



West End Neighborhood Study, Bristol CT

Date/Time: February 28, 2008, 7 p.m.

Location: Imagine Nation Children's Museum, 1 Pleasant Street, Bristol

Meeting Summary

On Thursday, February 28, 2008, 32 residents, business owners, community leaders, and other stakeholders came together to discuss the West End neighborhood and to learn more about the West End Neighborhood Study that has just begun. The City of Bristol Land Use Division and the partnering team of consultants who are conducting the study – The Capstan Group and the Yale Urban Design Workshop – held this first meeting to start to identify key stakeholders in the community, educate community members about the study, and seek widespread participation from the neighborhood to improve the study.

The following document is a summary of this meeting. While it is not intended to provide a verbatim report, it is intended to provide a general record of what occurred and to provide for those who were not able to attend a sense of what discussion took place. A list of those who were present for this meeting is provided on the last page of this document.

Welcome from Alan Weiner

Alan Weiner, City Planner, welcomed the group and thanked Michael Suchopar and the staff of the Imagine Nation Children's Museum for hosting the event. Mr. Weiner also remembered former Planning Commission alternate and City Council member Tony Savino, who passed away on Feb. 26.

Purpose of the Meeting

Elizabeth (Lisa) Grossman, CEO of The Capstan Group, introduced herself and other members of the team who will be working on the West End Neighborhood Study: Gloria Wang and Amber Walsh from The Capstan Group, and Alan Plattus and Vanessa Mendoza from Yale Urban Design Workshop (YUDW). Ms. Grossman recognized the wide cross-section of people who had turned out this evening, including public officials, West End residents, former West End residents, and West End business owners. Ms. Grossman noted that everyone who had been identified as someone who was potentially interested in the West End or communicated their interest to The Capstan Group or the City was invited to this first meeting. She noted that there may well be other interested people who have not yet been identified, emphasized that this is the first meeting of many, and asked for help getting everyone who should be involved to the table.

Ms. Grossman outlined the purposes of the meeting: to get to know each other; to educate the community about the study, what it will cover, and its timeline; to begin to identify the issues important to the neighborhood; to discuss the importance of public involvement to the success of the study; and to seek commitments from those interested in serving as neighborhood-based advisors.

About the Study

History. Mr. Weiner briefly shared the history behind the study and the process leading to the City's selection of The Capstan Group and YUDW to conduct the study. Ms. Grossman and Mr. Plattus reviewed the experience and qualifications that The Capstan Group and YUDW bring to this study.

Process. Ms. Grossman explained the anticipated process and timeline for the study, emphasizing that the study is estimated to take approximately 12 months in total. The first portion of the study is to focus on "where we are", i.e., developing a solid understanding of the current status of the neighborhood and how it got to where it is today. This portion includes significant data collection and collaboration with the community to interpret the data. The second phase of the study will review "where we want to go", i.e., developing the vision for the neighborhood and what we

would like to see happen. The third and fourth phases are “how do we get there”, i.e., developing specific implementation steps and then drafting the plan. Ms. Grossman specifically emphasized that having local partners and advisors is going to be really important all the way through – from talking about the current status of the neighborhood through to identifying what very specific changes are high priority and identifying how these changes can happen practically. Mr. Plattus added that part of the study will include mapping the current land uses and assets in the neighborhood and figuring out how to take advantage of the best development opportunities and amenities of the neighborhood, such as the river that runs through it.

Initial Review of Data. Ms. Grossman gave a preview of the data and analysis that has already, on a preliminary basis, been conducted. The data analysis shows trends in race, neighborhood income, property values, ownership trends, and absentee ownership in the West End. Members of the audience asked if the data used for analysis were reliable and could be verified, and requested specific information about the data source. Ms. Grossman agreed that the data source will be clearly described so its degree of accuracy can be understood. The group also asked if population analysis could be broken down by cultural ancestry (e.g., French, Polish, and so forth). Ms. Grossman agreed to incorporate those concerns as Capstan proceeds with data analysis. Ms. Grossman confirmed that this would be useful information to have. Ms. Grossman presented the “wish list” of data, acknowledged that some local partners have already been helpful in providing this information, noting, for example, that Police Chief DiVenere has already provided crime statistics for the neighborhood. Ms. Grossman asked for help from everyone present to provide the data and access to information that may not otherwise be available to help the study be successful.

