

**EAST NORWALK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**February 9, 2005
Minutes**

Board Member Attendees: Laurel Lindstrom, Erik Nees, Gordon Tully.

Guests: Chris Perone, 137th District State Rep;
James Stuart, Ed Stabell, Liz Ayn, Win Baum, Joe Gaita, Tony D'Andrea, Wendy Pardue

1.

2. The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm

3. Chris Perone

- a. Session has started, Governor has presented budget with a \$1.3 billion deficit. She is proposing to raise gas, cigarette and liquor taxes, and to cut programs. Plans to continue with CONN-PACE senior drug program.
- b. Approves of and supports ENNA. Likes our revitalization plan because it enhances the unique character of EN, derived from the 1913 consolidation of 5 villages into Norwalk.
- c. He will push for grant and other resource funding that would benefit ENNA.
- d. Transportation: SWRPA voted not to "pave our way out of the situation," which he approves of. Governor is ordering 365 new rail cars, and plans a new maintenance facility.
- e. Fairfield County: FC Caucus gathered from major stakeholders to address loss of business and tax base, partly because of run down MetroNorth. Also, FC is stepchild in the state. We directly impact the rest of the state by our position as gateway to NYC. Working w/ Chambers of Commerce to speak with one voice.
- f. I-95: need funding to clean up "choke points." Noted the improvement from Exit 8 on-ramp.
- g. LL gave kudos for new EN railroad station, asked about parking at station. CP wants to open up parking to encourage commuters, continue to park behind Fitness Edge and Penney's Diner. LL noted that our revitalization plan runs up to the station, and that we don't want just parking, but appropriate development. CP agrees we don't want another CT Avenue, which has no synergy, and opposed that to Wall Street, where they had a schematic plan.
- h. He noted we had a good coalition of Duff, himself, and Knopp to argue for improvements.

4. Extended discussion of ENNA's business revitalization plan (very lengthy discussion has been condensed and organized herein). Win Baum, head of the East Norwalk Business Association, spoke at length in heated opposition to ENNA's plan. His points included:

- a. ENNA had good intentions, but they have "gone awry." ENNA is pointing business in the wrong direction, but offers nothing, no revenue. He repeatedly accused ENNA of misfocusing their efforts.
- b. ENNA should focus on neighborhood issues and not tell businesses how to spend their money, or insist that the 50 businesses affected by our plan "bend to your will."
- c. "The only way you can get things to go together is if everything is put together." He objects that ENNA is trying to put everything together and is that this will result in the use of eminent domain, and the creation of another redevelopment project that just sits there for years, like the lower West Avenue project. ENNA is proposing to use "government mandated funds."
- d. ENNA is focusing attention on East Norwalk, which will become a target for eminent domain. Don't draw attention to EN businesses.
- e. Instead of requiring businesses to spend money on decorations, we should solve the key infrastructure problems. He noted that only two roads are slated for improvement through 2010. Roads add high tax value, while decoration are a useless waste of money if the roads are bad. Fort Point has potholes that will break axles, lower East Avenue has ruts and is unpaved, Van Zant is in terrible condition.
- f. He feels very strongly that sidewalks should be repaired, and believes we should turn our efforts in that direction.
- g. We are trying to turn Ludlow Square into an historic district.

- h. In summary, he, representing ENBA, was adamantly opposed to ENNA efforts; felt that ENNA drawing so much attention provided the city with an out to avoid fixing infrastructure; equated ENNA's program with redevelopment; and saw only harm resulting from ENNA's efforts.

Laurel Lindstrom then responded

- a. ENNA's purpose in publicizing the revitalization was to get useful feedback, not to put forward a finished plan. ENNA is not recommending changes that organizations and stakeholders will not buy into.
- b. The primary purpose of the plan is to find ways to help business owners make the improvements they wish to make, but haven't made, for whatever reason.
- c. ENNA comes from the community, and not from the City, and has neither interest in nor power to enforce eminent domain. Furthermore, the revitalization plan is a loosely organized, flexible guideline. Quoting from the Plan: "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."
- d. Most of the businesses affected by the plan are retail establishments and not business properties.
- e. We are not turning anything into an historic district, but are seeking historic status for the cemetery.
- f. Again quoting the Plan: "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."
- g. Most important, ENNA and its predecessor organizations, and LL personally, has for years been addressed exactly those infrastructure concerns mentioned by Mr. Baum. These are our everyday ongoing business. The Plan is something additional, that allows businesses to move ahead and do what they can while they wait for the City and state to respond to the constant barrage of complaints being made by ENNA and others.
- h. One infrastructure issue that ENNA doesn't push is sidewalk improvement, because the property owners are responsible for their own sidewalks. Far from forcing businesses to spend money, ENNA goes out of its way to protect them from expenditures they may not know they have to make.

