

**NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY
REDEVELOPMENT AREA PLAN UPDATE
WORKING GROUP MEETING #5
OCTOBER 17, 2017**

GROUP MEMBERS: Tami Strauss, Director of Planning and Community Development; Sabrina Church, Redevelopment Agency; Melissa Kaplan-Macey, RPA; Sarah Serpas, RPA; Steve Kleppin, P&Z; Kathryn Hebert, Parking Authority and Public Works; Britt Liota, Transit District; Jackie Lightfield, Norwalk 2.0; Nora King, Planning Commission; Carol Sulheim, Cornerstone Community Church; Tod Bryant, Norwalk Preservation Trust; Morris Gross, Norwalk Hospital; Robert Fahey, Plumbing Works; Carolyn Fahey, Resident; Elizabeth Stocker, Economic Development

1. Welcome and Introductions. Tami Strauss called the 5th Working Group Meeting to order at 10:00 AM. The members present introduced themselves as noted above.

2. Stakeholder engagement update. Ms. Kaplan-Macey said there is a meeting tomorrow at the library where they will have a workshop on the neighborhood of the future. A meeting is scheduled with the First Taxing District on October 31st, and they hope to set up meetings with the Norwalk Hospital and the Wall Street Theater. The business owner's survey has been sent out again. As they are talking about policies, they would like to sit down with representatives of the various bodies and share those policies and get their feedback. Tami said they plan to meet with the Planning Committee, the Planning Commission and the Redevelopment Agency.

3. Plan Revision Review. Ms. Kaplan-Macey said a lack of identity for this neighborhood is a concern, and she has divided the plan visions into five categories to talk about and address this concern. (1) Innovative – attracting new types of industries, jobs, retail and entrepreneurs, recognizing the way we live and work is changing and capitalizing on physical, economic and networking opportunities; (2) Authentic –preserving historic character, growing arts organizations, local businesses and restaurants, connections to the waterfront and established industrial uses; (3) Accessible – with adequate parking, easy connections to transit, better streets and sidewalks for walk, better wayfinding, bicycle infrastructure, designated truck routes and waterfront access compatible with industrial uses; (4) Affordable – for residents to rent and buy homes, for commercial businesses to thrive, for industrial businesses to operate and utilize the river, and for government to maintain infrastructure and public spaces; (5) Lively – with more people, more shops, fewer vacant storefronts and stalled developments, more activities, active sidewalks, well-maintained and programmed public spaces, nightlife, daytime uses, and arts & cultural opportunities.

Mr. Fahey said the Norwalk harbor has been a commercial harbor for 100s of years, and it is an important use, but they need to find ways to make it more attractive.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said they need to understand what things should stay and what things should go and what they need to do to make sure those things happen. Maybe they designate certain parts of the city as industrial for existing industrial, or move commercial uses that are within residential parts of the neighborhood to another part of the city, but they need to think broadly with the POCD.

Ms. Lightfield said Zoning did a study on industrial zones throughout Norwalk in the late 2000s and one of the challenges in trying to preserve some industrial but also address some of the quality of life issues where you have industrial abutting residential was to take a look at where you have contiguous industrial and preserve that, but rezone isolated industrial that is surrounded by residential into commercial business and allow for a transition time.

Ms. King said one of the biggest problems with industrial is that the City does a horrible job of enforcement. If you want industrial, you have to pay the price and make it look as though it is part of the neighborhood, and put up a nice fence and keep your trucks inside a warehouse, otherwise Zoning needs to go out and give them tickets or shut them down.

Mr. Fahey said he is a small business owner and he doesn't have \$4.5M to buy a piece of waterfront industrial and park eight trucks inside a heated building, so there is no way for a small business owner to even make that leap.

4. Draft plan policy discussion. Ms. Kaplan-Macey said as to policies, they plan to come back next time with a concept map that lays out what things look like. Today they are just looking for feedback and direction.

The topics for discussion are **innovative policies**, to incentivize and promote innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; foster collaboration with anchor institutions and area companies and businesses, enhance partnerships between artists, residents and businesses; support local commercial and industrial business.

Authentic policies, to capitalize on neighborhood assets, identify and protect historically significant buildings and identify appropriate scale and types of uses for redevelopment sites.

