissenting vote on a panel charged with protecting Norwalk's wetlands.

Applicant NordenPlace, LLC had scaled down its proposal from 328 units, but the commission advised it consider alternatives which reduce activity in areas around wetlands.

The decision was made without prejudice, giving the applicant leave to submit an amended proposal or appeal to the Connecticut Superior Court.

"We'll study the content of the motion and respond accordingly," said Clayton Fowler, principal of Spinnaker Cos., a partner in NordenPlace, LLC, who declined further comment.

According to the motion, the application was denied because it did not provide enough information to prove the applicant would fully mitigate the impact on wetlands. The motion also stated proposed detention basins to renovate and treat runoff in up to a one-inch rain event were inadequate.

"I feel like that wetland is worth treating in a storm event over one inch," said commission member Elizabeth Ackerman, before the vote.

"I think there are going to be more of (such rainstorms) in the future, looking at the trends," agreed acting chairwoman Ann Cagnina.

Commission members expressed frustration with some responses from GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc., a Vernon consulting agency hired to provide independent analysis of the project. On several matters, consultants told the commission they had incomplete data with which to form an opinion.

The motion was drafted by city environmental officer Alexis Cherichetti, based on the commission's concerns. The applicant had agreed to extend the commission's legal deadline from May 16 to June 9, but the commission's vote to deny the application was made on Tuesday.

but the panel was ready to vote at Tuesday's special meeting.

May 17, 2006

Advocate

Condo plan is killed: *Commission denies needed wetlands permit*

By John Nickerson
Staff Writer

Norwalk - The Conservation Commission has sidelined a controversial proposal to build NordenPark, a 27-unit condominium complex on the Westport border. The commission last night voted 6-1 to deny developer Norden Place LLC a wetlands permit to build a three-village condominium project along Interstate 95 and the Westport border.

A two-page motion that spelled out why the commission opposed the proposal said Norden Place, a partnership of the Spinnaker Cos, Greenfield Partners and Summitt Development, did not provide enough information to prove that its storm water management plan would protect numerous wetlands the 38-acre project area.

"the commission finds that the applicant failed to establish that the proposed development would not result in significant impact to wetlands and watercourses," the motion stated.

Many neighbors and environmentalists opposed the plan, saying that the development would bring too much traffic to the area, overwhelm local schools and make new demands on police and fire personnel.

After the vote, Alexis Cherichetti, Conservation Commission staff member and senior environmental officer said Norden Place would have to make a new application to the commission or appeal the decision in state Superior Court.

"Without a wetlands permit, they can't do the development or propose anything similar in scale," Cherichetti said.

Before instructing his development and legal team not to comment, Norden Place principal Clay Fowle said: "We will study the context of the motion and respond appropriately.

"Although the lengthy motion was proposed by member Matthew Caputo, Cherichetti said she penned the decision after meetings with members who were concerned about the project.

Acting Chairwoman Anne Cagnina said the commission did exactly what it was supposed to do.

"We are not certain that there will be no negative impact to the wetlands. We are here to protect the wetlands," Cagnina said.

Laurel Lindstrom, a conservationist and president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said she was pleased with the vote.

"Wow. They did everything I could have asked for. There were very thorough and kept focused on the wetlands and really did their job," Lindstrom said.

ENNA in the News

When the project was proposed in November, Norden Place had planned 316 condominiums for the property bounded by I-95 to the north, Westport to the east and Metro-North Railroad tracks to the south.

The industrially zoned property, along with an additional 40 acres of property that contains a 620,000 - square-foot building, was purchased by Norden Place five years ago for \$40 million from Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. The tenants would remain. Gibbs College, radar manufacturer Norden Systems and tour travel company Tauck World Discovery are located there.

Developers in February increased the project to 328 units after agreeing to a city task force recommendation that the project should make 15 percent of the units affordable.

Two months later, Norden Place trimmed the plan to 273 units and cut 100 parking places after the Conservation Commission said the project had too many residential units for the site.

Along with the revamped residential component, Norden Place came up with a revised storm water runoff plan that its consultants said would protect wetlands even during large storms.

But an independent consultant hired by the commission and paid by Norden Place said the developer did not provide enough information for an informed analysis of the storm water runoff plan.

A number of commissioners were concerned that runoff from a large storm would inundate the property's most valuable wetland which covers several acres along the railroad tracks.

During a public hearing last month, Norden Place attorney Frank Zullo said all the information had been supplied to the consultant GZA GeoEnvironmental.

In a telephone interview yesterday, GZA Senior Project Manager Christopher October said, "The revised application did not have enough information to render a conclusion on whether or not the proposal would perform as stated in the application text."

October added that as of yesterday, GZA hadn't received the hydrology calculations and detailed site plan information that it needed to reach a conclusion about the water runoff plans.

May 7, 2006

Hour

Photo of ENNA neighborhood cleanup off East Avenue near East Norwalk Train Station

[Click here](#)

April 21, 2006

Norwalk Citizen-News

Traffic Calming Sought for Strawberry Hill Avenue

By Leslie Hutchison

ENNA in the News

Staff Writer

It took a petition, a neighborhood traffic forum and a consistent message, but supporters of a traffic calming study for Strawberry Hill Avenue got what they wanted; and sooner than expected.

Members of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association got the attention of the Common Council by documenting traffic accidents on the busy street and showing photos to members of the council's Planning Committee.

The request by the ENNA to fund the study came as the council was preparing to vote on the capital budget for fiscal year 2006-07. Not only did the council vote unanimously on April 11 to appropriate \$80,000 for the study; it also approved the funds for the current fiscal year; so work on the study can begin right away.

ENNA President Laurel Lindstrom said the approval for the study wasn't a council priority and "without neighborhood backing," funding for such projects isn't always supported. She said the traffic problems were "just below the radar screen" for public works officials: "For the last three months, we really entirely focus on bringing [the situation] to their attention." Lindstrom added.

The strategy worked. At last week's meeting, council member Fred Bondi, D-District C, said he would like to see additional traffic lights on Strawberry Hill: it's a greatly used street." He added: "There are three schools on that street; and the traffic is very heavy before and after school."

Norwalk High, Nathan Hale Middle and Naramake Elementary schools are all located near the intersection of Tierney Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue. "Children cross the street there, and it's a dangerous intersection." said council member Nicholas Kydes, R-District C, noting that he would like that to be a "priority area" for the study.

Another area of concern is the sharp curve near Roxbury Road. Dave Park, who lived at 66 Strawberry Hill Ave. since 1985, said "the southbound traffic late at night" often includes motorists who are going too fast: "They wipe out on Roxbury Road, and telephone poles get knocked down," he said, adding that "early on a Sunday morning, you hear the crashes. I have had to go out and comfort many an accident victim over the years."

Park would like to see Strawberry Hill Avenue narrowed, to control the speed of traffic. He also believes "passing on the right would be cut down" if the road were narrowed.

Council member Matthew Miklave, D-At Large, also discussed the concerns about the curve near Roxbury Road. "That one curve is always a problem at night." He believes Strawberry Hill Avenue will be "an excellent test candidate to see how changes can be applied in other areas."

Lindstrom said some possible solutions to speeding and unsafe passing could be "curb extensions that bulge out" and make the lanes more narrow. "It's a very wide road with an incline, and it makes people go faster. There are not a lot of lights compared with East Avenue. It's difficult to go less than 40 [mph] unless you tap your brakes going downhill."

Bondi added. "We have to slow traffic a little bit, so we don't have a fatality."

The requested capital budget for 2007-08 includes \$1.58 million for implementing traffic calming solutions on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Lindstrom knows the improvements will cost millions of dollars. "But these projects can be funded with

...mentments and improvements will be a mix of grants," she said, citing as an example the federal Safe Routes To Schools program. "The street is a perfect candidate for that," she said.

April 14, 2006

Advocate

Curbs disturb

By Ryan Jockers
Staff Writer

April 14, 2006

NORWALK -- The curb in front of East Norwalk Cemetery's main gate is practically flush with the state road encircling the landmark.

"The goal of a curb is to keep traffic in-bounds," said state Rep. Chris Perone, D-Norwalk. "When you have a curb that's three-quarters of an inch high, it doesn't do anything to keep traffic off the curb. It's a safety hazard."

