



## Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association In the News



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October 17, 2006

Hour

### ENNA supports efforts to preserve St. John House

The mission of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association includes fostering the preservation of historic resources and the residential character of the neighborhood.

Since the Grumman St. John House at 93 East Avenue is located within the boundaries of our association and is a significant historic asset that would enhance our neighborhood if it is restored – we support saving the house at its current location. This section of Norwalk is rich in history and the house is an important contributing structure in the National Register Norwalk Green Historic District.

The ENNA respects the rights of private property owners. But evidence shows that preserving historic structures adds value to property, neighborhoods and communities.

We support and greatly appreciate any efforts the owner makes during the next few weeks toward finding a financially viable solution that would keep the Grumman St. John House as a functioning asset to the Avenue Village District – and to the neighborhood.

Laurel Lindstrom, President  
Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association

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October 15, 2006

Hour

### East Norwalk: Rich with history, maritime community thriving

## ENNA in the News

This is the third in a series on Norwalk's neighborhoods. If you have information you'd like to share about your neighborhood, email [jbodach@thehour.com](mailto:jbodach@thehour.com).

By [JILL BODACH](#)  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — From the British troops who marched down its streets during the burning of Norwalk on July 1779, to the site of the city's first meeting house, East Norwalk has a lot of history.

"The first settlers in Norwalk settled in East Norwalk," said Susan Gunn, curator of the Norwalk Museum. "The first public map of Norwalk created in 1847 by Rev. Hall shows a lot of settlement in the East Norwalk area of town. The roads and plots of land all have names already where many other parts of town did not."

These same settlers subsequently died there, or at least nearby, and were buried in the East Norwalk Cemetery.

"This is the oldest public burial ground in Norwalk," Gunn said. "There are stones that date back to the 1600s."

The settlers in Norwalk, particularly the East Norwalk area, enjoyed the benefits of their location between Long Island Sound and the Norwalk River but also endured numerous struggles, particularly the burning of Norwalk.

During the burning of Norwalk, all but a few homes in the city were burned to the ground by British troops. As a result, many families were forced to start over. By the time the Revolutionary War was over nine towns in Connecticut had been burned by the British. Norwalk suffered the greatest financial loss.

The area that was once comprised of mostly farmland is now one of the busiest corridors in the Norwalk area. Still bordered by two waterways, one significantly less navigable than it was before, East Norwalk is also bordered by other vessels of transportation, Interstate 95 and the railroad. The railroad was built in 1947. For those who live in East Norwalk this is just one of many ways in which the history of their neighborhood has remained in their minds.

"There is so much history in this area, a really rich history in fact," said Laurel Lindstrom, a resident of Raymond Terrace and president of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

Lindstrom's street, Raymond Terrace, bears the name of one of the oldest families to settle in Norwalk. "Aside from the cemetery in East Norwalk being the oldest in the city I know that there was an apple orchard in this area and that where St. Thomas Church is there were a lot of Indian artifacts found in the grounds there," Lindstrom said. "On Strawberry Hill, within five minutes of my house, are three of the houses that survived the burning of Norwalk. There are little bits of the original Norwalk still in place in this." Gunn said that there were many Native Americans who settled in the East Norwalk area.

"They kind of kept to themselves by the water on high ground so they could see when other tribes were coming by water to attack," Gunn said. "Unfortunately, we don't hear much from the descendants of the Native Americans who lived here."

The water of Long Island Sound is still one of the aspects of East Norwalk that separates it from the rest of the city even today.

"I think this portion of Norwalk is defined by the close proximity to the beaches and the water gives a nautical feel to the area, even as far away as Raymond Terrace, because there aren't a lot of urban, downtown structures that would block the view," Lindstrom said. "You really feel like you have a connection to the water here, at least I do."

Lindstrom said her neighborhood is also characterized by its proximity to I95.

"Our neighborhood predates the Interstate going in by just a few years so even though we aren't defined by the interstate being there it plays into our way of life, as does our proximity to the train station and the whole character of our area," Lindstrom said.

The area is not, however, without its problems.

While East Avenue was a main thoroughfare for travelers to sell their wares, this busy road has complicated life for current residents of the area in other ways.

"A lot of residential streets that feed into these busier streets face some problems because of the busy intersections, traffic, speeding and development," Lindstrom said. "We work on these issues with the city, and the residents of neighboring streets, and some of them have been resolved in the past."

It is the ability of residents of Raymond Terrace and other neighboring streets to work together that Lindstrom thinks make the community she is part of a strong one.

"Our street has been getting together at the end of summer since 1991 for a block party because we're like the camaraderie," Lindstrom said. "We've bonded over our issues and then still enjoy getting together on other things."

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October 11, 2006

Hour

## Fitch condos clears hurdle

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Conservation Commission approved Tuesday night DT Development Co. LLC's storm-water management plan — part of the developer's larger proposal to raze the former Fitch School on Strawberry Hill Avenue and build 29 condominiums.

While the larger plan also needs Zoning Commission approval to advance, Tuesday night's action — necessary because of a nearby pond — represented an important hurdle, given that nearby Olmstead Place residents last month labeled the development a flooding threat to their already often-soggy properties.

Conservation commissioners, while expressing sympathy for those residents, accepted the developer's assertion that the storm-water management plan will reduce flooding problems in the neighborhood.

## ENNA in the News

"I was very impressed with the plan, the planting and storm-water management," said Commissioner M<sub>2</sub> Smith prior to the vote. "If it is approved tonight, it doesn't mean we weren't concerned and sympathetic with the plight of the people down the hill."

Under the plan, DT Development will raze the former school and two adjacent houses at 61 and 63 Strawberry Hill Ave. and build the condominiums.

The storm-water management plan, explained by the developer's consultants during a public hearing S<sub>26</sub>, includes catch basins with inserts, and underground galleries designed to retain the first inch of rainfall and slowly disperse rainfall in excess of that amount.

Diane Cece, whose property at 37 Olmstead Place floods, said she was not surprised that commissioners approved the plan, based on the information presented by the developer last month.

At the same time, Cece expressed confidence that the commission will mind residents' flooding problem when reviewing future development proposals.

