

Minutes of the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations Meeting

**Monday, May 8th, 2006
City Hall, Room A322, 7:30 PM**

**Next Meeting: Monday, June 12th, 2006
City Hall, Room A333, 7:30 PM**

Attendees:

Laurel Lindstrom (ENNA)	Maribeth Becker (ENNA)
Al Raymond (Spring Hill/Hospital)	Anna Mae Schaab (Silvermine Crossing)
Diane Lauricella (ENNA/LWV)	Diane Witkowsky (Spring Hill/Hospital)
Dick Vicenzi (Shorefront Park)	Diane Lockwood (Broad River Neighborhood)
Ernst deFlines (RCA)	Pam Garrett (Harbor Shores)
Bob Wagman (West Norwalk)	Lynne Pratt (Rowayton Advocates for Zoning - RAZ)
Barbara Felter (Broad River)	Julie Burton (RAZ)
Marija Bryant (NPT/ENNA)	Christine Abraham (West Main)
Paul Littell (Village Creek)	Mark Pierce (Wilton Ave Assoc)
Michael Mushak (Golden Hill)	Fred Smith (Rowayton Civic Association)
Marny Smith (Norwalk Land Trust)	Mike Geake (Golden Hill)
Mary Geake (Golden Hill)	

The meeting was called to order at 7:32p.m.

“Round the Room” – Introductions and 1 minute report from everyone in the room so that people can get to know each other better and learn from each other’s experiences.

- Laurel Lindstrom – ENNA – Developments going in, traffic, and neighborhood centers project
- Diane Witkowsky – SHHA – Preserving neighborhood character, open space and crowded streets/traffic
- Christine Abraham – West Main – People are “selling out”, knowing who’s coming and going, drugs, traffic and reopening Willie Moorer Park (scheduled for June)
- Anna Mae Schaab – Silvermine Crossing – City at large, West Ave and power lines
- Pam Garrett – Harbor Shores – Minimize impact (views) of business/industrial and crime
- Lynn Pratt – RAZ – Zoning!
- Mary Geake – Golden Hill – Will be discussed under new business
- Mike Geake – Golden Hill – Neighborhood cleanup
- Marny Smith – Norwalk Land Trust – Guest speaker from the Norwalk Land Trust
- Dick Vicenzi – Shorefront Park – Not quite McMansions but too big, too many garage doors
- Al Raymond – SHHA – Increasing CNNA membership
- Diane Lockwood – Broad River – Neighborhood cleanup, mayor’s meeting, speeding, noise, and drugs in the parking lots
- Diane Lauricella – LWV – Zoning, master plan taking too long, make sure mini-master plans are included, and pollution
- Mark Pierce – Wilton Ave – Speeding, traffic, illegal housing
- Mike Mushak – Golden Hill – Illegal housing and revitalizing business spine on Cedar Street
- Bob Wagman – Norwalk’s population has remained relatively stable while school population has declined. What are the longer term implications of this?

Acceptance of minutes from the April 10th, 2006 meeting was tabled until later in the meeting. Laurel Lindstrom proposed a change to the minutes that the board will consider.

Norwalk Land Trust - Marny Smith, president of the Norwalk Land Trust talked with us about what we can do to identify and preserve open space in our neighborhoods. Since every parcel of land is now worth so much for development it’s difficult to encourage preservation of open space. There are very few places left where kids can just explore and it’s important to hold on to them. These would be natural areas – not ball fields.

We need to find various parts of Norwalk that might be underdeveloped and find out if property owners would consider donating land to the land trust, or putting a conservation easement on the property. An easement would prohibit development on the land, but would preserve open space and the property owner would receive a reduction in property taxes because the land would be considered 'non-buildable'.

The Land Trust is most interested in preserving (contiguous) land along watercourses like Betts Brook. Neighborhoods can help by identifying areas and being stewards of areas in your neighborhood. More urban neighborhoods can encourage and protect 'vest pocket parks'. Even a small space to experience nature and reflect can be of great value.

The Norwalk Land Trust is also looking for members and donations. The dues are modest and the rewards are great. Their web site is www.norwalklandtrust.com

Committee Updates

Zoning Task Force – Marija Bryant gave a quick report. The group is focusing on and researching a few key areas and is aiming to have recommendations to the CNNA by July.

- Neighborhood preservation zones
- Incentives for preservation rather than demolition
- Strengthening our zoning enforcement (including demolition ordinance)
- Architectural Review Board

A discussion ensued about zoning violations – such as illegal apartments and what can be done about it. The Golden Hill Association has taken an active role in their neighborhood to tackle these issues. They stay on top of properties when they go on the market and send a return receipt letter to the realtor letting them know for what uses the property is legally zoned. It doesn't matter how long an apartment has been operating out of code – there is no length of time after which a 2 family apartment becomes a 3 family – regardless of what taxes have been paid on the property. The 3rd unit would need to be removed. They have had some success on this front. But the city needs to do more to enforce these issues.

We also discussed the proposed B-Zone changes. The coverage piece of this zoning amendment passed with a sliding scale to determine maximum footprint based on lot size. The height restriction portion will be revisited on Thursday May 11th.

Membership Committee – Al Raymond discussed the group's first meeting where they drafted a questionnaire to determine the topics of interest to each of the various associations. Please take the time to answer the survey when you get it so that the CNNA can best serve all of our neighborhoods!!

The Membership Committee is off to a good start – there were several new faces at our meeting! It was good to see everyone and hear the great ideas. Keep joining us!

The group then talked for a bit about how to get people more involved. The CNNA shares many of the same issues that each of the individual associations has.

Old Business

West Ave – Maribeth Becker gave an overview of the West Ave walk-through that occurred on Saturday May 6th. The group expressed frustration with the process and the terms being used to describe the area (underutilized, deteriorating, etc). People also wanted to know what would be done about areas in town that are much more 'blighted' than West Ave (burned out church on Harbor Ave, former KIA dealership, etc)?

The group discussed that we should continue to support the project, but voice our concerns. Although we don't plan to make any public statements about the West Ave project in the near future, it was suggested that we be prepared for calls from the press by slightly modifying the letter that was used at the press conference.

The group encouraged each association to have a CNNA section of their meeting where the CNNA representative gives their association a quick status report on issues that were discussed. This way, associations will be up to speed on the various issues and it will be easier for them to assess their association's

position on an issue. It is also important that each group continue to have at least one representative attend monthly CNNA meetings so that they are familiar with the issues and can take them back to their group.

Master Plan - Bob Wagman had written an article for his association that discussed what a master plan is, why it is important, and pleaded for a timely completion of Norwalk's. The group agreed that Bob should distribute his letter (adding a section requesting a specific timeline) to our elected officials.

New Business

Scan Day – Marija Bryant mentioned that there would be a Scan Day on Saturday May 20th beginning at 10AM at City Hall. The purpose is to gather pre-flood photos and memorabilia of the Wall Street area to create a scrapbook.

"It Takes a Thief" – Mary Geake of Golden Hill told us about a Discovery Channel TV show that tests your home and small business security and then offers a 'home security makeover'. If you are interested, you can contact Mary at mary@mgeake.net or 852-9693. The website for the show is: <http://dsc.discovery.com/fansites/ittakesathief/ittakesathief.html>

Adjournment was 9:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

MB