Perone stood on the sidewalk next to the curb with taxing district representatives, community leaders and state transportation engineers he had assembled yesterday to tour the East Norwalk center and discuss ways to improve sidewalks, curbs, roads and the historic area's general appearance.

Other parts of the city -- SoNo, Wall Street, West Avenue, to name a few -- get a lot of attention, Perone said, and efforts to revitalize those areas overshadow East Norwalk, which has a train station, businesses and churches.

"East Norwalk has a lot to offer for businesses and families," he said. "We want improvements made to energize this area."

The group walked the sidewalks, noting their poor condition and crumbling curbs. Perone said it is the state's responsibility to fix them -- Route 136 occupies most of the traffic circle -- and a Department of Transportation engineer said he would tell his supervisor about the condition of the sidewalks, curbs and road.

"It's their road," Perone said. "We want to make sure (the improvements being sought are) built into their budget."

Norwalk could get as much as \$550,000 in state funding through the Town Aid Road program for the next fiscal year.

The safety improvements are needed in East Norwalk, members of that group said yesterday, because it is used by commuters, senior citizens and church-goers.

In addition to improving pedestrian and traffic safety, East Norwalk residents are seeking support for a general beautification project. Paul Coggin, the Third Taxing District commissioner, said he would like to see granite curbs and brick sidewalks.

Hanging flower baskets and facade upgrades would improve aesthetics and slow motorists, said Laurel

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hanging flower baskets and facade upgrades would improve aesthetics and slow motorists, said Eugene Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

Nicholas Kydes, a Common Councilman representing District C, said he would like to see an electric trolley route linking East Norwalk to SoNo and West Avenue and Wall Street.

He called the trolley idea "a wish," but yesterday's tour of the area could start a grass-roots effort to beautify the area, he said.

The taxing district, which planted an antique clock in a traffic island near the cemetery, will support such efforts.

"We'd be a positive voice and coordinate things locally," he said. "But the state and the city are best suited to take the lead on funding."

The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency has given a \$40,000 grant to the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, which it plans to use to spruce up the business facades in Liberty Square, Lindstrom said. But business owners or residents need to match the Redevelopment Agency's grant in order for the organization to use it.

Liberty Square, across Norwalk River from SoNo, is an ideal location to beautify, Lindstrom said, because it would link beautification efforts from East Norwalk to SoNo.

April 13, 2006

Hour

Officials look to slow down Strawberry Hill Avenue traffic

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Common Council this week authorized Director of Public Works Harold F. Alvord to find an engineering firm to develop a traffic-calming plan for Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Alvord's department will issue a request for qualifications, the first step in hiring a firm to design traffic-calming measures for the busy thoroughfare in East Norwalk.

"This is a good request. We'd like to get this design work done on getting Strawberry Hill Avenue with some sort of traffic-calming program," said Councilman Fred A. Bondi, in whose district the street lies. "One of the main things I'd like to see on Strawberry Hill Avenue is the addition of traffic signals."

Alvord's department will tap \$80,000 from its traffic-calming account, which under former Mayor Alex Knopp was used to install speed-humps.

Under Mayor Richard A. Moccia, the city is focusing on other approaches. As Bondi noted, speed-humps are not suitable for Strawberry Hill Avenue — the street is an emergency response route. Still, other traffic-calming measures may be in order, depending on the engineering recommendations.

"You could use curbing, on-street parking, landscaping, striping, traffic signals and you've got signage,"

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Aivora said Wednesday. But I'm not going to prejudice (the results). I want the experts to come back to us with their proposals."

Councilman Nicholas D. Kydes, who with Bondi represents District C, would like a traffic-calming plan that prioritizes those sections of Strawberry Hill Avenue "that are most dangerous." Kydes said the area near Tierney Street is particularly dangerous because of its crosswalk, which children use.

The Strawberry Hill area is home to Norwalk High, Naramake Elementary and Nathan Hale Middle school, another reason to slow motorists, residents say.

Police stepped up enforcement along Strawberry Hill Avenue and elsewhere in Norwalk during Slow Down Days March 20 to March 27.

"We can't put a police officer there 24 hours-a-day, but we will have another slow-down week in June," Moccia told council members Tuesday night.

During a public safety forum arranged by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association at City Hall last month, residents urged police to crack down on speeders on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

David Park, Strawberry Hill street representative for the association, has lived on Strawberry Hill Avenue for 21 years. He welcomes a traffic-calming plan.

"The volume of traffic has slowly been increasing over the years, and there's been several car accidents, some of them serious in the area of my house," Park said.

On March 23, a head-on collision directly in front of his home destroyed two vehicles and left one motorist hospitalized.

April 12, 2006

Hour

Developer outlines scaled-down design for Norden Place

By PATRICK R. LINSEY

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Conservation Commission's public hearing on the Norden Place development was finally closed Tuesday night, after design revisions delayed the developer's rebuttal.

Norden Place LLC touted a reduction in density, dropping the residential development's plan by 55 units to 273, while also showcasing new mechanisms to protect wetlands.

"We are doing something that takes into account the wetlands and the needs of the community," said Elizabeth Suchey, an attorney for Norden Place LLC, the Spinnaker Cos.-led developer.

Some members of the public reiterated their concerns over the 38-acre site, which lies between Westport and Norden Park and includes several wetlands, while two others spoke in favor of the project.

ENNA in the News

Several critics petitioned the commission for intervenor status. Laurel Lindstrom, a petitioner, said the state would entitle her to information provided to the commission and its staff in a timely fashion.

Lindstrom also spoke against the toned-down plan. "The applicant is heading in the right direction," Lindstrom said, "but they've got a long way to go."

The new plan will still disrupt wetlands on the site, she said, while also having other, tangential impacts on the environment. Lindstrom Monday said "under 200" is a more appropriate number of units for the site.

But Winthrop Baum, chairman of the East Norwalk Business Association, disagreed with the notion the development will harm the wetlands.

"If what you are alleging were true ... then the premise of sanitary systems as we know them and as they are installed in millions of land lots here and elsewhere is wrong as well," Baum said. "Science has provided us with ways in which to work with the properties of soil and water filtration, and create clean, healthy environments."

Baum and other speakers later strayed from the subject of wetlands, of which those in Norwalk the commission is charged to protect. Commissioners called some comments inapplicable to their body, and admonished speakers to address only their concerns over wetlands.

The commission's consultant, GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc. of Vernon addressed the new plans. The consultant's remarks generally praised new features to protect the wetlands, though they declined to fully sign off on the project, as they had not received some specifications until the day of the meeting.

"If they are able to attenuate peak (stormwater) flow, these units as they're listed certainly appear to be adequate," said Chris October, a GZA engineer.

The commission was assured they can by Terrance M. Gallagher, the developer's project manager. The updated plan has incorporated porous pavement and bio-retention basins, as well as recharge galleries and a rain garden. These features help filter stormwater, rather than letting it run into wetlands untreated, Gallagher said.

Norden Place has said the project will bring much-needed affordable housing to Norwalk. The site is zoned for industrial purposes, but the city's Industrial Zones Committee has endorsed rezoning if the developer pledges 15 percent of units be priced affordable.

The Zoning Commission closed its public hearing in March, leaving both bodies to deliberate on the matter separately. The Conservation Commission will make its recommendations to the Zoning Commission.

"I am satisfied that we have held a public hearing — to everyone's satisfaction I think," said acting Chairwoman Anne Cagnina. "The public hearing is closed — and it's only 10:10."

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

April 11, 2006

Hour

Norden Place to unveil new plan at public hearing

By PATRICK R. LINSEY

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A new plan for the Norden Place housing development in East Norwalk will be unveiled to the public tonight, at a hearing of the Conservation Commission.

The revised version eliminates 55 units, dropping the total from 328 to 273. "I'm confident that it addresses the concerns raised by the commissioners, the public and the independent consultant," said Elizabeth Suchie, an attorney for Norden Place LLC, the Spinnaker Cos.-led developer. "The plan is an outgrowth of that."

The public hearing, which began Feb. 28, was set to resume March 28, but was delayed until tonight so the developer could modify its plans. While the continuation was scheduled for the developer's rebuttal, because new information is being presented, public comment will again be allowed.

Many Norwalkers are still concerned about the project, said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association. The wooded, 38-acre site is located between Norden Park and the Westport border.