Commissioner D. Seeley Hubbard said the commission should go beyond its application review responsibilities and work with residents to alleviate flooding problems.

"I had no clue until the public hearing that there was a flooding problem down there," Hubbard said. Elizabeth Ackerman, also on the commission, expressed concern that the storm-water management plan might not handle rainfall exceeding one inch. She asked for a retention pond.

The 3-1/3 acre site is too small for adding such a pond, according to Alexis Cherichetti, senior environmental officer and staff person to the commission.

To proceed, DT Development now needs the Zoning Commission to lift the city's cap on planned residential developments, and to approve the site plan to build the 29 new units.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, predicted that the Zoning Commission review also will draw residents' attention.

"That affects a broader area ...the traffic and whether it fits in the neighborhood," Lindstrom said.

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September 27, 2006

Advocate

## Hunting draws fire in Norwalk

By Lisa Chamoff  
Staff Writer

September 27, 2006

NORWALK -- Officials who don't like waterfowl hunting from the shores at Calf Pasture Beach and Veterans Memorial Park want residents to know where to direct violations and complaints.

## ENNA in the News

Under state law, hunters are allowed to shoot waterfowl below the high tide mark and more than 250 feet from any building. The only way it could be banned is if there were enough violations, said state Sen. Robert Duff, D-Norwalk, and Mayor Richard Moccia.

Duff said he has received dozens of complaints over the years from residents.

"Nowadays, this is a park that's used throughout the year," Duff said at a news conference yesterday near the Shea-Magrath Memorial in Veterans Memorial Park, along Norwalk Harbor where much of the hunting takes place. "When you hear gunshots, it's a little unnerving for some people."

The hunting season for Canada geese runs from Sept. 15 to Sept. 30, while duck season runs Sept. 20 to Oct. 20, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Duff said residents can call the city's customer service line, 854-3200, the police department, 854-3000, or DEP's hotline at (800) 842-HELP to report complaints or possible violations. Violations include hunting on Sundays in the parks; hunting near roads, buildings, people or pets; or shooting from a vehicle, according to the DEP Web site.

The officials are hoping that by raising awareness, they may be able to log enough violations to bring about a hearing to discuss a ban on hunting at the beach and at Veterans Memorial Park.

"We need good, solid information before they can justify that this is not a proper place for hunting," said Norwalk Police Chief Harry Rilling, who also attended yesterday's news conference.

Hunting on public beaches has long been debated.

Jack Harder of Westport, who is on the board of directors of the Connecticut Waterfowlers Association and sometimes hunts geese from Calf Pasture, said he doesn't see any safety issues with hunting at the beach despite the number of people there.

"What you really run into more than anything else is a culture conflict," Harder said. "People don't like the noise and seeing birds getting killed."

Harder said he prefers to hunt at the beach in winter because there are fewer visitors.

In response to the city's concerns, the DEP will place more signs in the parks to make visitors aware that hunters are there and that there are rules they must follow.

Capt. Kyle Overturf, with the DEP Environmental Conservation Police, said a public safety issue must exist with enough complaints to warrant a hearing.

Laurel Lindstrom, head of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said residents also have complained to her and she agrees that the public beaches are not a good place for hunting.

"Every time this time of year comes around and guns start going off, that's when residents put in complaints," Lindstrom said. "Hunting should not be in an urban area like this."

Duff said that in the last few sessions of the General Assembly, he has introduced legislation that would allow coastal municipalities to ban hunting in public areas, with the option of the DEP holding a hearing if someone wants to appeal the decision. He said the legislation was met with stiff resistance by other lawmakers.

Moccia said he is not anti-hunting, but said he wants people to feel at ease when they go to city parks.

"We do respect the hunters' rights, but we also have to respect the rights of citizens who are using this park," Moccia said. "I have concerns about weapons being discharged at parks used year-round."  
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September 27, 2006

Hour

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September 26, 2006

Advocate

## Public hearing tonight on plans for Fitch School site

By Lauren Klein  
Staff Writer

September 26, 2006

NORWALK -- Developers of the former Fitch School site at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave. will present revised plans to build 29 condominiums at a Conservation Commission public hearing tonight at City Hall.

DT Development of Greenwich bought the property about a year ago and submitted a plan to the Planning and Zoning Department, said David Waters, the attorney for DT Development. The revised plan addresses concerns raised by neighbors about the original proposal.

The project would be built 130 feet from a city pond at Fitch Park, so the Planning and Zoning Department passed the application to the Conservation Commission, which must approve a permit before construction begins.

The commission wants to ensure that no sediment washes into the pond during construction and that stormwater that runs off the site is as clean as possible, said Alexis Cherichetti, senior environmental officer.

The plans include six catch basins that would sift rainwater before it flowed back into the ground, Cherichetti said.

The complex of 29 townhouses with two- and three-bedroom apartments would be to the east of the pond. Five of the apartments would be reserved for affordable housing, Waters said.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said Olmstead Place residents are concerned about how construction would affect flooding problems there.

Since the new development would sit "higher up than Olmstead Place, any additional development will add to the demand on our city's infrastructure," Lindstrom said. "They already have flooding there, and they have legitimate concerns."

Strawberry Hill Avenue residents also want the new structures to fit in their neighborhood of single-family homes, she said.

DT bought the property three years after Lea Manor Health Center, a 60-bed nursing home, went bankrupt and put the property on the market for \$8.5 million. It was a school before it was a nursing home.

The building would be torn down for the development.

If the proposal is approved by the Conservation Commission, DT Development will submit an application to the Planning and Zoning Department, Waters said.

The meeting starts tonight at 7.

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August 23, 2006

Hour

## Hearing set on plan to turn school into condos

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Conservation commissioners viewed Tuesday night DT Development Co. LLC's plan to reshuffle the former Fitch School property at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave. into a condominium development. Afterward, they scheduled a public hearing for Sept. 26.

"Basically what you have are 29 (condominium) units that are located in six buildings. With just a couple exceptions, all of them have a one-car garage. The rest of the parking is on grade. They are two-story buildings," said David F. Waters, the Norwalk attorney representing DT Development of Greenwich.

