



**East Norwalk  
Neighborhood Retail Center  
Revitalization Plan**

**For Ludlow  
And Liberty Squares**

**Prepared by the  
East Norwalk Neighborhood  
Association**

# East Norwalk Neighborhood Association



20 Raymond Terrace, Norwalk CT 06855

Sea To The Green®

(203) 855-7668

<http://EastNorwalk.org>

## SUBJECT

East Norwalk Neighborhood Retail Center Revitalization Plan for: Ludlow Square; Liberty Square; and the gateways from north and west that are the entry points into the East Norwalk Community

## PROPOSAL

Revitalization of the neighborhood retail center facing the historic East Norwalk Cemetery located between Winfield Street to the north and Van Zant Street to the south, henceforth referred to as Ludlow Square. The plan would involve restoration and enhancements to the gateway locations, including the Liberty Square retail center at the entryway into East Norwalk from South Norwalk and the Interstate's Exit 16 entryways to East Norwalk onto East Avenue.

Submitted to Mayor Alex A. Knopp and the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency on December 30, 2004 by:

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association

Contact: Laurel Lindstrom, president  
East Norwalk Neighborhood Association  
20 Raymond Terrace  
Norwalk, CT 06855  
Phone: (203) 855-7668  
Fax: (203) 855-0095  
Email: [laurel.lindstrom@sbcglobal.net](mailto:laurel.lindstrom@sbcglobal.net)  
Website: <http://eastnorwalk.org>

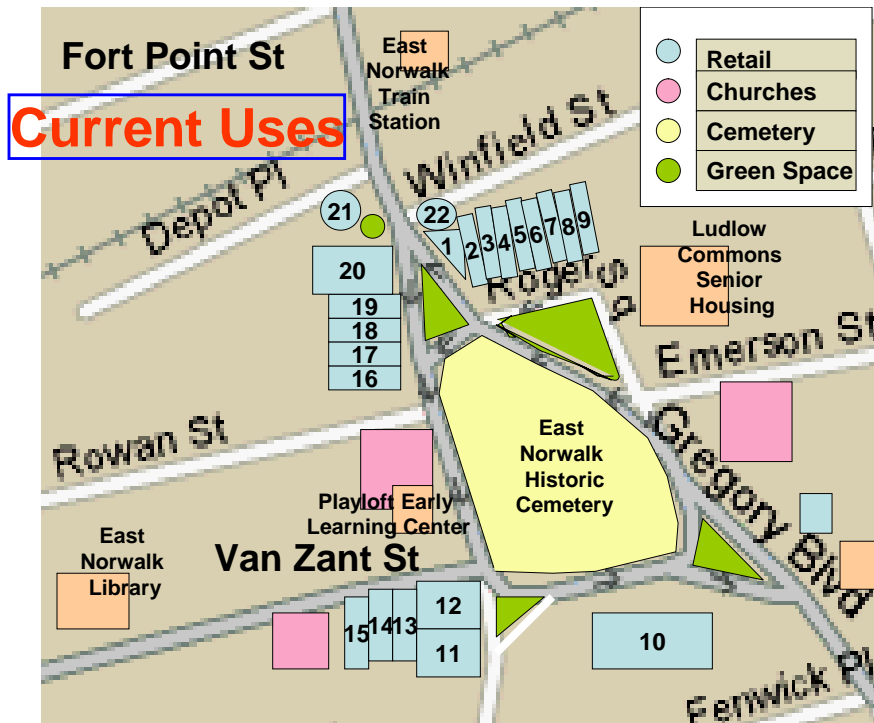
ENNA Board of Directors: Laurel Lindstrom  
Gordon Tully  
Marie DeLeo  
Marija Bryant  
Erik Nees  
Maribeth Becker



East Norwalk Neighborhood Association



East Norwalk Neighborhood Association



## PREFACE

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association (ENNA) is following the Wall Street revitalization plan closely, offering our recommendations throughout the process. This well-conceived plan has inspired us to turn our long-held dreams for the smaller neighborhood retail areas of East Norwalk into actual planning of revitalization projects.

The ENNA gained a heightened interest in neighborhood revitalization planning after attending a one-day workshop held by the Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF) in Hartford in May of 2004. Community activists from several Connecticut cities gave testimony about deteriorating neighborhood retail centers that were revitalized through community involvement and assistance from CEDF programs.