"They talk about they're not being a very dense project, but when you consider that there are so many wetlands on the site ... they should really be looking to cut back on the density even more than they have," Lindstrom said. A more appropriate number would be "under 200," she added.

In a letter to the commission, Acting Chairwoman Anne Cagnina lobbied for the removal of 11 acres of wetlands from the density calculation formula, which would leave room for 240 units, still 33 short of the revised proposal.

GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc. of Vernon was hired by the commission to review the previous plan. It deemed the engineering sound, but requested information on 30 points within the drainage plan.

Conservation Commission staff could not be reached for comment Monday afternoon.

April 6, 2006

Hour

Study: 2 projects not too many

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Norwalk's retail and housing markets are the envy of the Northeast, and can support redevelopment of both West Avenue and Reed-Putnam, according to an analysis presented to the Redevelopment Commission Wednesday night.

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"The Reed-Putnam site is real different from a retailer's point of view. I don't think that the same retailers that would look at West Avenue are going to necessarily look at Reed Putnam," said Richard Gsottschneider, president of RKG Associates Inc., a New Hampshire-based economic planning firm. "I think they're both important. I think they both can work."

On Wednesday night, Gsottschneider presented commissioners his company's analysis of Norwalk's commercial and residential markets.

The analysis comes as developer Stanley M. Seligson looks to revamp West Avenue with nearly 400,000 square feet of retail; 75,000 square feet of office space; and 350 new residential units. 95/7 Ventures LLC, the developer for the last piece of the Reed Putnam area immediately to the south, tentatively plans 215,000 square feet of retail; 500,000 square feet of office space; and 300 residential units.

When 95/7 Ventures asked to drop the office space and boost retail and housing in its project, Seligson expressed concern that the changes, if approved by the city, would result in two similar developments competing for tenants.

Mayor Richard A. Moccia said he intends to meet with both developers and learn their concerns. For now he distinguished between the two developments.

"West Avenue is a city within a city, whereas Reed Putnam with its offices ... you're looking at people coming to work," Moccia said. "If we're a magnet, we'll find a way to attract (everyone)."

The 47-page analysis contains demographics, housing trends, retail indicators, a shopping center inventory, consumer demand and sales, an office market overview, and data on the condominium and apartment markets.

According to the analysis, Norwalk could support roughly 422,800 square feet of new retail through 2010 plus 51,300 square feet for every 1,000 households coming online. On housing, Gsottschneider said the market could absorb over a five to 10-year period the roughly 1,500 units on paper or under development.

"We don't believe (1,500 units) represents an oversupply in any manner, shape or form," Gsottschneider said.

Commissioner Emil Albanese asked whether interest rates, oil prices or other factors might alter the market forecast. Gsottschneider said those factors were not taken into consideration, but added that Norwalk likely will fare well.

"You have a price advantage and it's an attractive community" said Gsottschneider, contrasting to costs in neighboring Westchester County. "You're doing all the right things that all the cities in the Northeast are trying to do."

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, which has pressed the city to finish updating its Master Plan of Conservation and Development, said she intends to review the market analysis.

For now, Lindstrom said the analysis suggests opportunities for planning.

"Norwalk looks like it's really well-positioned to be able to attract developers and development. It also means commissioners and the city are in the driver's seat," Lindstrom said. "There are things we could

require more of developers (such as) architectural review and standards, having citywide inclusionary zoning for a certain amount of affordable housing, and historic preservation."

April 5, 2006

Hour

Fire chief aims at compromise on HQ request

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Fire Chief Denis McCarthy told the Common Council's Planning Committee Tuesday night that \$600,000 is enough to start design work and firm up the cost of building a new fire headquarters.

"The next phase is to allow us to nail down the last dime that this project is going to cost with some degree of reliability," McCarthy said. "What would it take to come up with a final design with a fairly ha cost estimate? ... The estimate that we collectively agreed on was \$600,000."

McCarthy requested \$1.72 million in his 2006-07 capital budget to raze the Fire Support Services Facility c Fairfield Avenue and design an estimated \$14-million new headquarters for that location.

Giving him \$600,000 would postpone demolition of the Support Services Facility as the city firms up costs a new headquarters. McCarthy said the figure stems from discussions he had with Alan Lo, city building and facilities manager, and John Hawley of Gilbane Building Co., the firm overseeing municipal construction projects.

McCarthy said \$600,000 would cover schematic plans; establish the cost of steel, concrete and other structural and mechanical components; perform traffic studies and other necessary design work short of final construction documents.

"If we started on July 1, we could come back to the council in January with a hard design number and potentially ask for the balance of the funds," McCarthy said. "We would still need a total of \$1.7 million t finish the design work and demolish 100 Fairfield Ave."

The shift comes as the city moves away from a \$4.1-million plan launched under Mayor Alex Knopp to renovate the Charles A. Volk Central Station at 121 Connecticut Ave. and Fire Support Services Facility a 100 Fairfield Ave., to a new plan to build an estimated \$14 million headquarters on Fairfield Avenue.

While Moccia, McCarthy, firefighters and some Common Council members say a new headquarters is needed to meet the long-term needs of the city and its firefighters, others have expressed concern that the \$14-million estimate will climb and that the city cannot shoulder additional capital debt.

The Planning Commission, under Chairman Walter O. Briggs, recommended in February giving McCarthy \$70,000 for 2006-07. That money, together with \$270,000 leftover from the renovation plan, would keep th headquarters project moving forward. Said Briggs: "There's a lot of ifs floating around to fund the new fir station, and I'm trying to tighten down the ifs."

While Moccia recommended giving McCarthy the full \$1.72 million, he indicated Tuesday that \$600,000

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...Mocchia recommended giving the city the full \$12 million, he indicated. "Probably that \$100,000 would work for now."

"The ultimate end is to get a modern facility. If it means that they need a little more information and they want to move a little slower, we'll try and work with them on that," Mocchia said. "I understand their concerns about financing and plans. If it means working on a compromise basis, that's what it's all about."

Mocchia said he is still hopeful that Norwalk will receive federal funds for the fire headquarters project and "factor that into the pot."

The city would need to bond less than \$1 million to design and build an estimated \$14 million fire headquarters, according to city Finance Director Thomas S. Hamilton.

Under Hamilton's analysis, the city could receive \$4.2 million from selling the Volk station property. Using \$4.1 million allocated from the earlier renovation project and \$4.75 million from the city's capital fund balance would bring the bonded portion of the estimated \$14 million project down to \$950,000.

McCarthy plans to speak to the Planning Committee Thursday night as it makes its recommendation to the council on the city's unfolding 2006-07 capital budget.

City departments and the school district collectively requested nearly \$30.3 million for the fiscal year starting July 1. City Finance Director Thomas S. Hamilton recommended paring that to \$12.5 million to keep city debt within acceptable levels. Mocchia is recommending \$12.7 million.

During a public hearing Tuesday night, a dozen speakers asked Planning Committee members to add back \$300,000 to plan traffic-calming measures for Strawberry Hill Avenue (Note: this amount is incorrect. The amount is actually \$80,000), \$50,000 to repair a retaining wall along Perry Avenue and \$275,000 to continue outfitting schools with new computers.

The Board of Education requested \$875,000. Hamilton, the Planning Commission and Mocchia are recommending \$600,000.

"Quite frankly, the need we have is for the \$875,000 that we had been planning on and that was part of our long-range plan," Corda said. "Six-hundred thousand dollars, and I know that is a lot of money, but it just doesn't do it."

Kate McFarland, a Norwalk High School senior and student government president, said 77 of the 110 computers available to students function, on average.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association, and others praised city officials for reintroducing Slow Down Week last month, but added that police crackdowns and education alone cannot halt speeding.

"We really could benefit from having some traffic-calming projects and devices in places," Lindstrom said. "There's a lot of talk right now about the speed bumps and whether they're effective or not. This would be a really good opportunity to actually showcase some other form of traffic calming."

Lindstrom said having a plan for Strawberry Hill Avenue will leverage federal dollars to construct the traffic-calming devices. They might include curb extensions, textured patterns at intersections and narrowing the roadway at key locations.

April 2, 2006



April 2, 2006

Living In | East Norwalk, Conn.

In Fairfield County, a Touch of Nantucket

By [C. J. HUGHES](#)

AS with the first settlers, closeness to the water draws many people to East Norwalk, a wedge-shaped section of Norwalk on a peninsula midway up the Fairfield County coast.