Accessible Policies, to create more reliable, faster and safer transit connections; improve aesthetics and operations of Pulse Point transit hub; improve sidewalks and streetscapes; create bike paths that link neighborhood to jobs and transit; make on-street parking business friendly; make Yankee Doodle garage attractive and easy to use; designate a truck route connecting industrial waterfront to I-95; improve connections between the neighborhood and its waterfront.

Affordable Policies, to protect existing neighborhood residents and businesses from displacement; make it easier and more affordable to maintain and upgrade buildings, infrastructure and public spaces; make it easier for people to do business in the neighborhood; make sure that local residents and businesses benefit from neighborhood improvements.

Lively policies, activate ground floor and sidewalk spaces; enhance and maintain streetscapes and open spaces, encourage walking and biking in the neighborhood, incentivize investment in buildings, infrastructure and open/public space, brand and promote the neighborhood as an innovation district, create opportunities for pop-up events and installations.

Mr. Bryant said most of the policies in place now don't allow construction equipment in the neighborhood, and he doesn't know what the solution for that is. Ms. Kaplan-Macey said they have really strong industrial waterfront businesses, but they have heard that there are issues with that and with truck traffic and truck routing and how do they have public access to the waterfront but also not push out the industrial businesses, so there are tensions.

Ms. Lightfield said they need to have design guidelines that reflect the historic architecture of the area but provide a way to modernize some of that. Street activation can be accomplished not just by regulating uses on the ground floor, but regulating what the architectural style is and adapting different architectural motifs to make things look more inviting and lively.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said she would like to understand what is special about this neighborhood. They have heard things like Norwalk Center was the identity, and so what should Norwalk Center be in the future.

Mr. Bryant said looking at the 14-year old plan, the idea was for the City to leverage the two parking lots at each end of the street and incentivize development and bring in residents who would increase neighborhood services and reactivate the street, which was a good idea and maybe it's worth taking a look at a larger area.

Ms. Lightfield said when you look at the historic evolution of Norwalk Center, in the early '80s the area was filled with people walking, there were a lot of businesses and people came out of those businesses and supported the retail and the service businesses, but as time progressed, there was a lack of focus on the area and it was redirected to the SoNo area. The parking assets for a suburban model downtown are there, but they need to improve the pedestrian accessibility and preserve the incentives for businesses to locate there so the area doesn't die off during the day and just be overly residential, or be overly commercial and have no residential, and they need to do the things that will activate the streets and create a vibrant and flourishing downtown.

Ms. Sulheim said people like to walk and they go to malls to walk because it's inviting and aesthetically pleasing, but they don't have that going on in this area.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said as to Accessible Policies, they have talked about the Pulse Point and about a train station, and they need to figure out what the right recommendation is and what they are trying to achieve.

Ms. King said she has heard that the state is adamant about not putting the train station on Wall Street, and Bob Duff is not supporting the train, so she doesn't think it is going to happen.

Ms. Stocker said they need to make sure that roads are properly designed to accommodate trucks as well as motor vehicles, bicycles and the walkers.

Mr. Liotta said he doesn't know what can be done with Pulse Point. It is a collaboration between the City and the Transit District, but the City doesn't manage it or take care of it.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said she hasn't heard any disagreement that it is valuable in terms of transit, connectivity and service, but from an urban design standpoint, with the building sort of adjacent to it, it looks like a redevelopment opportunity. Buses will probably be automated in the future, so they need to look at what is doable in a five, ten or thirty year term.

Mr. Fahey said with buses coming in and out and the possibility of a train station, the area is a hub, and there is a chance for people coming into the hub to visit local businesses in walking distance, which is something to take advantage of.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said that is an opportunity that has not been utilized to the full extent. It doesn't feel that clean or safe or wonderful to be there, but yet you are bringing all these people to the area, so what can be done to make a better functioning Pulse Point that is more aesthetically pleasing and welcoming.

Ms. Lightfield said more people are opting for taxis or ubers because they can control when the pickups are happening, and there is an opportunity for a shared vehicle system, and certainly for autonomous buses that can be on demand, so they should be looking at ways to solve transit keeping in mind the different options.

Mr. Bryant said assuming that there is going to be a train station, they would have a train station, a bus pulse point and a garage on the edge of the urban core, and the way to connect all of those is with design.

Mr. Liotta said there has been a decline in bus use because the housing developments have put out their own shuttles. The Pulse Point is meant to get people in and out quickly, but there is an opportunity for the Pulse Point to be better designed and better functioning for the Transit District as well as for the neighborhood. People who are using the uber are the younger people because they don't carry cash. No one wants to pay cash when they get on a bus. The fare boxes are being reprogrammed and they are looking at the future with smart cards.