"There's significant open space that is proposed as part of this. There is a swimming pool and pool house for the 29 units, five of them are designated as affordable housing units," he said.

Waters pitched Strawberry Hill Commons — the name given to the proposed condominium development as preferable to a standard subdivision. "The alternative would be a single-family residential subdivision (that) would generate an 18-lot subdivision," Waters said. That, he suggested, would cover more ground and leave less open space.

In August 2005, DT Development purchased the roughly 3.4-acre property, including the former school, a brick building constructed in 1930 and until recently used as a nursing home. The property lies on the west side of Strawberry Hill Avenue, immediately south of city-owned Fitch Park and Interstate 95.

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

To proceed with the project, DT Development needs two approvals from the city's Zoning Commission: Lifting the city's cap on planned residential developments to permit new 29 units, and then approval of site plan to actually build those units. The development plan also requires Conservation Commission approval. A pond immediately to the south, and a slope leading to that pond, places the property with

the upland review area.

DT Development submitted an application to the city's Planning and Zoning Department earlier this summer, but withdrew it upon learning that it must proceed in conjunction with the application to the Conservation Commission, Waters said. A new application to the Planning and Zoning Department is anticipated.

Waters said the development would reduce the amount of impervious surface — pavement on the prop — and treat run-off water, which is not being done now. "From an environmental standpoint, it will reduce the amount of run-off and treat run-off," Waters said.

Conservation commissioners focused on the nearby pond and landscaping.

Commissioner Elizabeth Ackerman asked that shrubbery be added to the western side of the property.

Rolling out plans, landscape architect Don Strait of Norwalk -based Grumman Engineering LLC said the planting plan calls for adding small trees, such as Red Japanese Maple, and ornamental plantings to the background of existing trees. Erosion control measures will be added to the slope area, he said.

"Does that pond have a name? I didn't even know there was a pond down there," said Commissioner Matthew A. Caputo.

Erin Leonard, compliance inspector for the Planning and Zoning Department and staff to the commission said she will gather information from public works officials about the pond.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, withheld judgment on the proposed condominium development, but vowed to keep fellow residents abreast of it.

"As head of the neighborhood association, my interest at this time is that neighbors closest to the location get a look at the plans," said Lindstrom, leaving City Hall Tuesday night. "I would like as many people as possible to look at them."

[Robert Koch](#) covers Norwalk City Hall. He can be reached at (203) 354-1007

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August 6, 2006

Advocate

## Rash of robberies mirrors national trend

By Matt Breslow  
Staff Writer

August 6, 2006

NORWALK -- Armed robberies have been occurring nearly every other day in the city recently, which officials say appears to be consistent with a national rise in violent crime.

## ENNA in the News

The city had at least 10 reported holdups involving a weapon, displayed or implied, in about three weeks starting July 12. The incidents escalated in violence last week, when police said a robber shot a man in the face early Thursday at the Monterey Village housing complex.

A man was pistol-whipped and beaten with brass knuckles in a Wednesday night robbery in SoNo's Wel Street parking lot. Another man was pistol-whipped in a holdup early Thursday across the street from a Point Street bar, police said.

Other recent violent crimes in Norwalk have included shooting yesterday, a stabbing Thursday afternoon on Belden Avenue and the shooting of a city man about two weeks ago.

"We have seen an increase in some violent activity over the past month or so . . . to include some of the robberies, the stabbing (Thursday) and the shooting the night before that," Police Chief Harry Rilling said.

In May, the city saw a similar spate of armed robberies.

But Rilling said Norwalk hasn't had the same level of violence as last year, when six people were murdered. He also cited a recently published report stating robberies have increased across the country, with most being committed by young teenagers.

"That's the same kind of thing we're seeing here," Rilling said.

Violent crime has risen nationwide in the last two years, said James Alan Fox, a criminal justice professor at Northeastern University in Boston.

Part of the explanation for the trend is that violent crime levels sunk so low after peaking in the early 1990s they were bound to increase, Fox said last week.

"Short-term trends are very unreliable, although the fact that it's a national pattern suggests that it's not a fluke," he said, adding "but it's still not out of control."

Violent crime isn't nearly approaching levels seen in the early 1990s, Fox said. Though the nation's current increase is "worthy of concern," he said, the trend isn't cause for panic.

Fox said there are more at-risk youths in the population, and budgets have been cut for law enforcement and crime-prevention programs.

Law enforcement funding has been trimmed at the local and federal levels partly out of a "spirit of complacency," as money was shifted to other areas when people saw crime drop, the professor said. Fox said some resources have been moved from "hometown security" to homeland security.

Rilling indicated recent incidents in Norwalk don't point to one particular cause. Contributing factors could include a "mini population explosion" in Norwalk in the 13- to 21-year-old age group, in which crime is most common, the chief said. Many young people are outdoors later at night because school is not in session, Rilling said.

Discussing the recent heat wave, he said, "weather this extreme certainly . . . contributes to behavioral changes."

Rilling said police have made arrests in some recent robberies, but not in a trio of nighttime holdups of ATM customers using the automatic teller machine at Bank of America on Winfield Street in East Norwalk. The ATM robberies occurred May 2, May 25 and July 12.

"we expect to have some information . . . very soon on one or them," the chief said.

Police have increased surveillance around the branch and spoken to bank security. The bank has made security improvements through video surveillance, improved lighting and shrubbery reduction, Rilling said.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said residents have been talking about robberies occurring with increased frequency in East Norwalk in the past year or so. Lindstrom said there was once a sense that a robbery was an "anomaly" in that section of the city; now residents wonder why that has changed.

"It is a concern," she said.

Several holdups in the past month have occurred in East Norwalk. In two incidents, robbers ambushed a driver responding to an apparently bogus call to the area -- a food deliveryman in one instance and a driver in the other.

Rilling said the department has significantly increased patrols of the Special Services Task Force -- a street crime unit formed last year -- and is working closely with a few surrounding departments, although he declined to elaborate publicly.