In April the ENNA was fortunate to have arranged a walking tour with Mayor Knopp and the Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee through the retail areas that we identified as most in need of revitalization efforts – Ludlow Square and Liberty Square. The ENNA was able to point out the revitalization plan area to Mayor Knopp and city department representatives during the tour. Following the tour we scheduled two neighborhood cleanups on streets within the plan area and partnered in a community effort to have billboards removed from the perimeter of Ludlow Square.

The following month we presented an extensive document of Master Plan recommendations to the Planning Commission that included revitalization considerations for this area.

In June the ENNA arranged for Preston Maynard of CEDF to drive down from New Haven to tour the plan area and to meet to discuss the project. Goals, scope and optimum funding options were explored.

Also in June the ENNA consulted with Munro Johnson, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Coordinator for the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency. From him we learned the application process to follow in order to be in the running to receive community block grant funds for our project.

In the months following this meeting the ENNA researched further, consulting with numerous people with expertise in several areas. The knowledge and guidance they provided was invaluable.

After Mayor Knopp recently announced his support and encouragement to neighborhood associations initiating revitalization efforts for their retail centers, the ENNA drafted the following plan using information we previously gathered.

## INTRODUCTION

The plan proposed in this document includes two neighborhood retail centers, the entry points or gateways into these retail areas and the streets that act as connectors from the gateway to the retail area, and from one retail center to the other.

Although several other retail centers exist in the East Norwalk Community that need attention,

the scope of our first revitalization plan is limited to Ludlow Square and Liberty Square.

We also have included a plan of improvement for the gateways and connecting streets to help create a more complete unit of revitalized living space.

The concept of gateway is important to keep in mind. The gateways are the entry points to the East Norwalk Community, and to the retail centers. Gateways should entice and direct those entering the area. The impact of the gateway can be magical or monotonous, stimulating or dulling, organized or chaotic. A gateway is the first and last impression as one enters and leaves. Gateways, therefore, need special attention in the planning process.

The ENNA has documented many complaints about the blight that exists in this section of Norwalk. We've also heard people express their dreams of creating a thriving pedestrian-oriented retail area in the two shopping centers and along the streets that link them. The plan that the ENNA drafted has specific short and long-range recommendations to be completed over a 10-year period. The document is not intended to present a final plan, but to serve as a starting point for ongoing community input.

The ENNA has identified various funding opportunities and grants that might be available for the plan area but will not request any approvals or funding until we have heard from the community. We want community input and support first. Then we will be better able to identify ways to help individual merchants improve their properties -- alone or in partnership with other stakeholders. Creative ideas will lead to creative results.

The ENNA's proposal for Ludlow and Liberty Squares is a grassroots effort, not a redevelopment project. Its scope depends on the cooperation and commitment of the East Norwalk community, the businesses in the area, and citizens' groups, supported by whatever help is available from the Third Taxing District, City and State.

## HISTORY

The revitalization plan area is the site of the first settlement in Norwalk, in 1651, and as a result is rich in history. The historic East Norwalk Cemetery, at the center of Ludlow Square, is Norwalk's first burial ground and contains the grave of Thomas Fitch, governor of Connecticut from 1754 to 1766. Immediately surrounding the cemetery were the home-lots of the first settlers. The first meeting house was located on the street that is now East Avenue, between Fort Point and Prowitt Streets. Fort Point Street was the road for the first settlement and exists today as laid out by the early settlers.

The Town House on Mill Hill soon replaced the meeting house near the original settlement and the home-lots were gradually divided into the small residential properties of today. Ludlow Commons, a large brick building in Ludlow Square, is today an Independent Living Facility for the elderly, owned by the Norwalk Housing Authority. Originally it was a school that replaced another school near that site.

The retail component in Ludlow Square came into being within the last century. As vacancies persisted at some locations and businesses failed buildings have deteriorated and have

changed owners or tenants. A bakery one year may become a florist the next, the decision often based on the merchant's field rather than the market's need.

The infrastructure developed in the same haphazard way, with each property owner creating facades, walkways and landscaping without consideration for complementing other properties within Ludlow Square or creating a cohesive retail center with its own identity.

Liberty Square, next to the Norwalk Harbor, fronts on the street that bridged the river to South Norwalk. The new Stroffolino Bridge is located a few yards south from the original road. Route 136 runs across the bridge, past Liberty Square and then passes through Ludlow Square.

With the construction of the I-95, and the selective widening of Route 136 to accommodate more and more traffic, people that once stopped in the small shops at Ludlow and Liberty Squares speed by in cars on their way to the malls and the large retail stores on Connecticut Avenue.