Striking out in any direction brings a reminder of how close the water is. Near Taylor Farm Park, rows of sailboats protected by tight white tarps ride out the winter months, while the dead-end streets of Grego Point lead to public beaches that double as canoe launches. Past the fields of Veterans Memorial Park, boats return to the deep harbor filled with bushels of oysters, and along Duck Pond Road a lattice of marshes leavens the air with the sharp smell of salt.

While East Norwalk's appeal to sailors is clear, landlubbers may also like it. East Norwalk is perhaps the last place in [Connecticut's](#) panhandle to find a modestly priced home, brokers say. Prices on the peninsula can sometimes be a third of similar-size homes in neighboring Darien and Westport.

East Norwalk is quiet at night, giving it a small-town ambience that contrasts with South Norwalk, the rollicking nightlife hub a short walk away. And although as an address it may not have the instant brand name recognition of neighborhoods like Shippan Point and Southport, East Norwalk is getting a second look from buyers who might once have passed it by.

Robin Bonnist knew East Norwalk from mooring her boat there but didn't consider it as an option for her dream waterside home until realizing that communities like Milton Point in Rye, N.Y., and much of Greenwich, Conn., were way beyond her budget.

"We just kept going north," she said, before finding a 6,500-square-foot home with six bedrooms, six full baths, two half baths, four fireplaces and an elevator on about a third of an acre in a tiny gated community near Long Island Sound. Last August, she paid \$4.2 million for the home, which is less than a year old.

"It was such a wonderful surprise to find something that reminds us of Nantucket, the kind of place where we have the pleasure of watching the tide go in and out," said Ms. Bonnist, who with her husband, Ran, owns an art-reproduction business in [Brewster](#), N.Y. "It's the type of house you don't want to leave to go work," she said.

More construction of this neighborhood is slated to come to East Norwalk, where the first home is slated to

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new construction of this magnitude is slow to come to East Norwalk, where the typical home is older and relatively small, and where the average resident has been around for many years.

A third-generation oyster boat captain, Hillard Bloom Jr., lives in the same house where he grew up, a 1,200-square-foot Cape built in the 1920's owned by his family, for which he pays about \$1,500 a month in rent.

In fact, many residents rent in East Norwalk, a community that the 2000 census found had only a 39 percent home ownership rate, according to a report from the Norwalk Housing Partnership. Brokers and urban planners, however, said that the number of homeowners today is probably closer to 70 percent.

"At this point, I can't see myself ever leaving," said Mr. Bloom, who walks five blocks to the beach, as he did when he was a child.

What You'll Find

In East Norwalk, the homes — a jumble of styles, most of them built in the 20th century — are close to the road, set off with fences or the occasional bird bath.

Their size generally increases in direct correlation to their distance from the Long Island Sound. Near Interstate 95, the highway that demarcates East Norwalk's landlocked northern edge, a typical home is a ranch on a quarter acre with two bedrooms. On prestigious Pine Hill Avenue, it is common to find a colonial with four bedrooms and a sizable back yard.

Direct waterfront property in East Norwalk, however, is rare, because much of it is parkland. In fact, the area near the Bonnists' home is one of the few developable parcels on the Sound, although building it meant tearing down a longtime community center and beach club.

Teardowns, though, are not as common here as they have been in Greenwich and Westport, or even in Norwalk's Rowayton section, said Michael B. Greene, Norwalk's director of planning and zoning. An ordinance allows residents to request a 90-day delay of any demolition of a home more than 50 years old.

Pressure to demolish old homes could increase in upcoming years, because much of East Norwalk's population is elderly. Indeed, according to 2000 census data, the age group with the biggest population gain, 18.3 percent, was those 75 or older.

Homes owned by members of that group have often never changed hands and can need lots of work, according to Anna McElaney, an agent with Buyer's Capital in Stamford.

"We're talking about a new roof, electrical systems and plumbing," Mrs. McElaney said.

New homes do occasionally come on the market and include the 14 condos recently built by Hacienda on Osborne Avenue near the Norwalk River. Nearby, Oyster Bend, a marina and town house complex put up in the 1980's, is adding 24 condos, Mr. Greene said.

Spinnaker Real Estate Partners has proposed building 328 town houses and apartments, with 15 percent of them reserved as affordable housing, on a former industrial site on Norden Place. The proposal, however, has met resistance from the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, a group that worries that the development could put too many extra cars on the street and children in the schools, according to Laur Lindstrom, the group's president.

What You'll Pay

The average price of currently listed East Norwalk homes is \$960,000. Excluding the 12 homes on the market at the \$1 million mark or above, almost all built in the last 15 years, the average home price is closer to \$500,000, Mrs. McElaney said. Ten homes are listed for \$400,000 to \$499,000, according to the Consolidated Multiple Listing Service.

Prices have jumped 50 percent in the last three years, brokers say. Many buyers need dual incomes to afford even a starter house, they said, and, as with other well-located neighborhoods in Fairfield County prices are expected to rise. "There won't be any part of my region in the next 10 years that by any stretch will be called affordable," said [Robert Wilson](#), executive director of the South Western Regional Planning Agency, which is in the middle of its first housing study in a decade. "But for now," he said, "there's still some relatively good value there."

What to Do

Once the weather warms up, East Norwalk residents visit beaches like Shady Beach — part of East Norwalk's 110 acres or so of parkland — whose wide sandy beaches are free for residents. Access to the Norwalk River and harbor is protected by zoning provisions stipulating that multifamily developments along the water provide public right of ways.

Spring is also the time to put a boat in the water, whether tying up a yacht to one of the 400 public moorings or wheeling a kayak to a convenient boat launch. Boaters typically head to islands like Sheffield, with a lighthouse from 1868 that is open for tours much of the year, or to Chimon and Peach, though they require a permit from the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge.

The area and its surrounding communities offer a lot of activities for children, according to Clara Cohen, an East Norwalk resident. Over the years, her two daughters have kept busy with classes in sailing, swimming, ice skating, dance and theater.

"Everything a child needs is here: space and a yard and places to ride bikes," said Mrs. Cohen, who lives a 1916 Dutch colonial with three bedrooms and two full baths across the street from where she grew up. "It's a big reason why we came back."

The Schools

With 11,300 students, Norwalk's public school system is large and includes many schools.

Younger students who live in East Norwalk attend Marvin Elementary School or Naramake Elementary School from kindergarten through Grade 5, then Nathan Hale Middle School for Grades 6 through 8.

Neighborhood children attend Norwalk High School, which is to undergo major renovations to its science and computer labs starting this summer. It expects to enroll 1,740 students during the next school year.

The high school, one of three in the city, offers instruction in seven foreign languages and special electives like forensics and child psychology.

The music program is also popular, especially the marching band, which consistently is a force in national competitions, said the superintendent, Salvatore Corda.

High school students can also take classes free of charge at the Center for Global Studies, a regional magnet school based at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk, where students from across Fairfield County can study Japanese, Arabic and Chinese language and culture.

In terms of college entrance exams, the class of 2005 scored an average of 486 on the math section of the SAT and 482 on the verbal, significantly lower than the state averages of 517 in math and 517 in verbal.

Dr. Corda says his proudest accomplishment has been increasing scores in the state's mandatory 10th-grade proficiency exams. In the last four years, the number of students in the school district who scored at the proficiency level has steadily increased in three subject areas to at least 79 percent, depending on the subject; the score in math remains in the 60's.

The Commute

In 2005, Norwalk built a rust-colored train station on the westbound side of tracks at the Metro-North Railroad station. Commuters at the East Norwalk station can buy a coffee and newspaper in an airy waiting room before boarding a train to Grand Central Terminal, about an hour away.

Although the station is within walking distance from most of East Norwalk, only about 15 percent of the community's residents commute into the city every day, according to Arnold Knittel, a sales associate at Century 21 Access America in Stamford. Many others take their chances with Interstate 95, which, while can be clogged with cars in the westbound lanes during rush hour, can be comparatively lighter heading toward Bridgeport.

The History

The area's first settlers built homes in East Norwalk in 1648. Almost none of those houses remain, largely because British troops, who landed in East Norwalk during the Revolutionary War in July 1779, burned down 24 of the 30 properties they came across, according to Ed and Madeleine Eckert, two local historians.