But Rilling said dealing with violent crime requires a communitywide approach. Programs in Norwalk include the city's summer youth-employment initiative, a two-week Police Activities League day camp that recently ended and Mayor Richard Moccia's initiative to bring towns together to address youth crime.

Rilling said he and Moccia will soon plan the school-resource officer program, which will place an officer at Norwalk and Brian McMahon High Schools when classes resume. The officers also work with officials at Richard C. Briggs High School.

Robbery victims sometimes put themselves in vulnerable positions and must be alert and aware of their surroundings, Rilling said.

Discussing Thursday's Fort Point Street incident, the chief said robbers sometimes lay in wait when bars are closing and victimize a patron who has a diminished capacity because of drinking and must walk a distance alone to home or a vehicle.

He said police tell merchants to ask for a phone number when taking a food order and call back after hanging up to ensure the request is legitimate.

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July 31, 2006

Hour

## Map gives summary of ongoing city development

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

## ENNA in the News

NORWALK — From the city's new police headquarters to a planned Parish Center for St. George Church and the stalled housing plan for the Norden site, Norwalk's past, present and future development projects are laid out to see on a Major Projects Map posted in Planning and Zoning Department.

The roughly 3-foot-by-4-foot map hangs on the wall of the department's conference room, where Planning and Zoning commissioners often meet to review and discuss projects.

"It's a work tool for all of us. Some of the (projects) are pie-in-the-sky. Then there's Wall Street and West Avenue," said Planning Commission Chairman Walter O. Briggs. "The master plan will certainly (reflect) the map."

The map — updated periodically by the Planning and Zoning Department — contains about 70 dots, each representing a project in the planning stage, a pending application, an approved project, a project under construction, a withdrawn project or a denied or completed project.

The West Avenue, Wall Street and Reed-Putnam urban renewal projects, because of their size, remain obvious to Norwalk planners and are not displayed on the Major Projects Map. As such, the map is neither all-inclusive, official nor necessarily up-to-date. Still, it's helpful.

Michael B. Greene, the city's planning and zoning director, describes the map as "a work document" that gives an "at-a-glance summary of what activity is occurring and where."

"We have so many projects, at a variety of stages, that we use the map as a quick reminder. It is also a quick way to see if there are projects that need looking into, when you are going into the field and will be in close proximity," Greene said. And "it shows a diversity of activity in scale, type and location. This diversity is something we stress when meeting with the bond rating agencies to show that there are opportunities throughout the changing economic times."

Among the bigger projects on the map: Norden Place LLC's plan for roughly 316 units of housing on the eastern half of the Norden site (pending); FF Realty's plan for 235 luxury housing units at the Pepperidge Farm Property on West Avenue (approved but under appeal); AvalonBay Communities Inc.'s plan for 311 housing units near River View Mall (approved but on hold); and Maritime Yards, Spinnaker Cos. 197-unit housing-and-retail development under construction near The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk.

Is there, as some critics maintain, too much going on in the city?

Briggs cautions against viewing the Major Projects Map as synonymous with development.

"First of all, it's not going to happen in one year," Briggs said. "This all comes on line in a three-to-five year period — maybe longer."

About two-dozen projects shown on the map are completed. They include the new police headquarters in South Norwalk; the addition to Brookside Elementary School; the new restaurant at Oak Hills Park; several more buildings at the Merritt corporate complexes; and condominiums at 134 East Ave.

Residents and/or neighborhood associations have expressed concerns about the collective impact of development on city roads, schools and other infrastructure. For the proposed Norden development, they urged the Zoning Commission to withhold action until the city's Master Plan of Conservation and Development is updated. The commission last month rejected Spinnaker Cos.'s request to amend zoning permit multi-family housing on the Norden site. The decision is under appeal.

## ENNA in the News

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, and others have urged the city to update its master plan and get the "big picture" of development in Norwalk. For her, the Major Projects Map is one way of getting that picture.

"The very first time I saw (the map), it was an eye-opener, seeing all of the different projects going on in the city on one map," Lindstrom said. Typically "one project will make the news, then it goes on the back-burner. When you see the map, it's all clear, and you see that there are a lot of projects going on."

Lindstrom added, however, that the projects must be taken in context of their size and location.

And, as Briggs indicated, not all projects are moving forward simultaneously.

Greene said there is no activity at present on a proposed addition to Norwalk Yacht Club. The application was denied, and the project is pending a court decision. Similarly, the Webster Parking lot project remains on the Major Projects Map, even though a study aimed at reshaping the lot into retail and housing is on hold.

"It is still something we have to work on at some time, so it stays on the map," Greene said.

Walter McLaughlin, a member of the Planning Commission, predicted the Norden development "will be coming back" and that redevelopment of Wall Street and West Avenue will continue moving forward.

"Sometimes, it takes a long time to get things going. And it's not all going to take place tomorrow," McLaughlin said.

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July 6, 2006

Hour

## City lands grant to help calm streets

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The city has landed a \$368,000 grant from the Connecticut Department of Transportation to increase safety on streets near three schools off Strawberry Hill Avenue, according to city officials.

"This grant will allow us to institute traffic calming measures, including a traffic light at Tierney Street and Strawberry Hill, and a new pedestrian crossing at Alowood Drive," said Mayor Richard A. Moccia. "There are other traffic calming measures that will also be considered by the Traffic Engineering Department."

Moccia credited the Department of Public Works and its senior civil engineer, Michael Yeosock, for securing the grant.

Strawberry Hill Avenue is one of the city's most-traveled north-south thoroughfares and has long been the subject of residents' complaints about speeding — particularly in the presence of children. The area is home to Naramake Elementary and Nathan Hale Middle schools as well as Norwalk High School.

The \$368,000 grant is part of ConnDOT's Safe Routes to Schools program.

Harold F. Alvord, director of public works, said the money will pay for a variety of measures to safeen route the three schools, including adding bicycle lanes, cross walks and the traffic light at Tierney Street and Strawberry Hill Avenue.

Although the grant has been approved, the safety measures will not be constructed immediately.

Alvord said the city and ConnDOT first will hold series of meetings to establish a grant agreement and determine how the project will proceed.