The railroad track runs just north of Ludlow and Liberty Squares, and the East Norwalk Train station is next to Ludlow Square on East Avenue. Commuters pass through the area daily on their way to and from the station.

The taxing districts were created in 1907. Both Ludlow and Liberty Squares are within the Third Taxing District (TTD). The TTD owns several small pieces of land throughout the district, including Constitution Park, adjacent to Liberty Square. In Ludlow Square the TTD owns the East Norwalk Cemetery property, Governor Fitch Park, and may own some of the landscaped traffic islands. Currently the TTD Commission is researching records to verify ownership of various pieces of land.

## CURRENT STATUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL & STRUCTURAL CONCERNS

The two identified neighborhood retail centers are within neighborhood business zones and surrounded by densely built low to moderate income residential single-family homes and multi-family rental unit properties. Light industrial zones occur along the Metro North train tracks, and scattered nonconforming uses are present.

Ludlow Square is bisected by a State Highway (Rte. 136). It consists of several small retail shops that face the historic cemetery, three churches, a senior housing facility, an early learning center, a bank, a pocket park and three landscaped traffic islands. The East Norwalk Library and East Norwalk Train Station are within a 3 minute walk from the center of Ludlow Square.

Ludlow Square is configured for cars rather than pedestrians. There are: empty, boarded-up shops; broken and patched sidewalks; excessive traffic signs that are leaning, bent and rusty; insufficient crosswalks; speeding cars that swirl around the circle; inadequate unrestricted, public parking; and large private parking lots with minimal greenery. One business allows a tractor trailer and several cars posted with 'for sale' signs to be parked in the parking lot in violation of zoning laws. Merchants have reported loiterers in the Square and homeless people sleeping in the cemetery that scare their customers away. The cemetery gates are rusty and hanging crookedly on their hinges, many of the headstones are deteriorating and vegetation has covered several of the gravestones in a tangle of vines and invasive shrubbery.

The traffic islands and pocket park have inconsistent maintenance, creating a hodge-podge effect that is repeated in the facades, landscaping and sidewalks of the shops. Some shops have attractive awnings, siding, landscaping and brickwork in their sidewalks. Other shops are box-like with no thought to aesthetics.

The immediate entryways to Ludlow Square are unappealing, and from the south there is no signage or indicators to let those entering know that they have arrived at a destination. High volumes of cars pass through Ludlow Square driving between Exit 16 of the Interstate and the beach area, especially during mega-events such as the Oyster Festival, Fourth of July fireworks display and the annual boat show. Billboards at the railroad overpass, visible from Ludlow Square, clash with improvements that have been made to the square, discouraging revitalization efforts.

Property within Ludlow Square has multiple owners: individual merchants, churches, the Third Taxing District, the Norwalk Housing Authority, the City of Norwalk and the State of Connecticut. To implement an effective revitalization plan all parties will need to cooperate in the process, making it a collaborative effort. Future plans for road work call for construction on the railroad bridge and East Avenue underpass that may lead to road widening. The decisions that are made regarding that project could be destructive to the survival of Ludlow Square unless a solid revitalization plan is in place and supported by all parties.

Liberty Square, at the gateway to East Norwalk from SoNo, is located within view of the harbor and across from Veterans Park. It consists of several attached retail shops with rental apartments above. The facades, with one exception, are attractive, but are in need of restorative work. Facades are discolored, and have paint that's peeling. The wooden barrels, used for plantings, are rotted and full of weeds. The sidewalks and parking area are patched and unattractive, with neglected landscaping. Large billboards on top of the buildings dominate the square, compromising the attractiveness of the fine architectural structure of the shops.

Although the Department of Transportation (DOT) fence that ran along the north side of Route 136 was recently removed the fence on the south side remains. It is unattractive, catches litter and creates an unwelcoming barrier. Constitution Park, between Liberty Square and the Harbor, is an attractive feature but phragmites (the invasive alien plants that have taken over wetlands from cattails in recent years) have invaded much of the area. And, litter and dumping are problematic.

Pedestrians and cars attempting to enter or exit Liberty Square to cross to the Veterans Park side of Route 136, and vice versa, put themselves at risk of being hit by thru vehicles since there is no crosswalk or traffic light at this location.

The proximity to Veterans Park and the activities of park-goers create situations for Liberty Park merchants, requiring heightened police presence. Speeding vehicles, blasting radios and drug & alcohol use are some of the problems that occur regularly.