Tony D'Andrea, proprietor of Select Plastics, a boating supply retail business in Liberty Square:

- a. A key reason why traffic is bad and roads are deteriorating is the inability of the City to get the harbor dredged. This results in 300 trucks of gravel and sand for every barge that can't move into the harbor. The harbormaster is threatening to close the harbor.
- b. The problem is that the State Department of Environmental Affairs has set impossibly restrictive standards for sludge disposal, far above those agreed to by the US EPA. Also, Long Island is using every measure they can to stop the dredging.
- c. In addition, Tony discovered state surveyors surveying the area behind Liberty Square. The subject was a staging area for rebuilding the railroad bridge, that involved razing all the properties behind Liberty Square, including taking his store.
- d. It was agreed that this area was truly the only logical staging area for an essential improvement, but that community and City input should be insisted upon before the State bulldozed its way in, and then set the rules for redevelopment afterward. Chris Perone agreed to look into it.
- e. Tony also raised the issue of quality of life. There are 22 homeless people hanging out under the Stroffolino Bridge. It is unsafe for children to use Constitution Park because of needles and bags and condoms.
- f. Garbage is not taken care of; streets aren't plowed; migrant workers hang out in Veterans' Park; City claims parking at Liberty Square is TTD, whereas it is the City's responsibility.

- g. He sent photos of cars illegally parked at Liberty Square to the police for 40 weeks, and made daily phone calls for 6 weeks, with no useful response.
- h. He pointed out that businesses at Liberty Square have made efforts to improve their properties—he spend \$3,200 on azaleas in front of his store, and another shop installed the nice pilings.
- i. Tony supports both priorities: having things look good, but also quality of life and street repair. We need both.

Joe Gaita, resident of Edlie Avenue:

- a. You can't use Fort Point because of the trucks. There is persistent double parking on both sides of Prowitt Street, in connection with the restaurant, so that it is nearly impossible to get through, and emergency vehicles cannot get through.

Chris Perone:

- a. He will check the issue of TTD versus City ownership of Liberty Square parking.
- b. Putting off repaving until 2010 is unacceptable. He can pressure the mayor.
- c. However, we need to prioritize the street problems – this was done, with Fort Point first, East Avenue second, and Van Zant third.
- d. He felt a good issue had been raised, that roads were important to businesses.
- e. He recommended that ENNA, EINA and ENBA try to work together to create a “zone of business availability.” He felt we had more clout if we spoke with one voice.

5. December and January Minutes:

- a. Gordon will make corrections and redistribute. January minutes were approved with corrections.

6. President's Report:

- a. Upcoming meetings:
 - i. TTD annual meeting March 2nd, St. Thomas Hall, 7 PM.
 - ii. Operating Budget public hearing same night.
 - iii. Affordable Housing Forum, LWV, 17th at 6:30 at the Main Library. Feature Curtis Law, Matt Miklave, and Spinnaker. Liz Ayn noted that the Woodfield Commons across from Norden was a good example.
- b. Budget:
 - i. Common Council Capital Planning meeting 31 March on the budget, after Planning Commission sees it.
 - ii. Finance Commission said no to nearly all public works proposals, including traffic calming on Strawberry Hill (build out curbs, hire a consultant, use this as a pilot program, also do Ward Street, wants \$80,000). They have mostly completed the speed bumps. LL put in letter in favor of SH improvements.
 - iii. Other Capital Improvement issues LL wrote in favor of and Fin Com said “no” to included East Avenue signal coordination, signal at Tierney and SH, tree planting, school and park playgrounds including Fitch Park equipment, Calf Pasture Beach and Vets' Park, environmental/conservation study starting with Taylor Farm, open space fund.
- c. Tree Liaison: Maribeth is working with the Tree Advisory Committee members to figure out where to put trees. She is looking for volunteers to help.
- d. Citywide Cleanup: Mayor wants it for April 30th. Word is out, trucks will be available at various locations, no refrigerators (just litter), paint will be available to paint hydrants.
- e. Know Your Town is ready for the printer (The Hour). Hour probably will not include it in the paper.
- f. Weed and Seed: February 25th deadline for requests for small scale home repair, small scale (similar to Americare).

7. Treasurer's Report

- a. No report, but request that James Stuart's check be deposited.