Neighborhood Boundaries. Mr. Plattus introduced the initial set of working boundaries for the West End neighborhood, and noted that determining the boundaries is one of the first decisions to make during this study. The boundaries were initially proposed to be consistent with the City’s RFQ, and Mr. Weiner noted that, although these boundaries seem about right, they may be modified as the study proceeds. After presenting the first initial “layer” of the map, Mr. Plattus explained that YUDW will work throughout the study to add additional layers, creating maps with themes including land use, criminal activity, blight, development opportunities, and districts within the neighborhood. Mr. Plattus asked meeting attendees for their initial thoughts about whether they agreed with the boundaries and if not, which changes needed to be considered. Chief DiVenere, Dave Hamelin, Jerry Rafaniello, Mary Moulton, Sammy Vasile, Andre Dorval, Michael Suchopar, and Chet Reed all offered suggestions:

- Extend the northeast boundary up to Center and West Sts. and include the Peck Lane area
- Focus primary attention on the area closest to downtown, since this is the area that is consistent with what the Police Department considers to be the West End
- Include as much of the area as possible, as a previous revitalization effort focused on too small a portion of the neighborhood
- Emphasize and develop the Pequabuck River as an asset in the neighborhood
- Emphasize Muzzy Field and Rockwell Park as centerpieces of the neighborhood
- Include Laurel Street and the Boys & Girls Club (Mr. Suchopar noted that the club was one of the few places that accommodated West End children)
- Focus on the former IGA site as a prime development opportunity
- Recognize that there are “shades of gray” as to areas that could be considered West End or downtown and that there are different sub-neighborhoods with different priorities and concerns
- Integrate the closure and redevelopment of O’Connell School, possibly as a wellness center for the many veterans in the community (Mr. Vasile mentioned that Bristol has the fifth-highest population of veterans in the state)
- Make sure that the plan, once it is completed, has clearly articulated and appropriate enforcement mechanisms so the plan can genuinely have “teeth”

Mr. Plattus noted that these comments are exactly the type of discussion which will occur during the study; he suggested the possibility that the neighborhood could have multiple centers having different identities (e.g., one near downtown, another further to the west). YUDW team will take the input and adjust the neighborhood boundaries as they continue to work on the maps of the West End. Ms. Grossman noted that this is one of the first conversations that will be held broadly and publicly in the first community-wide meeting, as it impacts other decisions down the road.



Involvement & Communication

Noting that an important component of this meeting is to engage members of the community to be involved in the study in the long-term, Ms. Grossman outlined the different ways that stakeholders could be involved depending on the amount of time they have and the level of involvement they seek. The different ways to be involved include reading the study website, submitting comments through the website, helping the team gain access to data, attending the first community workshop, recruiting others to participate in the workshop, and serving on the Neighborhood Advisory Committee. Ms. Grossman explained that the Neighborhood Advisory Committee will be comprised of individuals who are extremely committed and provide a truly representative group within the community who can serve as advisors, connectors, and a sounding board to the study consultants. Those interested in serving on the committee were asked to express their interest to the consultants. The need for ongoing commitment (so it is not a different group at different meetings and consistency is achieved) and strong interest in getting into the ‘meat’ of the study is important in order to serve on the Neighborhood Advisory Committee.

Questions & Discussion

The meeting was opened for any and all questions and discussions, including specifically the opportunity to identify any issues that should be considered in the report. The following questions were asked and comments made:

On current issues:

- Mr. Vasile pointed out that the closure of O’Connell School and the construction of a new K-8 school would have a significant impact on the neighborhood, as O’Connell Scholl is a source of stability for West End children.
- Others felt that the proposed new K-8 school belongs in the West End neighborhood, and to locate it at the Scalia site on Barlow Street would be detrimental to the neighborhood.
- Mr. Rafaniello noted that it seems that the level of business activity in the West End has shrunk over time, especially after the departure of small grocery stores and convenience stores from the neighborhood.
- Lenny Lamothe said he thought previous City Council members representing District 2 had focused exclusively on the Federal Hill neighborhood.
- Mr. Lamothe also mentioned that absentee landlords are a substantial problem in the West End, in terms of taking care of the properties. Specifically, he identified issues related to maintenance of sidewalks, incidents of vandalism in the neighborhood that contributed to its poor condition and highlighted the former convenience store at Park and Dutton that is an eyesore in the neighborhood.
- Mr. Rafaniello commented that the West End study should take note of the current plans for Route 72 and development in downtown Bristol since the issues are interconnected.