The connecting streets of East Avenue, Fort Point Street and Van Zant Street are heavily traveled by cars, trucks and buses. Many of the uses are nonconforming, creating strain on the area. Several houses and businesses have properties and structures in disrepair. Litter and

dumping is a problem in several areas.

The entries to East Norwalk at Exit 16 are uninviting and the signs lack information to adequately direct those coming off the Interstate onto East Avenue. The landscaping is nonexistent or poorly maintained in most places. The Department of Transportation has plans to reconstruct and widen the lanes on the bridge at this location, which may take even more of the green space away.

## PROPOSAL

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association is focusing on two retail areas in East Norwalk, Ludlow Square and Liberty Square. We are recommending improvements that emphasize unifying features in each. In the plan, signage, lighting fixtures, walkway additions, benches, kiosks, facades and planters follow a standard design throughout each center. The centers become special places to visit and congregate for locals and visitors alike. A theme, such as nautical, could emerge and be repeated in the details of murals and planting beds throughout each neighborhood retail center.

Special attention is given to pedestrian-friendly, traffic calming additions. We emphasize the need to provide clear information and to create a pleasant destination that builds on and recreates the rich history of these locations, where possible.

Areas for improvement addressed in the plan are: the retail component, including needs analysis & façade improvements; residential component, and consideration for church parishioners, Playloft Early Learning Center participants & Ludlow Commons senior housing complex residents, including increased opportunities and expanded use of plan area; green space, including enhancements to the east bank of the Harbor, pocket parks, traffic islands, planters, roadsides & parking lots; walkways, including attention to sidewalks & addition of pedestrian crossings; traffic, including improved parking & traffic calming, and recommendation for studies; signage, including addition of murals and the removal of billboards; gateways, including recommendations for improvements to connecting streets; and other areas related to aesthetics and creation of a safe & inviting environment.

With the addition of planned improvements, Ludlow Square has great potential as a destination neighborhood retail center and a community gathering place for special events and activities. Liberty Square, because of its high-visibility gateway location, is an asset and can receive similar enhancements that would also include signage that would welcome visitors to East Norwalk and provide directions to destinations within East Norwalk. Liberty Square not only has the potential to be a handsome little shopping area but can function as an attractive gateway to East Norwalk from South Norwalk. It already has a park, the use of which can be enhanced by creative improvement to the rest of the square.

The gateways to East Norwalk and the connecting streets to the retail centers & between the retail centers are also included as important components of the revitalization plan. Signage at Exit 16 on East Avenue can be revised and beautified with improved landscaping and the addition of directional information that would guide people to locations in the revitalized areas.

Fort Point Street, Van Zant Street and East Avenue, from I-95 to Ludlow Square, are the connecting roads for the retail center projects that need to be included in the overall plan for improvement. The goal is to create aesthetic enhancements and safer streets that are geared to people walking & riding bicycles in addition to driving motor vehicles. The plan calls for the addition of kiosks at critical locations to provide directions, and sign posts with historic narratives at select locations, along with a designated 'Become a Norwalker' route starting at Veterans Park (to Liberty Square, along Van Zant Street, to Ludlow Square, along Fort Point Street, back to Liberty Square, and Veterans Park). Significant properties and structures, such as the Historic East Norwalk Cemetery, the East Norwalk Library and the new East Norwalk Train Station, will be incorporated into the revitalization plan as integral components.

The revitalization of these neighborhood retail centers will restore long-neglected sections of Norwalk. The revitalized retail centers will benefit our local merchants and provide services for area residents. It will also enhance area property values and allow for greater diversity of public usage. Public workshops to present the plan and gather ideas will be essential in the early stages of implementation, and throughout the entire process.

Several organizations with goals and missions that coincide with this vision of the neighborhood retail centers are potential collaborators for the project. Several entities and individuals who are property owners within the plan area have a vested interest in the plan. The ENNA has begun contact with officials, merchants and stakeholders within the plan area who clearly support many, or all, of the concepts outlined in this plan.

This project is very marketable to grant-making organizations because it addresses urban renewal and proposed development & revitalization in a low to moderate income neighborhood. This project would be eligible for Community Development Block Grant funds from the Department of Urban Development (HUD) through the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency. Additional funds could be obtained from the Community Economic Development Fund. We are also asking for consideration and assistance from the city departments and commissions that have shared interest and responsibility in neighborhood revitalization and retail development.

The East Norwalk Neighborhood Association strongly recommends that before substantial amounts of funds are spent on improvements a professional retail needs analysis, and traffic & parking studies, be done.