"We've just been notified that our grant request was successful. Now there's a whole bureaucratic process that you have to go through with DOT," Alvord said. "I'd venture a guess (the improvements) probably will happen this year."

The improvements are part of the city's three-pronged approach to calm traffic and safeen roads: Education, enforcement and engineering.

As another part of the engineering aspect, the Common Council in April authorized Alvord to find an engineering firm to develop a traffic-calming plan for Strawberry Hill Avenue. Alvord's department is tapping \$80,000 from its traffic-calming account, which under former Mayor Alex Knopp paid for the installation of speed-humps.

At the same time, police have stepped up their enforcement efforts through Slow Down Days, which at Moccia's request were resumed in March and haven't continued periodically since then.

David Park, Strawberry Hill street representative for the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, welcomed the tougher enforcement and the ConnDOT grant.

"The police were out here again with the recent slow-down days last week. They targeted Strawberry Hill Avenue again. They were in front of my house Friday night about two hours," Park said. "The enforcement is one thing, but the calming, the changes to the road, is something that is permanent."

"The enforcement is going to come and go. This money for the Safe Routes to School program and \$80,000 for traffic calming is permanent and is going to help," Park said.

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June 28, 2006

Advocate

## Officials consider renovating Walk Bridge

By James Lomuscio  
Special Correspondent

June 28, 2006

NORWALK — Built in 1896 for trains to cross the Norwalk River, the 540-foot Walk Bridge is the last remainin

## ENNA in the News

NORWALK -- Built in 1870 for trains to cross the Norwalk River, the 300-foot Walk Bridge is the last remaining railroad swing bridge in the country -- the bridge bed swings open to the side to make way for marine traffic.

Robert Brown, a state Department of Transportation engineer, and other DOT engineers and Metro-North Railroad officials unveiled a plan last night at a City Hall public information meeting for the trestle's renovation.

The state held the meeting to update the status of design plans for the project.

With the exception of one representative from the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, the public missed the meeting that drew 11 members of the bridge rehabilitation team from the Newington area.

The project, scheduled to begin in spring 2010 and be completed by 2014, will cost an estimated \$30 million, said Julie Georges, DOT principal engineer.

She said that the Walk rehabilitation will involve replacing structural steel that has been compromised by time and weather; putting in a new turning mechanism; and installing new pier fenders, which are the sections into which the rotating bridge slides. Repairs will maintain the bridge's historical look, she said.

The bridge, the swing section of which is now rust-colored, also will be sandblasted and painted, but the color has not been determined, Georges said.

The project will be part of a larger, \$100 million project that includes restoring the railroad bridge over the Saugatuck River in Westport, installing a new trestle in East Norwalk and replacing all of the overhead electric cables from South Norwalk to Westport's Greens Farms station.

"It needs to be done, because basically the mechanical and electrical systems are archaic," said David Willard, Metro-North's assistant director of structural engineering.

Brown noted that some of the Walk Bridge's catenary cables have been in use since 1913. Over the past years, the bridge has had only minor upgrades, he said.

When the project begins, two of the four railroad tracks would be shut down, Brown said. Two northbound tracks would be closed for the first two years and two southern tracks for the next two, he said.

Railroad service would not be affected and temporary passenger platforms would be installed at the Saugatuck and the East Norwalk stations for passengers to board trains, Brown said.

Laurel Lindstrom, from the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, wanted to know whether East Norwalk streets would be disrupted.

Brown and Georges said only North Water Street in South Norwalk would be affected, with alternating one-way traffic patterns.

Marine traffic, however, would be a different story. Georges said that the bridge would remain closed for one month as the turning mechanism is replaced. This would occur during the latter half of the project and restrict overhead clearance for large vessels. Mariners would hear about closures through the Coast Guard, Brown said.

-- Documents detailing the bridge rehabilitation are available at the DOT engineering office at 2800 Berlin Turnpike in Newington. Comments on the project can be mailed to Julie Georges in the DOT engineering office at P.O. Box 317546, 2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington, CT 06131-7546.

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June 26, 2006

Hour

## Slow Down Days back for encore this week

By [PATRICK R. LINSEY](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Slow Down Days are back and city officials want you to spread the word. Quietly.

Fresh off the program's March debut, during which Norwalk police pinched more than 400 lead-footed drivers, the city is conducting another crackdown on speeders this week, and officers will also keep their ears open for vehicles violating Norwalk's noise ordinance.

"Down in SoNo, it's a nice Saturday night, people are doing outdoor dining, and we hear this tremendous racket sometimes," said Mayor Richard A. Moccia. "We're going to continue to send out messages until people finally understand the rules with speeding, traffic and noise are going to be obeyed in Norwalk or they're going to pay penalties."

And Norwalk will pay to get that message across. The Slow Down Days program incurs overtime costs for the Police Department.

"We're going to be using mostly some grant money that we have left over, said Police Chief Harry Rilling. "There will be some additional costs, but not really a lot."

The department hopes to minimize costs by keeping some officers on duty for slightly longer shifts during week, rather than scheduling prolonged stretches of overtime.

Rilling said officers will be on the lookout for speeding in residential areas, as well as failure to obey stoplights and signs. He and Moccia hope the program will encourage residents to drive safely all year long.

Sharing that hope is Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association. Lindstrom said she appreciates the increased traffic enforcement, but wishes it would last longer than seven days.

"We need to have enforcement throughout the year, so that people don't just feel that they have to slow down during that one week," she said.

With children now out of school, Moccia said it is important drivers take care in residential neighborhoods and Rilling agreed.

"When school (is in session) you have children walking to school," Rilling said. "During the summertime, when school is out, you have kids riding their bikes ... really everybody should be paying attention to the law and not just during Slow Down Days."

driving responsibly all the time.

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June 26, 2006

Hour

## City to focus on 'quality of life'

By [PATRICK R. LINSEY](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A friendly reminder from City Hall: Now might be a good time to mow the lawn, trim the hedges, and, for goodness sake, get your car off the sidewalk.

Throughout July, the city will focus on quality of life issues, Mayor Richard A. Moccia announced last week.

Moccia wants to see the city crack down on code violations, and said he is also exploring the concept of an anti-blight ordinance.