8. Membership / Volunteer Task List

- a. Because we had no clear description of the various tasks that volunteers and members can do when they have a moment, LL prepared an extensive one. The items are deliberately small and manageable, although consequently numerous.
- b. Laurel will attend a February 16th Pro Bono Workshop on just this topic.
- c. The list follows herein:
 - i. We need about 50 street reps to cover our 235 streets. LL is in contact with 25 or so, but not regularly. Need to stay in touch on a quarterly basis, provide update to Board on meetings. Need someone on Board to manage this.
 - ii. Neighborhood Cleanups: need 3 or 4 helpers to coordinate through the street reps. Someone on the Board needs to be in charge.
 - iii. Adopt-A-Spot: we are keeping the City Hall spot and looking for another one, need another Board member to coordinate this.
 - iv. Tree Liaison: Maribeth needs an assistant, to help monitor ongoing butchery.
 - v. Neighborhood Preservation Committee: LL goes, meetings held 1st Wednesday at 10 AM. It would be nice to have backup. Wilton Avenue and Golden Hill send more than one member regularly.
 - vi. CNNA: need monthly representation.
 - vii. Anti-Litter Task Force: LL is a member, will handle this.
 - viii. Monitor of City meetings: someone needs to keep an eye on upcoming meetings to spot those affecting ENNA.
 - ix. First and Third Taxing Districts need to be monitored.
 - x. Monitor for legal notices and real estate transactions that affect EN, found in newspapers.
 - xi. Archive collecting: Gordon's job.
 - xii. Newsletter Manager: needs to work with the Board.
 - xiii. Website Manager.
 - xiv. Corresponding Secretary.
 - xv. Printing and Design.
 - xvi. Mail and Distribution: house to house, plus mailings.
 - xvii. Know Your Town: LL handles this.
 - xviii. Publicity.
 - xix. Grants: watch for, and write.
 - xx. Fundraising.
 - xxi. Membership and Board Development.
 - xxii. Project Managers: cemetery, Ludlow/Liberty
 - xxiii. Accountant to review books.
 - xxiv. Specific duties of various officers.
- d. LL requests Board comments on this (excellent) list

9. Tax Exempt Status

- a. Application will be in by the end of the week, according to our attorney.
- b. We should get a response in 3-4 months.

10. Cemetery

- a. LL made a short presentation to our guests on the cemetery, noting that Gov. Fitch is buried there, and it is the oldest cemetery in the city.
- b. No cemeteries in the city have historic designation.
- c. The EN Cemetery Association is reconvening. LL will contact them. This is a good thing.
- d. Funds are needed for restoration. Now "funded" by TTD.
- e. LL needs three full days to complete the application.
- f. The Cemetery Association represents the families of the buried, has rules about restoration.
- g. The question of competition between ENNA and ENCA arises, and the consensus was that we should not insist on doing it if they truly are ready to take on the burden.

11. Mayor's Neighborhood Preservation Committee

- a. LL showed our guests the spreadsheet that the Committee uses to keep track of concerns.
- b. Items from ENNA on the list include the used cars being advertised at Olmstead real estate and at Wachovia Bank; litter under the bridge; pollutants at the brook at East Wall Street; getting the fence down at Vets Park.

12. CNNA

- a. Bob, LL, and Lee Levey, the triumvirate in charge, met. Lee is leaving, Bob and LL will stay.
- b. Agenda will be coming soon to the Board. The CNNA meets on the Second Monday..

13. Emails during the Month

- a. Diane Gilmore: can't make the meeting, but we need to send letters to homeowners to keep their sidewalks clear. Old Saugutuck Road and Shorehaven are culprits. Plows have ripped up part of the sidewalk on Shorehaven.
- b. Exchange of emails with Win Baum: LL sent plan on 15 January. Win Baum replied 17 January that it was not acceptable to the ENBA. He cited (in addition to arguments given above): it lacks a program for carrying it out; to get a positive result, one person needs to own all the affected property (as at SoNo; you need cooperation from all the adjacent properties at Liberty Square; gaining landmark status for Ludlow Square would be meaningless [note that this is not in the plan], because there is nothing to save except the cemetery, "which is already in a permanent state of preservation." [not so]; melding all the disparate elements in Ludlow Square into a "common-themed historical physical presence" would require eminent domain (he devotes a long paragraph objecting to this, this seems to be at the heart of his concerns). LL replied same day with similar arguments to those above, and desire to meet and talk. This never happened until this meeting.
- c. Wendye Pardue asked how she could help with the exciting revitalization project, to which LL replied that for now she should help get the plan known to as many people as possible.
- d. In reply to his receipt of the plan, Paul S. Coggin (TTD) gave a cautious reply that (for example) historical lighting and sidewalk repair would be good, but they are short of staff and would need City and/or State help to address most of the problems. He applauded the creation of a dialogue.
- e. Joe Cote intended to come to the meeting (not sure if he came and didn't sign in), but encouraged us to spruce up Van Zant Street.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Gordon Tully, Secretary.