The ENNA has divided the project into four phases, with a projected timeline, that will be expanded to become a comprehensive Master Plan for Ludlow Square & Liberty Square, and their gateways and connecting streets, as defined in this document.

#### Phase 1: (Year 1)

The following seven steps can be accomplished simultaneously, and apply to the entire plan area

1. Identification of applicable city agencies as Collaborators to assist professionally with project
  - Mayor's Office
  - Redevelopment Agency

- Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee
  - Anti-Litter Task Force
  - Housing Authority
  - Historical Commission
  - Public Works Department
  - Planning and Zoning Department
  - Recreation and Parks Department
  - Public Schools
  - Police Department
  - Fire Department
  - Health Department
  - Tree Advisory Committee
  - Common Council Committees
    - Recreation & Parks
    - Public Works
    - Land Use & Building Management
2. Identification of other entities as Collaborators that could assist with project
- East Norwalk Neighborhood Association (ENNA)
  - Retail property owners and tenants within area of revitalization
  - Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) – highways
  - Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
  - Southwestern Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA)
  - Third Taxing District (TTD) Commission
  - Norwalk Historical Society (NHS)
  - Norwalk Preservation Trust (NPT)
  - Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF)
  - CT Department of Economic Development (CDED)
  - US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
  - Connecticut Policy & Economic Council (CPEC) – City Scan
  - Norwalk River Watershed Association (NRWA)
  - East Norwalk Business Association (ENBA)
  - East Norwalk Improvement Association (ENIA) – EN Library
  - East Norwalk Cemetery Association (ENCA)
  - Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - Corporations
  - Clean & Green – Adopt-a-Spot program
  - Garden Club
  - Parents and Teachers Organization (PTO)
  - State elected officials
  - Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
3. Formation of an East Norwalk Neighborhood Retail Center Revitalization Committee that includes:
- Members of the ENNA
  - Merchants, tenants and property owners of revitalization areas
  - Member from the Redevelopment Agency

- Member from the Housing Authority
  - Members from city departments
  - Member from the TTD Commission
  - Member from State Legislation or Senate
  - Members from the Common Council
  - Members from the Community and Neighborhood
4. Community and neighborhood involvement
    - Hold public workshops to introduce project and gather ideas
    - Press coverage and publicity
    - Form 'Friends of Ludlow Square' & 'Friends of Liberty Square'
  5. Restoration and enhancements
    - Identify funding sources, grant availability and corporate sponsorship possibilities
    - Identify no-cost professional assistance from the State of Connecticut and from nonprofit agencies
  6. Site and needs assessment, including assessment of economic factors
    - Identify all properties and property owners within plan area
    - Review of uses, past and present
    - Do a modified historic research to ascertain past use, dating back to turn-of-the-century, including Partial Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
    - Complete a Historic Resource Inventory to assess structures and their condition
    - Zoning survey to determine ownership of property and to assess extent of nonconforming uses
    - Review retail studies, proposals for improvement including additional studies and recommendation for hiring a professional consultant to determine retail needs
    - Review traffic flow records, and recommend hiring a consultant to do traffic study
    - Do a parking study to assess need, proposals for improvement
    - City Scan initial assessment, and subsequent assessments to document change
  7. Sanitation and security
    - Complete short-term remedial work based on City Scan, and other conditions reported by residents and merchants. Review and follow-up for long-range planning

#### Phase 2: (Years 2 – 3)

##### Applicable to Ludlow and Liberty Squares

- Decide on uniform signage, walkways, landscaping, theme (nautical?), lighting fixtures, etc.
- Remove billboards
- Add crosswalks and clarify pedestrian walkways
- Make façade improvements, restoration and/or additions
- Enhance all planting areas
- Plant native trees, shrubs and vegetation, when possible.
- Establish a walking route through 'Become a Norwalker' program starting at Veterans Park, to Liberty Square, along Fort Point Street to Ludlow Square, along Van Zant Street, and back to Liberty Square.