If passed by the council, such an ordinance would give zoning officials "a little more teeth ... to (compel) people to clean up their properties if they're in disrepair," said Moccia, a Republican.

Norwalk's mayor took pains to separate the notion of an anti-blight ordinance from blight findings related to eminent domain, saying the two are unrelated.

Moccia said he is looking at anti-blight ordinances approved by other towns, citing Fairfield as an example. He said he will direct the city's law department to explore the issue.

Common Council President Michael Coffey said a blight ordinance raises legal questions.

"We'd have to take a look, first of all, at the constitutionality of going in and doing something to somebody's property," said Coffey, a Democrat. "I think any type of ordinance needs to be tied to public safety, health and welfare ... Just being eyesores is probably tough from a United States constitutional standpoint."

Coffey also questioned the need for a blight ordinance.

"As a councilmember, I have to say, I've not had any complaints from anyone in the community wanting to go and do anything to anyone's property," he said.

Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association President Laurel Lindstrom said she would welcome the city having more power to address run-down properties.

"I think that just having that available, in case it's needed on some properties, it's something that could be useful," Lindstrom said.

During July, the city will also focus on enforcing codes now on the books, ticketing cars parked on sidewalk or lawns and investigating apartments that violate zoning rules.

Coffey said he welcomes such an initiative.

"People buy houses to live into a certain zone," he said. "If (apartments are) not in compliance and people don't have permits, that is something that should be addressed."

While much of the city's attention is on future projects, Moccia said things can be done to make Norwalk a better place in the here-and-now.

"We're waiting for a master plan for zoning and there's a lot of concern about over-development in neighborhoods," Moccia said. "In the meantime, we have to maintain the neighborhoods that are there and make sure what we have is kept up properly."

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June 20, 2006

Advocate

## 29 units proposed for Fitch School site

By John Nickerson  
Staff Writer

June 20, 2006

NORWALK -- A Greenwich developer wants to tear down the 76-year-old former Fitch School on Strawberry Hill Avenue to make way for a 29 garden apartment-type units, planning officials said.

Developer D.T. Development Co. LLC would demolish the former elementary school and two homes next door and construct six residential buildings, a pool and clubhouse on 3.6 acres, according to an planning application filed by attorney David Waters.

The overgrown and boarded-up brick school at 73 Strawberry Hill Ave. gained notoriety in March.

Authorities said it was the target of Weston resident Bruce Forest, who faces federal charges for detonating a tannerite explosive device at the building.

Earlier this month, state Sen. Bob Duff, D-Norwalk, called for a cleanup effort there. Owners said they would clean up the site.

Before the development can proceed, the Zoning and Planning commissions must approve an amendment to the zoning regulations that prohibit cluster-type developments within B residential zones.

The old Fitch School is in a B zone.

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The developer plans to designate five units as affordable -- or priced at below market rates.

The two single-family homes that would be torn down are at 61 and 63 Strawberry Hill Ave.

Waters could not be reached for comment yesterday but wrote in the application that current zoning regulations allow as many as 15 single-family homes on the property.

Planning and Zoning Director Michael Greene called the affordable housing component critical to the development.

Senior Planner Dorothy Wilson said she couldn't say how zoning and planning commissioners would react to the proposal, but she said building affordable housing meets their goal to provide more housing for mid-income workers.

Along with the affordable units, Greenwich-based D.T. Development would add 10 parking spaces and build a new playground at the Fitch playground.

Plans call for the rehabilitation of the playground's baseball field with new benches and fencing as well resurfacing the basketball courts and adding four new backboards.

The 46,000-square foot former Fitch School was built in 1930 and was sold by the city before becoming a bed nursing home in 1984. The center went bankrupt in 2002, was closed and put on the market for \$8.5 million.

At a meeting about a year ago hosted by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, Waters first suggested the idea of building multifamily housing on the site.

The consensus at the meeting was that neighbors and other East Norwalk residents would rather see single family homes, Duff said.

The proposal, technically called a Planned Residential Development, tightly clusters townhouse or garden type apartments within an 80-foot setback of the property lines, according to zoning regulations.

Although created in 1955, cluster development didn't come into its own until the 1970s and 1980s in Norwalk, Wilson said.

By 1990, Wilson said, there were so many built around the city that a "backlash" occurred within B residential zones, where parcels range from 6,250 square feet to more than 9,250 square feet and can house single- and two-family residences.

As a result, the number of such clustered units within that zone was capped at 1,806.

The B.T. Development proposal seeks to raise the cap to 1,835 to allow the 29 units to be built.

The Zoning Commission is scheduled to take up the proposal at its July 13 meeting, Wilson said.

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June 11, 2006

Hour

## Is city suffering without new master plan?

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Although Norwalk hasn't been penalized for not having a new Master Plan of Conservation and Development in place, some believe the city and its neighborhoods are suffering without the blueprint for the future.

Norwalk's current master plan dates back to 1991.

"The past master plan — the one we were working with — was very good. But times change and things change," said Douglas E. Hempstead, council minority leader. "It's hurting the city not having it. As we increase density inside the uptown downtown corridors, what are the impacts, as far as on the roads?" "The one that has been rearing its head more and more lately is the proliferation of condominiums in neighborhoods that weren't designed for them," he added.

In Norwalk, priorities have evolved from building retail along Connecticut and Westport avenues to revitalizing core areas of the city, such as the SoNo district, Wall Street and West Avenue. Most recently, major multi-family housing development has been proposed for part of the Norden site in East Norwalk.

While a municipality's master plan does not spell out what may be built where, it does serve as a blueprint. It guides zoning regulations, which determine where retail, housing and industry may be built, as well as where open space is desired.

State law requires municipalities to update their master plans every 10 years. Norwalk is five years behind. Municipalities failing to do so must write the state Office of Policy and Management, the Department of Economic and Community Development and other agencies, explaining why their plans have not been updated. A copy of the letter must accompany requests for state funding.

That law, however, was passed after Norwalk's last master plan was adopted in 1991 and thus does not apply, according to Planning Commission Chairman Walter O. Briggs. As such, the city has not written the state to explain the delay, he said.

