



**CITY OF NORWALK  
PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**January 31, 2018**

- PRESENT:** Planning Commissioners: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Brian Baxendale; Nora King; David Davidson; Steve Ferguson; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Adolf Neaderlander; Diane Lauricella, Tony Mobilia, Louis Schulman, Zoning Commissioner, Nate Sumpster, Zoning Commission Chair; Deanna D'Amore, Health Director, Tod Bryant; Tami Strauss; Alexis Cherichetti; Joe Perella, Harbor Commission; Allen Kolkowitz; Nancy Rosett, Chair of the Bike Commission; John Kydes; Tom Livingston; John Igneri
- STAFF:** Steve Kleppin; Mike Wrinn; Dori Wilson
- OTHERS:** Larissa Brown; Dan Hodges
- EX OFFICIO:** Mayor Harry Rilling

The meeting began at 6:35 p.m.

**I. REPORT ON VISIONING FORUM**

Larissa Brown began the presentation by having everyone on the committee introduce themselves as well as discussing the proposal so far. She explained that the discussions in the nine neighborhood meetings would focus on those parts of the city as well as the whole city and allowing for public comment.

She discussed the Report on the Visioning and went over it briefly. The report analyzed how representative of the Norwalk demographic that the committee was. She mentioned that there was an older demographic that they would have to work harder to reach. As she went through the report, she showed slides of Norwalk demographics represented on this committee. There seemed to be a reasonable distribution of wealth. She noted that about 50% of the committee worked in Norwalk. There were discussions of experiences in Norwalk, including whether you feel safe riding a bike, etc. She then showed them a word cloud which showed that bigger words were more important to the members of the committee than the smaller words. Important items were traffic, bikeability, and parking. There was a discussion of the word "zoning." Ms. Brown said that her understanding was that it was the kind of development around the city but could include other issues as well. There was a discussion about the mission statements written by each of the committee members which were on the project website. She went over a chart of the assets of the city which included outdoor spaces and schools. She also discussed the challenges that the members believed the city faced which included big box sprawl. She showed them the "what's good map," which the members believed were the good areas, but she noted that the "not so good" areas were similar. Some not so good areas were Manreasa Island, Route 7, to name a few. There was a discussion of "food deserts." There was also a discussion about the train station and whether they were well served. There was also a discussion about another train station in the downtown area. She noted that there was documentation of what the committee members wanted. She also noted that some wanted to see the school system to be improved, further than it has been. She went over the topics which seemed to be a priority to members, including diversity, sustainability.

She asked if anyone had comments and that they could send them to her. The total number in the survey was probably over 100. She hoped that as time went on participation would increase.

There was a discussion about the collapse of the condo market and why developers were only building rentals. Ms. King said that basically banks had strict guidelines for lending money to condominiums. She also said that there were different developments that were being funded which were similar to condominiums. There was a discussion about whether there should be an addition to the draft of the vision and principles document which was still in the early phases. There was a further discussion about the condominium market.

## **II. REVIEW OF DRAFT VISION AND PRINCIPLES**

Ms. Brown then discussed the Vision Statement and what it is and what it isn't. This is not the plan. She mentioned that the vision should go out 20 years even though the plan would only be in place for 10 years. It is a statement that is public friendly. There was a discussion of the pictures that were used on the Vision Statement. It was suggested to use more from the Harbor Commission. She then discussed the categories. She asked that if there were any comments on the language they should send them to her. She noted that they should keep it to 1 page. There was a discussion about whether this would be reaching to outside of Norwalk. There was also a discussion about emphasizing the school system, in the K-12 grades. There was a discussion about the language which seemed generic and simplistic to some. Others believed this was a broad view and that the Plan of Conservation and Development ("POCD") would give more details. There was a discussion about how the process for producing the POCD would work. Ms. Brown said that this Statement would be at the neighborhood meetings so that citizens could comment on it as well. She also said that this document could be posted on-line so that committee members could make comments, which everyone could see. There would be a deadline for comments.