- Enhance streetscape of routes connecting the gateways (entry points to East Norwalk) with the neighborhood retail centers: East Avenue from Exit 16 to Ludlow Square; and Fort Point and Van Zant Streets from Liberty Square to Ludlow Square.
- Place kiosks at critical points: Liberty Square; East Norwalk train station; Ludlow Square.
- Place informational placards (similar to signposts at Mill Pond Park) at select locations to identify special structures and historical sites: EN Cemetery; EN Library; Location of first meeting house; etc.
- Create master plans for revitalization areas by consultant hired in year 2
- Create zoning changes, if needed, to accommodate plan
- Establish measures of success

#### Specific to Ludlow Square

- Add crosswalk(s) at south end of Square
- Repair and replace traffic signs, with improved organization to avoid overload
- Complete historic designation of East Norwalk Cemetery by State and National historic registers (begun by ENNA in 2004)
- Support and incorporate new East Norwalk Train station into overall plan
- Establish measures of success

#### Specific to Liberty Square

- Remove fence on south side of Rte. 136 next to the Stroffolino Bridge.
- Replace or refurbish wooden planter tub barrels
- Add 'Welcome to East Norwalk' sign on grassy area in front of Veterans Park, at location visible to drivers coming across Straffolino Bridge from SoNo
- Add informational sign (similar to signs at Exit 16 entrance to EN – with modifications) on green planting strip in front of Liberty Square
- Add plantings to enhance the parking area
- Façade improvement to include additions or restoration
- Add kiosk and mural (similar to SoNo murals)
- Remove invasive marsh plants next to Constitution Park
- Address needs of residential tenants and home owners residing within plan area
- Add crossing for pedestrians across Route 136 between Veterans Park and Liberty Square that would also allow cars to enter and exit the Square and Veterans Park parking area more safely
- Establish measures of success

#### Specific to traffic island at Exit 16 entering East Avenue from westbound I-95

- Replace the missing 'Welcome to Norwalk' with a 'Welcome to East Norwalk' sign at the top of the directional sign
- Remove blacktop from traffic island and add landscaping
- Repair, remove or replace bent traffic sign
- Evaluate directional sign for clarity and the need to remove or add directional information (also applies to sign across the street)
- Establish measures of success

#### Specific to East Avenue from I-95 to Ludlow Square

- Assemble a design review committee, including all important stakeholders, to explore keeping East Avenue at its current width, and to explain ways to minimize its conversion

into a major truck route

- Make façade improvements
- Eliminate nonconforming uses, where possible
- Strictly enforce zoning, health, litter and speeding laws
- Improve landscaping and add street trees
- Recognize businesses that improve their properties and buildings
- At train overpass: get rid of billboards; add informational sign and/or kiosk; coordinate aesthetics with new train station
- Establish measures of success

### Phase 3: (Years 4 – 5)

#### Specific to Ludlow Square

- Add lighting fixtures and hanging flower baskets to streets
- Reconstruct sidewalks to add brickwork and granite curbing
- Design and construct pedestrian usage areas, including a children's play area, a picnic/seating area, and improved walkways with benches/seating throughout the plan area
- Add mural of 'Ludlow signing purchase of Norwalk' (similar to SoNo murals) on side of a prominent building, once façade additions are in place
- Create a walkway from Roger Square to Winfield Street between the Housing Authority property and the Ludlow Shopping Center property.
- Negotiate with business owners and places of worship within plan area to allow use of their parking spaces during public events
- Encourage and promote events and activities such as: Farmers Markets; Tree and Menorah lightings; and other community gatherings
- Support headstone and cemetery restoration
- Establish measures of success

### Phase 4: (Years 6 – 10)

- Restore native habitat along the Norwalk River near Constitution Park and under the Stroffolino Bridge
- Incorporate DOT road and railroad bridge reconstruction at East Avenue into revitalization plan for Ludlow Square, maintaining integrity of the revitalization plan
- Create changes in retail and housing distribution, including construction, if indicated from economic needs study. As is true for all the other development projects underway, additional housing would help vitalize the retail center at Ludlow Square, which is now a low-density area. Apartments and townhouses over shops seem to be an ideal solution, but a decision should await the planning results in Year 2.
- Establish measures of success

Note: Phases 2 through 4 will be modified and expanded based on outcomes of Phase 1

Plan submitted by the ENNA for review to:

- Mayor Alex A. Knopp – December 30, 2004
- Norwalk Redevelopment Agency staff – December 30, 2004

- ENNA membership – January, 12, 2005
- Officials and heads of pertinent organizations – starting January 15, 2005
- The Third Taxing District Commission – January 18, 2005
- Mayor’s Neighborhood Preservation Committee – February 2, 2005
- SWRPA Regional Plan of Development Chair – February 7, 2005
- Norwalk Planning Commission – February 8, 2005

This plan & a photo display are posted on the ENNA website at <http://eastnorwalk.org>. Additional information is available by contacting the ENNA.