Going Forward

New luxury condo projects in neighboring South Norwalk and in Norwalk could spur home sales in East Norwalk. It could also put the area in the sights of developers, who have so far been somewhat absent. At least one property could lend itself to large-scale development — Norwalk Cove Marina, a 10-acre site that is zoned for 25 housing units per acre, according to Mr. Greene. If large-scale multifamily housing complexes do rise in East Norwalk, the community's trapped-in-amber feeling could be threatened.

March 28, 2006

Hour

'Found' money a solution to traffic calming

To the Editor:

I felt like I was in a time warp when I read the editorial in Sunday's Hour demanding that funding previously approved for traffic calming be used for paving. The editorial was titled "Dump the bumps, use

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previously approved for traffic calming be used for paving. The editorial was titled "Dump the bumps, use money to pave East Ave."

I can only guess that the editorial was written before the weekend. Because on Saturday an article ran page 3 of The Hour, titled "'Found' money brings road-repair fund to \$4.5 M."

A review of Department of Public Works expenses for all road project accounts since 2002 determined that "not all the past budgeted money has been utilized," according to Mayor Moccia. The article goes on to say that the leftover funds total more than a million dollars.

When asked about the \$100,000 approved for traffic calming that the mayor had planned to use for paving lower East Ave., the mayor is quoted as saying, "We may just leave the (dollars) alone and use the money for other traffic-calming measures." He indicated that the council will decide.

The found money is clearly the solution to the problem. It is a win-win. Leftover paving funds were found for additional paving. And leftover traffic calming funds can now be used for traffic calming.

Laurel Lindstrom

Norwalk

March 28, 2006

Hour

Slow Down Days counted a success

By PATRICK R. LINSEY

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — City police pinched more than 400 speeders over Slow Down Days, which ran from March 20 to 26, approximately four times the normal number in an average week.

Police, elected officials and neighborhood activists counted the program a success. As municipalities do not share in revenues collected from traffic tickets, the approximately \$12,000 program was mostly funded through grants.

"I think we got the message across," said Mayor Richard Moccia. "I wish we had the funds to do it year-round."

Enforcement was particularly impressive on Strawberry Hill Avenue, said David Park, the street's representative for the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

"They were here a week ago, Monday morning, getting commuter traffic (and) they were here just about all day Saturday," Park said. "They were handing out tons of tickets."

Officers focused on routes motorists take in and out of Norwalk, said Police Chief Harry Rilling, including West Rocks Road, West Norwalk Road, Richards Avenue, Newtown Avenue and Chestnut Hill Road.

Despite this approach, 242 of the 405 motorists cited were Norwalk residents, Rilling said.

It takes more than just enforcement to discourage speeding, he emphasized. The city is also focused on possible engineering improvements and educating motorists as to safe driving habits.

"We don't want to be out there giving out tickets — that's not what it's all about," Rilling said. "The safe communities are those in which people willingly comply with the law."

And to sweeten the deal, officers handed out movie tickets last week to motorists who demonstrated courteous driving habits. Rilling said at least one driver seemed to have learned her lesson.

"One of the women who got a movie ticket one day, the day before had gotten a speeding ticket," Rilling said. "But she was very gracious. She used it (to teach her child a lesson). If you drive badly, you get this ticket. If you drive properly, you get a good ticket."

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

March 19, 2006

Hour

Residents wait hours to speak on Norden development site

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — During a public hearing before the city's Zoning Commission earlier this month, residents waited more than three hours to speak on a proposed 328-housing development for the eastern half of the Norden site.

From roughly 7 to 10 p.m., attorneys and consultants representing developer Norden Place LLC explained to commissioners traffic, drainage, architecture, wetlands impacts, stormwater management and other aspects of the development.

As the presentation continued, residents who had signed up to speak at the hearing sat bleary eyed, waiting for their turn to come. Some left. Of the nearly two-dozen people who did speak, almost all opposed the development.

"It took three hours for the applicant to present the development. I've never seen an applicant spend three hours. It's excessive," said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, whose time to speak came around 11 p.m. "The public is entirely discouraged by then."

For Lindstrom and others following the proposed Norden development, the public hearing before Zoning commissioners March 6 was déjà vu of the public hearing held by the Conservation Commission Feb. 28, when Norden Place representatives spoke at least two and a half hours. That hearing will resume March 28 when Norden Place representatives will be given an opportunity to rebut comments heard by the public last month.

Some at the Zoning Commission public hearing March 6 believe commission Chairwoman Dorothy Moriarty set a double standard. David Berk, also of the neighborhood association, later called the city's law

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set a double standard. David Park, also of the neighborhood association, later called the city's law department.

"I explained that when we got there, the chairwoman immediately gave instructions that, when it was the public's time to speak, she didn't want anybody to repeat anything that was said," Park said. But "the developer keeps repeating themselves about affordable housing six million times."

Lindstrom said she has never heard a chairperson restrict an applicant during a public hearing. By contrast, members of the public are sometimes given three minutes each, she said.

"The public does not get the full ear of the commissioners. They need to be listened to as closely as the applicant is, and that's definitely not happening, Lindstrom said.

Written guidelines dictate how the city's Zoning and Planning commissions must conduct public hearing. Rules for the Conservation Commission are similar. The commission first hears from the applicant or his/her representative. Others then may speak for or against the application. Afterward, the applicant is given the opportunity for a rebuttal.

Under the guidelines, individuals are given one opportunity to speak, and speakers "should not repeat points that have already been raised." Nowhere in the guidelines is a time limit set forth.

"We don't impose a time limit on people who wish to speak to a question. We may say, 'Please be sure you stay on the question at hand,'" Mobilia said. "It's a fine line. You don't want to shut down people, but you do want to try to move (the hearing) along."

Michael B. Greene, the city's planning and zoning director, said the Zoning Commission is by law required to set a record at a public hearing. As such, the chairperson cannot put a time limit on speakers, either the applicant or the public — "that is an appealable offense." Greene, who was at the Norden hearing, said the hearing followed proper procedure.

Attorney Frank N. Zullo dismisses that he and others representing Norden Place spoke three hours, as residents attending the March 6 hearing contend. He said commissioners' questions consumed some of the time between 7 and 10 p.m.

"With the questions raised by commissioners, (the public) had about two hours and we had about two hours. The public spoke and nobody was cut off," said Zullo, whose rebuttal came after midnight. The hearing ended after 1 a.m. "Getting through after 12 a.m. is not extraordinary."

Zullo said details presented by Norden Place representatives were needed for the commission's record and were "consistent with the law and good planning."

Mobilia said the Zoning Commission typically has one "very long" public hearing a year. A hearing several years ago addressing the former GTE property in West Norwalk — now The Dolce Norwalk Center — ran until 3 a.m., she said.

Lindstrom and others, meanwhile, hope commission chairpersons will exercise discretion in the future, so that residents are not forced to wait more than three hours to speak on important development matters facing the city.

"That's the issue. There's a lot of discretion for the chair. We could make things better. We could improve things so people are satisfied," Lindstrom said.

March 18, 2006

Hour

Funds for traffic calming shouldn't be diverted

To the Editor:

I don't know who came up with the line "speed bumps don't work", but since I first heard it a couple of months ago I've heard it repeated by several people.

No matter how it started, I'm writing to say it just isn't true.

Ask the hundreds of residents living on the 21 streets in Norwalk that have speed humps and you will hear a resounding response that speed humps work remarkably well. Safety of home and family is too important to be cast aside by false statements.

The only seemingly substantive argument advanced against speed humps is that they interfere with plowing and emergency vehicles. However, this argument directly contradicts the findings of the Traffic Calming Committee, which included representatives from police, fire and public works. That committee on record as recommending the use of speed humps and finding no significant concerns with their use if the criteria the committee established are followed.

The Traffic Calming Committee was created at the end of Esposito's Republican administration along with an ordinance to allow traffic calming and the first annual approval of \$100,000 for speed humps. For the next four years the program was championed by the Democratic administration. Now, the annual appropriation of funds for traffic calming is threatened.

This is unacceptable. Safety is not a political football. Funds earmarked for traffic calming should be spent on traffic calming — whether it is speed humps or another traffic calming method.