## **III. DISCUSSION ON INDUSTRIAL LAND AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Dan Hodges continued the presentation by summarizing his discussion of the economic development and trends from the perspective of residents and businesses. He has interviewed developers, etc. and would provide his findings. He began a slide presentation which noted that Norwalk has strong population growth as compared to the state which is declining. He said that the rate of population that has a bachelor's degree or higher is high. He discussed median household income which is above state level. He discussed a comparison of other cities around Connecticut as well as New York and Rhode Island and Maine. He then discussed the city and how it compared to other cities in employment growth. He noted that Norwalk's job sector is diverse. He showed a map of the location of the jobs in Norwalk as well as noting that there was a balance of people leaving the city as to coming into the city for employment. He discussed the property tax rates as compared to other cities in Connecticut.

Mr. Hodges then showed his findings from his interviews with developers, etc. He said that they thought Norwalk had an advantageous location, diverse mix of industries, opportunities in Transit Oriented Development ("TOD"), etc. He noted that some developers made comments about the permitting process. He also noted that some feel as if there is a lack of cohesion because of more than 1 downtown. Traffic is a concern to many and parking costs are an impediment to the restaurant scene, which used to be popular in SoNo. He said the SoNo Collection was viewed with trepidation. Many were skeptical, especially of calling it a mall. There was feedback about the Wall Street as well as the Walk Bridge project and whether the waterfront is an area for more development. He noted that there are not many developers building more offices. He said that start-ups are looking for small office space.

Ms. King noted that some of the retail stores moving into the SoNo Collection were leaving their storefronts in Westport and Greenwich. There was a discussion about ways to incentivize businesses to move into Norwalk. This should be in the POCD. There was a discussion of creating offices in the TOD areas. There was a discussion about reaching a critical mass of

residents to support retail stores in mixed use developments. There was a request for the number of multi-family houses in the city, which Mr. Hodges noted. Mayor Rilling noted that many people said that there was traffic coming to Norwalk and later it was hard to find parking when they arrived. There was a discussion of industrial zones which are being upzoned. There was a suggestion to add clean industry to these industrial zones, instead of assuming that residents did not want to live near industrial zones. There was a discussion about the Martin Luther King Boulevard area which seemed to be a high potential area. There should be a more robust public transportation system, which would include car sharing, Ubers, etc.

Mr. Hodges then showed a slide of Opportunities to Boost Economic Development which was a draft and partial list of ideas. Some included using trolleys to connect areas with one another, update zoning and land use regulations, Metro-North enhancements and waterfront initiatives, etc. There was a discussion about Business Improvement Districts (“BIDs”) which most cities have including Stamford. These private-public partnerships help pay for cleanup in certain areas so as to not burden the rest of the taxpayers in the city. There was a suggestion to add these points to the Vision Statement. Comments from members could be sent to Mr. Kleppin. Mr. Hodges suggested getting their comments to him in about 2 weeks.

#### **IV. UPDATE ON NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS**

Mr. Kleppin explained how the 9 neighborhood meetings would work. They would run through the end of February and March, in different venues. He suggested that those committee members could attend their neighborhood meetings. If they couldn't then they could attend other neighborhood meetings.

#### **V. NEXT STEPS**

Ms. Brown noted that the meetings would help to put together the preliminary drafts of the POCD. She reminded everyone that the Plan would be divided into different topics and would come together in the land use and zoning areas. They would also review the permitting process. The last chapter of the POCD would be the action plan which would include who should be responsible and how long it should take.

#### **VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was a discussion as to whether the slides seen at this meeting would be available at the neighborhood meetings. Ms. Brown noted that there would also be neighborhood specific information there to get feedback from the neighbors. She explained specifically how the meetings would run. There would also be a youth outreach program for their vision as well. The goal was to get as much participation as they could. There was also a discussion about traffic studies especially in South Norwalk and on South Main St. There was a concern about the projects that were and would be going on in this area especially the Columbus St. School. Mr. Davidson suggested outreach to the faith communities as well. Mr. Kleppin said that once dates for the neighborhood meetings were set that they would reach out to them.

#### **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.