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BRISTOL

### Draft Plan Proposes Improvements In Bristol's West End

By DON STACOM

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BRISTOL —

Homeowners, tenants and merchants in the West End are getting ready to propose a series of improvements for the section, but they acknowledge that the ongoing fiscal crisis will almost certainly postpone any changes that require substantial money.

After months of study, an advisory committee has drafted a list of more than 40 ways to improve transportation, housing, safety and recreation — and possibly to reverse the decline in the West End's business base.

A few ideas would cost nothing, such as encouraging residents to form a West End Neighborhood Association and establish block watches. Others would require funds from the cash-hungry state and city governments. Those proposals include replacing deteriorated sidewalks, extending Connecticut Transit bus service into the neighborhood and rebuilding the West Street bridge over the Pequabuck River.

A final report should be out by late spring, and City Planner Alan Weiner said the committee knows well that spending initiatives aren't likely to win support anytime soon.

"I think you'll see some things recommended for the short term, some as intermediate projects, some for the longer term," Weiner said. "When times are bad, it's a good time to be planning," he said. "When the economy does get better, you can hit the ground running."

The city last year began an extensive study of how to help the West End, where many longtime residents complain that an influx of low-income and jobless tenants has damaged the historically blue-collar neighborhood. Graffiti, vandalism, groups of teenagers loitering on the streets at night and rumors of drug dealing all seem to have worsened in the past decade, some residents say.

But during the past eight months of study and planning, the volunteer committee also has heard from police, who said crime in the West End is not that widespread. Some homeowners agree that the image is worse than the reality and that most of the trouble is confined to the rundown blocks surrounding the intersection of Divinity and Park streets on the edge of downtown.

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"We've never had a problem here. If there's anything, it's on the other side [of the Divinity-and-Park crossing]," said Pauline Pelletier, who has lived with her husband in the West End for nearly 25 years. "The police started having more foot patrols, and that's helped a little bit."

Postal Service employee Bill Ciervo, who has delivered mail in the West End since the late 1980s, described it as a solid, friendly neighborhood.

"Most of the people are good, respectful and all that," Ciervo said. "People keep up their houses."

Ciervo and Pelletier acknowledged, however, that businesses have had a tough time. Across from Pelletier's home on Divinity Street is an abandoned Italian market. Along Park Street, there's a boarded-up convenience store, a defunct restaurant, the vacant United Auto Workers hall and the long-unused IGA supermarket.

"All the new stores on Farmington Avenue hurt the little storefronts around here," Ciervo said.

The study committee is advising that more off-street parking, new streetscapes and better signs could help local merchants. It also wants to encourage new bike or walking paths, more community-focused use of Muzzy Field and better pedestrian access to the Pequabuck River.

Details of the study and its tentative conclusions are at [www.cpstn.com/westend.html](http://www.cpstn.com/westend.html).

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