As soon as possible, the public needs to be invited to hear from officials, offer ideas and voice concerns. We need to find creative and effective ways to make streets and neighborhoods safer through traffic calming measures. On some streets, this may mean speed humps. On other streets it could be through the use of landscaped curb extensions, neckdowns, roundabouts — or any number of innovative engineering strategies proven to calm traffic. Education and adequate enforcement are also essential.

Once this has occurred, officials will have a better idea of the direction to take in traffic calming and what to do with the unused \$200,000 which was approved for traffic calming in prior years.

In the mean time, there's the start of Slow Down Days. I encourage residents throughout Norwalk to participate in this citywide effort which takes place the week of March 20. It's one way that each of us can make a difference — by placing homemade 'Slow Down' signs on our front lawn, reminding our neighbors to slow down and by allowing more time to get from one place to another.

Laurel Lindstrom,
President
Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association

March 17, 2006

Advocate

Unsafe drivers beware, Norwalk mayor warns

By Joel Weickgenant
Special Correspondent

March 17, 2006

NORWALK -- Mayor Richard Moccia vowed to crack down on unsafe drivers yesterday through a steppe up campaign against speeding, illegal cell phone use and failure to wear seat belts.

As incentives for good drivers, police will hand out free movie passes as rewards for those who follow regulations.

"We are going to slow people down in traffic. It's going to happen," Moccia said.

In an announcement made with Police Chief Harry Rilling, Moccia said the city will institute "slow-down days" when extra officers will patrol the streets looking for traffic violations.

The campaign will begin Monday and run until Sunday, March 26.

"They're going to be out there every day that week in greater numbers," Moccia said.

Moccia first announced his intent to wage a campaign against reckless driving in December, when he called for drivers to slow down in response to several automobile accidents in the week before Christmas.

He said at that time that he was working with Rilling to bring back slow-down days.

Rilling said officers will pay attention to traffic infractions such as cell phone use while driving and failure to use seat belts, but the top priority next week will be stopping speeders.

"Is it worth it, hitting a child who has run into the road to get a ball, just to save two or three minutes?" he asked.

The police are working in tandem with neighborhood associations, whose members will post homemade signs encouraging drivers to abide by traffic regulations.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said she discussed the idea with group members during a traffic safety forum earlier this month and she will remind them in a bulletin this weekend.

"I'll emphasize that this is one of many ways" to make traffic safer in Norwalk, she said. Her approach to sign-writing is straightforward: she said she has one sign that says, "Slow Down."

"Hopefully, we'll end up with some creative ideas," she said.

The police department has some ideas of its own to encourage residents to drive safely. Beyond issuing

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citations, Rilling said officers have 50 free movie tickets they will hand out as bonuses for commendable driving.

Selected officers will be in charge of issuing drivers movie passes, said Sgt. Paul Vinett of the Community Policing Division.

Drivers who are "signaling, being courteous to other drivers, not taking a right on red where it says not to take a right on red," will be rewarded, Vinett said.

"(The officer) will follow them for a few blocks to make sure their behavior is consistent." The officer will then pull over the vehicle, letting the driver immediately know they have done nothing wrong.

"It's something we haven't done before, but other jurisdictions have done it," Vinett said.

Lt. Robert Bardos said stopping drivers who speed is still the best way to make the roads safer.

"Statistics show that the more intense your enforcement is over a period of time, you notice the accident rate goes down," Bardos said.

March 12, 2006

Hour

Zoners have no choice but to deny housing proposal

To the Editor:

I am in complete agreement with the letter printed in Friday's Hour written by a Westport resident who lives near 8 Norden Place and attended the Norwalk Zoning Commission public hearing on March 6 – a did I. ([Click here to view other letter](#))

In November and December of 2005 the developers presented their plan to the zoning commissioners, shortly after they submitted their application. Therefore, the commissioners already had several opportunities at subsequent committee meetings to question and clarify the hefty stacks of studies and site plans the developers submitted. Any interested member of the public had the same opportunities to become familiar with what the developers were proposing.

Why then did the developers need to take the first three hours of the public hearing to describe in minut detail the project they are proposing? I imagine it was clear to everyone who was there waiting to speak that they were attempting to shut out the public.

What was apparent to me when I listened to the zoning commissioners discuss the public hearing at a committee meeting later in the week was that they were hearing from the Norwalk residents for the first time during that period from 10 PM to just after midnight – and that they didn't fully comprehend what was said to them, or what speakers believed was the most significant parts of what they said. How could they?

What the commissioners did recognize was that the developers had offered no concessions to Norwalk – a large part because the Norwalk Zoning Commission had not asked for any.

Unfortunately, since the hearing was closed on March 6 it cannot be reopened. This means that the commissioners cannot question or request further information from any members of the public or from the

ENNA in the News

Commissioners cannot question or request further information from any members of the public, or from the developers – or their consultants. Nor can the public or developers submit anything more.

Making an impossible situation worse is that the Zoning Commission cannot at this point add conditions onto the request for the zoning text amendment which needs to be approved before they can vote on the plan for the condominium project. Their only options are to approve or deny the developers' request for zoning text amendment.

If they approve the zoning text amendment then they are bound by what is in the zoning regulations when considering the application for the development. That leaves them unable to add many of the conditions for approval which the public requested – or the commissioners may want.

What this all adds up to is that if the public – or commissioners – are to get anything they asked for, the Zoning Commission needs to deny the zoning text amendment. If it is denied the developer can resubmit a revised proposal – and the process will start again from the beginning.

Friday's letter compared the developer's attorney Frank Zullo to Fred Astaire as he waltzed his consultant to the podium. Yes, Mr. Zullo is a good dancer. But this time, it looks like he danced the zoning commissioners into a corner where their only responsible option is to deny his client's application.

Laurel Lindstrom, President
Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association

March 11, 2006

Hour

Moving violations recited Police Chief Rilling releases statistics at traffic safety forum

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — In the last year, Norwalk police have ticketed 45 motorists along Strawberry Hill Avenue for speeding, improper passing, failure to obey traffic signals and other moving violations.

Draw your own conclusions on whether that's too few or too many.

Police Chief Harry W. Rilling released the statistics Thursday, a day after residents, speaking during a traffic safety forum at City Hall, alleged that his officers are not enforcing motor-vehicle laws.

"One of the individuals indicated she would like to get an idea how many summonses were issued, because she believes no enforcement action has taken place," Rilling said. Citywide, "4,753 was the number of people ticketed. The number of charges were 6,873. None of the numbers reflect the times when officers stopped vehicles and gave written or verbal warnings."

The traffic safety forum, hosted by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, focused on the Strawberry Hill Avenue area of East Norwalk — home to Norwalk High, Naramake Elementary and Nath. Hale Middle schools

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Rilling, Mayor Richard A. Moccia, Director of Public Works Harold F. Alvord, and city traffic engineer Fred Eshraghi explained what is being done in the areas of education, engineering and enforcement to curb speeding on the busy thoroughfare.

Residents focused on enforcement, or, as they said, lack thereof.

Many residents found the average number of tickets issued daily — Rilling said roughly a dozen before delving into the numbers the following day — too few given the driving behavior that they have witnessed in their neighborhoods.

Strawberry Hill resident Lee Fleming said she has seen "almost no enforcement." She said motorists pass on the right or cross the centerline without being ticketed.

Judi Most, who lives on Strawberry Hill Avenue at Tierney Street, said night-time speeding is the primary problem facing residents.

"You can't speed between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. There are too many school buses," Most said. "My concern between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. From Westport Avenue down to William (Street), it is a non-stop speedway. I have seen people get hit by cars. I have seen people get hit coming out of Tierney Street."

According to Rilling, police issued 62 moving violations to motorists driving on Strawberry Hill Avenue between March 9, 2005, and March 9, 2006. Among those 62 formal charges were nine for traveling too fast, another nine for failure to obey traffic signs, signals or markings, and one for passing on the right.

While most comments Wednesday night focused on Strawberry Hill Avenue, residents from elsewhere also reported speeding and lack of enforcement.

Richard Lowenthal said that he has never seen a police unit during his 17 years living on Newtown Avenue. He said his wife has been rear-ended twice. They have had a pet run over on the street, he said.

On Newtown Avenue, police ticketed 25 motorists over the last year. Among the 31 formal charges issued 15 were for traveling too fast, three were for failure to obey a traffic sign or signal, one was for following too close, and one was for reckless driving.