Ms. Lightfield said she thinks the future is on demand, and if you want to go somewhere you're not looking at a bus route.

Ms. Hebert said the autonomous vehicles and all the alternative modes of transportation, which are great, don't take away cars.

Ms. Lightfield said managing delivery trucks, and the ability for delivery trucks to be able to temporarily park, unload and stuff like that, is a huge problem.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said they have to make the right policy decisions in terms of their transit as they look forward to autonomous vehicles and ride sharing. Some things are really long term capital intensive reaches, and some things they can do now and are not going to cost as much. Industry in this neighborhood is a unique situation where they have the river and the industries that are dependent on the river, and that might be a distinction they make because water dependent industry and prioritizing that along the river is sort of a broad industrial kind of policy. They need to figure out the mechanisms to afford to maintain and upgrade the infrastructure and public spaces. They can put in sidewalks and bike lanes and landscaping, but then how do they maintain those for the long term.

Ms. Lightfield said there were protections and incentives for artists live/work spaces in the 14-year old plan and they don't want to lose that if they want that creative vibe to continue in the arts district.

Mr. Fahey said they need more adult educational spaces where you have a welding shop, or a jewelry shop, and things that actually teach crafts, and also educational things for kids where their mom drops them off for an hour or so and then walks around the neighborhood while they are waiting, which would bring people in, and bring a good vibe to the neighborhood..

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said as to lively policies, they want to think what makes a dynamic live/work place that has the energy and pulls all these other things together, and what can they do from a policy level to make that happen.

Mrs. Fahey said she thinks a museum would be a great attraction for people to come to, maybe even something like the Museum of Modern Art or some kind of a structure that would be educational for both children and adults.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said they have done a beautiful renovation of the Wall Street Theater, and there is real opportunity if they get the right acts and folks coming and going. The library is right there, and there is a potential for some kind of space that could be affordable and has a very active ground floor and maybe a gallery space, so there are opportunities, but it takes funding to put it together, but maybe that's the desired use that they want to see.

Mr. Bryant said the idea was to make that the cultural heart and to activate the whole street.

Ms. Lightfield said they have more arts organizations in the Wall Street area than anywhere else. They have a high concentration of architects and landscape architects and design professionals, which are the types of people that you want in your downtown.

Ms. Sulheim said Cornerstone has talked about changing their building into a multi-use community center, and they would be open to any kind of partnership.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said that's a great possibility, and when you talk about affordability and you have something like a church that's a community use, those are places where you can maintain that affordability with a partner that's a nonprofit partner, and that is a great idea.

Mr. Fahey said if the vibe of the neighborhood is working 24 hours a day to keep a nice buzz going. So you have a baker that gets in at 4:00 in the morning as somebody is leaving the night club where a performer came in, and those things work harmoniously and at different hours, but there is a nice flow of people in and out, and then you don't have any scary dark or dangerous areas where no one wants to go.

Ms. Lightfield said their boutique manufacturing zone has ended up being a spot zone and they should look at expanding that so that you can activate entire corridors instead of having one-offs.

Mr. Bryant said he has heard a lot of talk about giving tax credits to developers in this area, but they don't need it. They can find money on their own. The small businesses are the ones that need it.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said the last category, lively, sort of brings it altogether. You want more people, more shops, fewer vacant stalls, more activities, active sidewalks, all the things we're talking about that makes this a vibrant exciting place and feeds on itself to create the kind of neighborhood they want to see here.

Ms. Stocker said the vacant shops have to be filled with businesses or services that actually provide neighborhood needs so they're convenient, affordable, and in the neighborhood, because there is a lot of housing being built here and they have to service those people and provide what they need.

Ms. Lightfield said they allow the businesses in those ground floor places to cover up their windows, whether it's with advertising or whatever, so that you can't see in, which then creates a barrier and an unappealing pedestrian environment. They started with things that they determined were signs, but the unintended consequences of their sign regulations means that businesses now put the signs on the interior so they don't have to go through Zoning, and they lose that street activation, so this is what has happened as a result of some of our policies, and it has not been good.

Ms. Kaplan-Macey said the key with a group like this is to really understand all of your policies that are in place that are having these sort of unintended consequences, so when they write regulations that will implement this plan they can address all those things, so that's why these comments are really instructive.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Pacchiana