"Everybody is claiming there is all kinds of penalties, but the truth is there is not," said Briggs, whose committee is finishing the new plan. "That law was passed after the previous plan. We don't have to (comply) until we're done with this plan."

Even if Norwalk were bound by the law, the penalty likely would not be significant.

Daniel Morley, planning specialist at the Office of Policy and Management, said he is unaware of a municipality losing funding because its master plan is out-of-date. "From an enforcement standpoint, I do think (the law) is being adhered to unless there is an inconsistency with the state master plan," Morley said.

Mayor Richard A. Moccia, while campaigning for office, urged the city to complete its new master plan. "(Lacking a plan) has probably left some people searching and trying to get a sense of direction of where the city is going in terms of zoning and development," Moccia said Friday. "Elected officials, appointed officials, zoning, planning, we all need a guide. No matter who is in office, we need that plan going down the road."

## ENNA in the News

Briggs said the extra time being taken to update Norwalk's master plan will result in a better document. Under former Mayor Alex Knopp, the city hired planning consultants to prepare mini-master plans for areas deemed susceptible to development pressures. Those areas include Wall Street, the mid-harbor, the Wet lot area, South Norwalk, and the Main and West Avenue corridor.

The Planning Commission last month recommended hiring Chan Krieger & Associates, the Cambridge, Mass., firm that prepared the mid-harbor and South Norwalk plans, to assemble the larger Master Plan on Conservation and Development. Briggs said the \$60,000 request will go to the council this month.

To date, the Planning Commission has held numerous public forums and accepted mini-master plans prepared by various neighborhood associations.

"We've allowed everybody to participate in producing the plan. You can't ask everybody to participate and not have it take time," Briggs said.

If Chan Krieger is hired to put together the new master plan, the Planning Commission will hold public hearings on the draft plan, make changes as necessary and vote on the document. From there, the final master plan will go to the council's Planning Committee, the council and Moccia for adoption.

"Assuming I can get started July 1, we should be able to complete (the new master plan) this year," Briggs said.

While Norwalk has not been penalized for being five years behind on updating its master plan, some believe the city has been left without direction.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said focusing on sections of Norwalk, such as the mid-harbor or South Norwalk, has been "well and good" but leaves the city without big picture.

"We have yet to look at the whole picture and see how everything fits together," Lindstrom said. "We don't know ... whether it's appropriate to go forward with those (mini-master) plans or a significant zoning amendment."

The Zoning Commission last week rejected a zoning amendment request to permit multi-family housing on the eastern half of the Norden site in East Norwalk. Developer Spinnaker Cos. is mulling its options, including whether to appeal the decision, as it did the Conservation Commission's denial of its housing plan.

In the Spring Hill neighborhood, residents have pled for zoning changes to curb the construction of condominiums — already numerous in the area. They would like to see a master plan that discourages condominium development in areas that traditionally have been home to single-family homes. Still others point to the impact of development on city services and infrastructure.

"What is the impact on our school system? What is the impact on our roads and sewers? What is the impact on our police and fire services? Are we really achieving smart growth. Are we increasing the tax base?" asked council President Michael W. Coffey. "There has been a lack of overall strategy of where all these pieces fit in the mosaic of development and growth."

Councilman Nicholas D. Kydes said lacking an updated master plan leaves businesses and employers unsure about whether to relocate to Norwalk.

"Before a major corporation moves into an area, they try to understand from a long-term perspective what the vision of a city is," Kydes said. "When you don't have that long-term vision ... then the companies are going to be more hesitant."

Lindstrom said she is hopeful that the new master plan will be completed sooner rather than later and that it includes input from her neighborhood association as well as from other neighborhood associations in Norwalk.

"I'm just waiting for (the plan) to come out to see what is included and what isn't included," Lindstrom said. "The sooner the better."

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June 8, 2006

Hour

## Zoning body nixes Norden Place plan

By [ROBERT KOCH](#)

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Zoning commissioners rejected by one vote Wednesday night a requested zoning change to permit multi-family housing on the eastern half of the Norden site in East Norwalk.

Officials from Spinnaker Cos.-led Norden Place LLC, which seeks to build up to 328 apartments and condominiums on the 38-acre parcel, said afterward they would consider whether to appeal the decision. Earlier this month, they appealed the Conservation Commission's rejection of their development application.

"I'm extremely disappointed. We'll step back and study" our options, said Spinnaker Principal Clayton H. Fowler, leaving City Hall.

"We knew the (site) plan was dead on arrival. (But) I don't think zoning by threat is the way the city should be run," added Fowler, alluding to a comment by a commissioner that the commission now may use affordable housing as a stick.

Norden Place needed a wetlands permit from the Conservation Commission — that was rejected May 17 as well as a zoning change and special permit from the Zoning Commission to build housing on land zoned for restricted industrial use.

On Wednesday night, Zoning commissioners rejected 3-3 a motion by Chairwoman Dorothy Mobilia to approve the zoning change. Four votes were needed for passage. Mobilia's resolution included a 15-percent affordable housing component, as agreed to by Spinnaker, and deduction of 50 percent of wetlands acreage when calculating housing density.

Commissioners Robert Hard and Karen Spencer joined Mobilia in voting for the zoning change to permit multi-family housing on the parcel. Commissioners Robert Keyes, Andrea Light and Patrick Shields voted against.

"It's the best (affordable housing component) we've seen ... we've set the groundwork," said Shields, referring to the 15-percent requirement. But "I think (Norden Place) can come back with a better propo-

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"I don't think we need to act now. I think we've made clear to (Norden Place) these are the things we want," Shields added.

Said Mobilia: "Is this not a good idea ... where we would now have on the books a 15-percent guarantee for workforce housing? No matter what happens to the (Norden Place) application, that would be there."

Norden Place has agreed, as recommended by the city's Industrial Zones Committee, to price 15-percent of the housing units as affordable. Ten percent would target individuals or families earning up to 80 percent of the state median income; 5 percent would be available to those earning up to 60 percent of the state median income. The state median income now stands at about \$81,000.