Rilling said taking officers off the street and placing them into a task force to address an uptick in youth violence, as well as staffing that is 21 officers short of the department's authorized strength of 179, has diverted resources from traffic enforcement.

Nor is Strawberry Hill Avenue the only street where speeding occurs, he said.

"There's always room for improvement, but we have 255 miles of roadwork in Norwalk. We have to use our limited resources where we can," Rilling said. "With all the other things going on, I think our (ticketing) numbers are good."

"All these things considered, Strawberry Hill Avenue did get quite a bit of attention," said Rilling, pointing to the statistics.

James Byington is among the officers who patrol East Norwalk. He pulled over and issued formal charge to three motorists on Strawberry Hill Avenue during the last year, according to the statistics released by

Rilling.

Byington said officers sometimes witness moving violations while they are en route to emergency calls — and thus cannot stop to issue a ticket.

"It's very difficult to pull people over constantly," Byington said.

The traffic safety forum came as the city gears up for Slow Down Days, which is set for March 20 to March 27. Police plan to increase their presence along Strawberry Hill Avenue and throughout the city during that slow-down week. The neighborhood association has asked residents to create and display signs during that week to remind motorists to slow down.

Rilling, meanwhile, asks residents to call his office at 854-3001; Deputy Chief Mark Palmer's office at 854-3002; or the police captain's office at 854-3007, to report their concerns about speeding and other traffic safety issues. He said residents should not let their frustration build up to the point seen Wednesday night.

March 9, 2006

Hour

Residents slow down or get ticket

[Click here for pdf of article](#)

March 9, 2006

Hour

Neighborhood coalition names new coordinator

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Maribeth Becker, a board member of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, has been named coordinator of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations.

The coalition, which comprises more than a dozen neighborhood groups, formed two years ago to "provide a common voice on larger Norwalk issues."

On Monday, Becker e-mailed Mayor Richard A. Moccia and Common Council members, introducing herself, stating the coalition's mission and outlining its concerns about the city's unfolding master plan.

"We have been closely following the situation with the city's master plan (or lack thereof). Attached is the document we sent to the Planning Commission to highlight our concerns. We would welcome the chance to discuss this with you in more detail," Becker wrote. "I appreciate the support you have shown to our organization in the past and I look forward to working with you all in the future."

ENNA in the News

Becker spoke at City Hall Monday night on a proposed 328-unit housing development for the eastern half of the Norden site. She says the city should not approve it nor other major developments until the master plan is complete.

Becker, a member of the Norwalk Preservation Trust and city's Tree Advisory Committee, was named coordinator of the coalition at the group's monthly meeting last month. She takes over from Robert Wagman, past president of the West Norwalk Association, who finished his second one-year term in February.

"Maribeth, who is a very bright and hardworking young lady, has assumed the role and she is off and running. I expect she will bring (the coalition) to the next higher level," Wagman said. "She's got the mantle for the next year or two."

Coalition bylaws allow a coordinator to serve for no more than two consecutive one-year terms, Wagman said.

Wagman said the coalition has done well for a start-up organization. He said it has let its concerns be known about the West Avenue Redevelopment Plan, and that the city's Redevelopment Agency has listened. Those concerns have included density, traffic and the use of eminent domain, he said.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association and coalition co-founder, said the coalition is "not about one person or one association. It's all about strength in numbers. That's what makes it strong."

March 7, 2006

Hour

Zoning body looks at Norden plans

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Representatives of Norden Place LLC pitched long and hard to zoning commissioners Monday night a proposed 328-unit multi-family housing development for the eastern half of the Norden site, as residents and neighborhood associations waited their turn to weigh in.

At about 10 p.m. — more than two hours into the public hearing in the concert auditorium of City Hall — the Zoning Commission called a brief recess.

"I want to sit here first and hear what everybody else wants to say. The impact on the area is just going to be horrendous. That's what my neighbors are telling me," said Councilwoman Joanne T. Romano, who lives on Howard Avenue. "I see a lot of people wanting to speak, but they're getting disgruntled and already left. The presentation is taking up most of the night and they left."

By 11 p.m., 10 people had spoken against the proposed housing development, Romano said.

Norden Place — a joint venture of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC, Greenfield Partners and Summit Development — needs Conservation and Zoning commission approvals to build the housing units on the

ENNA in the News

38-acre parcel between NordenPark and the Westport border.

Last week, the Conservation Commission opened its public hearing on the proposed development. Afterward, some residents complained that the developer spoke for more than two hours. Monday marked Zoning commissioners' opportunity to hear residents and others speak for or against the development.

Using a three-dimensional model and drawings, Norden Place representatives and consultants explained the architecture, wetlands impacts, drainage, stormwater management, traffic, impact on city services and other aspects of the development.

"A third of the land is going to be developed with buildings and parking. Two-thirds is not going to be developed and will remain green," said architect Perry Morgan of BartonPartners Architects & Planners.

Morgan said the bowl-like topography of the site will leave the development — built in three villages with four-story condominium buildings and 2.5-story townhouses — largely invisible to neighbors and motorists.

Norden Place has asked the Zoning Commission to amend city zoning regulations to allow multi-family housing on the parcel, which is now zoned for restricted industrial use.

The requested zoning change is in line with the recommendations of the city's Industrial Zones Committee. The committee this year recommended allowing multi-family housing on the site, provided 15 percent of the resulting units are priced affordably. Spinnaker Cos. has agreed to that request.

"Unfortunately there's been a significant decline in manufacturing, so we have to do something with the types of properties, and affordable housing is as good a use as can be found," said Edward J. Musante, president of the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, waiting for his turn to speak Monday night.

About 60 people attended the public hearing, including Mayor Richard A. Moccia; state Rep. Christopher R. Perone, D-137; Romano and fellow Common Council member Nicholas D. Kydes; Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association; Al Raymond, vice president of the Spring Hill/Norwalk Hospital Area Neighborhood Association; and Matthew Mandell, director of the Partrick Wetlands Preservation Fund.

Mandell estimated that he was among a dozen Westport residents at the hearing.

"Affordable housing is necessary but never at the expense of reasonable density. This is not reasonable density. This is overdevelopment," Mandell said.

Frank N. Zullo, the Norwalk attorney representing the developer, said the density, at 8.5 units per acre is one-third the typical density of 26 units per acre found in areas zoned for multi-family housing.

"It's on 38 acres of land — that's a lot of land," Zullo said.

Zoning commissioners pressed hydrologist Robert F. Good Jr. on continuing environmental remediation mandated by the state Department of Environmental Protection. Good said United Technologies Corp. former owner of the property — is responsible for remediating asphalt debris, solvents and other remnants of the land's industrial past.

"What we're really talking about is a small area of the 38-acre parcel," said Spinnaker Cos. Principal

ENNA in the News

Clayton H. Fowler. He said the remediation area impacts about 25 of the proposed 328 units. He said he anticipates no problems.

Norden Place representatives have said the development will enhance wetlands. The development will impact 2,000 square feet of the 450,000 square feet of wetlands on the parcel, and create 7,000 square feet of new wetlands, Zullo said.

Opponents of the development point to an independent study commissioned and presented to Conservation Commission by GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. of Vernon. The report raised 30 points within the Norden Place drainage plan.

"It's the same thing they went through last week," said Mandell, referring to Norden Place's explanation of the drainage plan to the Conservation Commission last week. "They focused on the environment, because that's where they're most vulnerable."

Traffic consultant Leonard A. Liss of Tighe & Bond, the firm hired by Norden Place, told Zoning commissioners that the intersection of Beacon Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue posed the only problem. There, he has recommended installation of a traffic signal.

March 6, 2006

Hour

[Norden Place article & ENNA Strawberry Hill Avenue Traffic Safety Forum photo - click here](#)

March 6, 2006

Hour

Norden Place development plan receives hearing

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Zoning Commission will hold a public hearing tonight on Norden Place LLC's plan for 3 apartments, condominiums and town houses on the eastern half of the Norden site.

"Every person who wants to speak will be allowed to speak. We're holding the meeting early and we're holding it in a place that has (enough) seats — there could be people from Westport also," said Dorothy Mobilia, commission chairwoman. "No matter what happens, we can't make a decision on Monday, because we have to have the Conservation Commission's report and recommendation."