"I'm wondering whether (Norden Place) explored the opportunities under current zoning," Light said. And the Conservation Commission has "a lot of issues with the site plan. I like having control of a pending amendment to zoning."

On May 16, the Conservation Commission denied Norden Place's development application. According to the commission, no information was given to show that detention basins would treat run-off during storms exceeding one inch of rain.

Norden Place has appealed the decision in state Superior Court in Stamford.

Keyes said the commissioners would be "putting the cart before the horse" by approving the zoning change without an approved application in place.

Frank N. Zullo, the Norwalk attorney representing Norden Place, afterward rejected that argument. "They could have approved a zoning change, because any plan that would come forward would require a public hearing" and review, Zullo said.

Also attending the Zoning Commission meeting Wednesday night was Walter O. Briggs, chairman of the Industrial Zones Committee.

"I'm disappointed, but I hope that the developer will bring back a plan that works with the Industrial Zones Committee's recommendations and addresses some of the items the Conservation Commission recommended," Briggs said afterward.

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association, said the association, given its size, has taken no position on the Norden development, but added that she was pleased with the Zoning Commission decision.

"I think it's a prudent decision. There's no reason why they needed to make a decision. The zoning change can certainly wait until an (acceptable) site plan comes in," Lindstrom said.

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June 1, 2006

Hour

## Wilton developer buys White Barn

## ENNA in the News

By JEANNE HOFF  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK— The \$4.8-million sale of White Barn Theater property to a New Canaan-based company owned by Wilton developer James A. Fieber sent a blow to preservationists.

The theater, which sits on 18 acres straddling the Norwalk/Westport border was founded in 1947 by the actress and theater producer Lucille Lortel.

Lortel bequeathed the White Barn Theater property to her New York -based theater foundation, whose trustees initially planned to build a cluster of homes on the site.

Their proposal and other development plans failed after much opposition from groups such as Save Cranbury, the Norwalk Land Trust and the city of Norwalk — first under former Mayor Alex Knopp and now under Mayor Richard A. Moccia — that worked to save the White Barn Theater property as open space.

However, records in the office of Westport Town Clerk Patricia H. Strauss show that the property located at the corner of Cranbury Road and Newtown Avenue sold to 78 Cranberry Road LLC. Roughly 15.5 acres of the White Barn property is located in Norwalk and the remaining 2.5 acres is in Westport.

According to The Commercial Recording Division of the Secretary of the State of Connecticut, the New Canaan-based firm, at 47 Elm St., is owned by Wilton resident James A. Fieber.

Fieber is a partner in the Fieber Group, which constructs luxury homes throughout Fairfield County. The Fieber Group, also at 47 Elm St., in New Canaan, is a member of the Home Builders and Remodeler's Association of Fairfield County, Inc.

Paul Littell, head of the Land Trust's acquisition committee, said since the Land Trust voiced concern over the development of the property on several occasions, he found it unsettling that the firm failed to contact them.

"We're a little disappointed that the developers had not communicated with us," he said. "The mayor held a big meeting and rally a few months back and we made it clear that we wanted to work with anyone who would limit development on the White Barn property ... Since no one could afford to write a check and buy it, we keep it as open space we wanted to limit residential development as much as possible."

Laurel Lindstrom, president of the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association said with the current dearth of open space in Norwalk, she too found it unsettling that the land could not have been preserved for open space use.

"These resources, once they are gone, they are not going to come back — especially if there is building development that takes place on the site," Lindstrom said. "All we can do now is be hopeful that the developer is going to be approachable and sensitive to the property and to Norwalk, the neighborhood and the community."

Last year Gov. M. Jodi Rell came to the White Barn Theater property and presented the Norwalk Land Trust with a \$450,000 check to purchase the open space and subsequently Moccia committed \$217,000 in the city open space, if needed, toward purchasing the property.

## ENNA in the News

Matthew Mandell of the Partrick Wetlands Preservation Fund of Westport — a group that works closely with Save Cranbury — said trustees of the Lucille Lortel Foundation squandered an opportunity to preserve the "spirit" of the White Barn Theater by selling the property to a developer.

"The trustees had the opportunity to save the spirit of the theater and Lortel's land but chose not to," he said. "They should have sold it to the Norwalk Land Trust, who had the backing of the governor."

However, with an initial asking price of \$5 million and budget constraints within the city Moccia said purchasing the property for \$5 million would not have been feasible.

"At a \$5 million price tag, to ask taxpayers to buy open space in one neighborhood would have been opening a lot of doors, and it's just not economically feasible at that price tag," Moccia said. "My entire capital budget this last year was roughly \$7 million for the entire city — including roads — so it would have been very difficult to (purchase the land)."

Moccia said he spoke with an attorney representing the developer and was told that, to date, the firm had not come up with a development plan for the lot.

Westport First Selectman Gordon Joseloff, citing a time when the 148-seat White Barn Theater was a popular venue to develop unseasoned actors, playwrights, designers, composers and directors, said it can be difficult for towns to compete with developers in the bidding process.

"Every taxpayer dollar spent to buy land is well thought out and there has to be widespread support," he said. "Unfortunately, we can't purchase every property, especially when prices are bid up by developers. Works from playwrights such as Langston Hughes, Adrienne Kennedy, Samuel Beckett, John Whiting and Ugo Betti have been championed at the White Barn.

"For 50 years this was a landmark theater. It was small. But it gave a head start to many playwrights," said Joseloff adding that the shift in ownership of the property is regrettable.

"Lucille Lortel left a great legacy and the theater and the property were integral to it. The foundation has made a donation to the Westport Country Playhouse that will enable some of her work to be continued and Lucille Lortel herself has donated a collection of photographs correspondence and other materials to the Westport Public Library — so at least some of her work will be preserved in that manner as well." Several reviews, playbills, contracts, photographs and other material belonging to Lortel are contained in a room located within the Westport Public Library.

Patsy Brescia and Tom Shrum of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty of Norwalk were the listing brokers for the Lucille Lortel Foundation Property.

Staff writer [Jeanne Hoff](#) covers Westport and Weston. She can be reached at (203) 354-1049.

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