The public hearing is scheduled for 7 tonight in the concert auditorium of Norwalk City Hall, 125 East Ave

Norden Place — a joint venture of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC, Greenfield Partners and Summit Development — needs Conservation and Zoning commission approvals to build the housing units on the 38-acre parcel between NordenPark and the Westport border.

Spinnaker Cos. officials say the development 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.

They have boosted the affordable housing portion of the development to 15 percent, as recommended by the city's Industrial Zones Committee.

Last Tuesday night, the Conservation Commission opened its public hearing and afterward resumed it March 28. Some residents at the hearing said the developer was given too much time — more than two hours — to explain the development.

"I don't know that the presentation to us is going to be anywhere nearly that long. They won't have to do such a detailed environmental description," Mobilia said. "And we do have some discretion in shortening that."

The Conservation Commission is responsible for considering the impact of the development on wetlands and drainage. The Zoning Commission is responsible for site-plan review and considering Norden Place LLC's request to allow multi-family housing on land now zoned for restricted industrial use.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said density is at the center of every argument over development.

For affordable housing advocates, density equals more affordable units. At the same time, density results in loss of open space, wetlands encroachment, increased traffic and a drain on city services, Lindstrom said.

Lindstrom said Zoning commissioners have an array of options, if they decide to amend zoning regulation to allow housing on the Norden site. She said they could require increased setbacks from restored wetlands, a conservation easement for public use, a state-of-the-art drainage management plan, extensive native plantings, and halving the number of proposed condominiums.

During a presentation by Spinnakers Cos. officials in East Norwalk in January, residents said the housing development, if built, will overburden roads and schools.

March 3, 2006

Hour

Norwalkers must express opinion about Norden Place -

by Laurel Lindstrom
[OpEd - click here](#)

March 3, 2006

Norwalk Citizen-News

Focusing on Safety

For some time the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association has been focusing attention on traffic safety issues on Strawberry Hill Avenue, promoting a multi-pronged approach for traffic calming.

ENNA in the News

issues on Strawberry Hill Avenue, promoting a multi-pronged approach for traffic calming.

A couple of years ago, working with the Public Works Department, the ENNA had reflective yellow material placed on the signposts near the schools Marvin Elementary School, Nathan Hale Middle School and Norwalk High School to alert drivers to the need to slow down.

More recently, through the Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee, the ENNA succeeded in having Public Works working with the newly hired traffic engineer create school zones on Strawberry Hill Avenue so that vehicles will be required to slow to 20 mph at the school locations.

The ENNA has made it clear to the city that additional enforcement is needed in order to deter speeding. As incidents occur, it's important for residents to report these to the Police Department so that they go on record.

On Wednesday, March 8, at 8 p.m. the ENNA is sponsoring a public forum at City Hall in Room A333 specific to traffic safety on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Police Chief Harry Rilling and traffic engineer Fred Eshraghi will be the guest presenters. The public is encouraged to attend and to participate.

At the March 8 meeting actions for slowing down traffic, and other safety issues on Strawberry Hill Avenue will be discussed.

Slow Down Days planned by the city for March 20-27. The ENNA will focus efforts at the Strawberry Hill Avenue location for the upcoming Slow Down Days. Discussion will include planning the specifics of ENNA involvement. Residents are encouraged to create signs to target speeders on their own streets during Slow Down Days.

Traffic calming funding request for Strawberry Hill Avenue in the city's capital budget for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2006. The public hearing is April 4 where a show of support from residents is needed.

Keeping sidewalks and footpaths clear and walkable.

A petition will be available for signatures specific to the need for additional measures to increase safety related to traffic on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

For more information contact ENNA President Laurel Lindstrom at 855-7668, ENNA Street Representative for Strawberry Hill Avenue David Park at 866-7555 or visit the ENNA Web site at <http://eastnorwalk.org>.

Laurel Lindstrom
East Norwalk

March 3, 2006

Traffic topic of forum at City Hall

By ROBERT KOCH

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Representatives of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, police and public works officials will be at City Hall next Wednesday to talk about traffic on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

"What we hope to do is bring all the neighbors together that have had concerns about the traffic on Strawberry Hill," said Laurel Lindstrom, president of the neighborhood association. "What we want them to do is talk about the different concerns they have and have those (officials) present help address them."

Lindstrom said Police Chief Harry W. Rilling and traffic engineer Fred Eshraghi will be the guest speakers at the forum.

The public forum is scheduled for Wednesday, March 8, at 8 p.m. in Room A333 of City Hall, 125 East Ave. The neighborhood association is sponsoring the forum.

For years, East Norwalk officials have pressed police for additional enforcement on Strawberry Hill Avenue — a busy thoroughfare off which three schools are located — and the Department of Public Works for traffic-calming measures.

Their efforts had resulted in reflective yellow material being placed on the sign posts near Marvin Elementary, Nathan Hale Middle and Norwalk High schools to remind drivers to slow down. The public works department, at the direction of the Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee, created school safety zones, where the posted speed limit is 20-mph.

Mayor Richard A. Moccia and police have slated March 20 to March 27 for Slow Down Days. The slow-down week will focus on Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Public works engineers attribute speeding along Strawberry Hill Avenue to the width of the roadway — roughly 40 feet in some locations.

Harold F. Alvord, public works director, has requested \$3.2 million over the next four years to design and install traffic-calming measures on Strawberry Hill Avenue. Those measures might include curb extensions, textured patterns at intersections and narrowing the roadway at key locations.

The neighborhood association is encouraging residents to speak in favor of the \$80,000 which Alvord has requested for the coming year during a public hearing next month on the city's unfolding 2006-07 capital budget.

March 1, 2006

Norden Place opinions unexpressed

By JAMES WALKER
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — If Joe and Kim Quan had waited another 12 minutes, they would have had a chance to speak during a public hearing at City Hall Tuesday night on a proposed 328-unit development for the eastern half of the Norden property.

But the Norwalk couple, among many others, left the meeting of the Conservation Commission complaining the "public hearing" was venue for representatives of developers Norwalk Place, LLC., to make their case for construction of the complex.

ENNA in the News

make their case for construction of the complex.

"There's no chance to talk," Joe Quan said. "We have been here two and half hours. They talked too long. I think they do this on purpose."

Commissioner Anna Cagnini acknowledged the frustration. "I hate when that happens," she said.

With a miniature model of the complex sprawled on a table and schematic drawings on easels, representatives from Norden Place took more than two and half hours to essentially say their studies conclude there would be no adverse effect on the wetlands and watercourses on the property.

"The ultimate result of all our efforts is a better wetlands system," said Judith Slayback, an environmental analyst with Landscape Architecture & Planning of Norwalk. "In the long run, we will improve and upgrade the wetlands."

But Laurel Lindstrom isn't so sure.

The president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association said in reading studies by the Department of Environmental Protection and others "it sounds like we're not aware of what's on the site."

"We are currently opposed as it stands," she said.

Carol Anne Curry, who is not against the project, expressed concerns about possible flooding onto property of Westport residents living near the proposed complex.

"Our neighborhood is 90-feet from the property," she said. "The effect on us in Westport is more flooding."

The hearing comes as commissioners review an independent consultant's report of Norden Place LLC's drainage plan for the roughly 38-acre property that lies east of Norden Park. The land is now largely wooded with numerous wetlands.

The proposed complex will feature three, four-story New England style "villages" with apartments, townhouses and condominiums ranging in size from one bedroom to two bedrooms with a den.

Current plans call for "35-percent of the property to be covered with buildings and a parking lot" and surrounded by "elaborate landscaping."

The balance of the 38-acre property will be "open space," said Liz Suchy, an attorney representing the developers.

Norden Place LLC — a joint venture of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC, Greenfield Partners and Sumr Development — needs both Conservation and Zoning commission approvals.

Quan said he is concerned the complex will result in higher taxes, an increase in the Board of Education budget, and crowding about "650 to 800 people in such a small space."

"I don't want Norwalk to turn into New York City," Quan said. "Now, you don't see it. But in three or four years, you'll see it. I'd rather they build light industrial."

ENNA in the News

But Karen Schuessler, director of Special Programs at the Human Services Council, supports the development that will include a 15-percent affordable housing component.

"There is an urgent need for housing," she said. "I don't go two days without someone calling me for housing."

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