On involvement:

- Karen Pio later said that if absentee landlords are invited and are expected to attend future meetings, they should not be “ganged up on” by other stakeholders.
- Another participant noted that historically, much of the neighborhood’s identity had to do with its ethnic parishes and it will be important to have the faith-based communities and different ethnicities involved in the study.
- Mike Audette, principal of O’Connell School, said that it is important to reach out to Hispanic residents and noted that many in the neighborhood may not be comfortable with coming to big meetings. He suggested that the consultants go to them, and offered to help get a group together to meet within the school, where they may feel more comfortable.
- Mr. Audette also suggested that providing babysitting or childcare services may be important at some of these meetings where widespread public participation is sought.
- Ms. Pio noted that her son is interested in becoming involved and may be available to help reach other residents, particularly those who are younger and minorities.

On implementation:

- Steve Deveau wanted to know what possible funding sources exist for the recommendations that would emerge at the end of the study. Mr. Weiner said implementation would require an investment on the City’s part, as well as private investment. Ms. Grossman added that requesting funding for specific improvements tends to be more successful than requesting general funding. Mr. Deveau pointed out that some improvements would not cost money, such as cleaning up the public spaces.



- Ms. Pio asked if there were any additional options in implementation that could arise from Enterprise Zone status. Mr. Weiner reflected that the City's housing rehabilitation program may be an option in the neighborhood – particularly if the study caused the City to focus its investments in this neighborhood. Karen Pio noted that it was her understanding that the program only funded single-family homes.
- Council Member Ken Cockayne responded that, as one of the District 2 representatives on the City Council, he is committed to ensuring that the West End neighborhood and the implementation of this study gets the attention that is warranted.
- Others recommended that future meetings include: ethnic groups, particularly the West End's Hispanic population, school board members, renters of West End homes, and the Bristol Housing Authority. The study team agreed to reach out to those groups going forward.

Conclusion and Next Steps

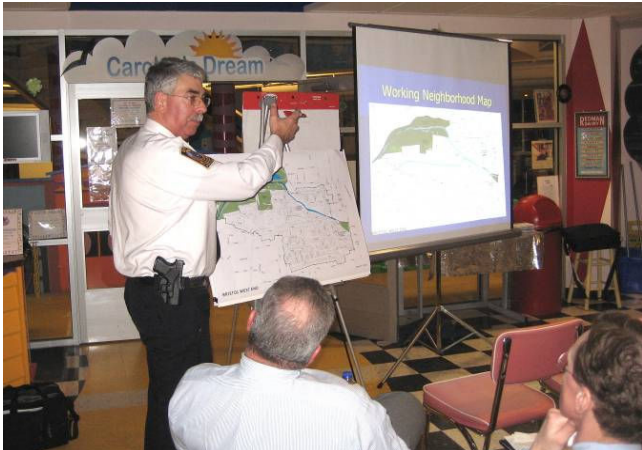
In concluding the meeting, Ms. Grossman heartily thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the meeting, learn about the study, and become engaged in the process. She asked community members to seriously consider joining the Neighborhood Advisory Committee and explained the following next steps:

- Updates about the study, including a summary of this meeting, will be distributed via email and available on the study website
- A date for the first community-wide workshop will be set and announced
- Stakeholders who are interested in serving on the Neighborhood Advisory Committee will sign up
- Stakeholders will help consultants gain access to relevant data in any way they are able
- Stakeholders who can help involve others should inform others about the study and encourage their participation
- Consultants will keep everyone in the loop as far as communication and next steps

If you have any comments, questions, or corrections to this meeting summary, please let us know.
We can be reached at (203) 785-0130 or westend@cpstn.com. Thank you again!



Photos from the Discussion



List of Attendees

Community Members

Roger Albert – Saint Ann Church
Mike Audette – O’Connell School
Jerry Chamberland – Neighborhood Resident
Ken Cockayne – Bristol City Council
Leslie Czerwinski – Neighborhood Resident
Steve Deveau – Neighborhood Property Owner
John DiVenere – Bristol Police Chief
Andre Dorval – Neighborhood Stakeholder
Brian Ewings – Bristol Planning Commission
Dave Hamelin – Hamelin & Sons
David & Robin Ferraro – Neighborhood Residents
Kara Jones – Neighborhood Resident
Mark Jones – Neighborhood Resident
Joe Kelaita – Bristol Planning Commission
Lenny Lamothe – Neighborhood Resident
Phil Lysiak – St. Vincent de Paul
Jack Michaud – Bristol Police Department
Sandra Migliarese – Bristol Community Organization
Tom Morrow – Bristol Community Organization
Mary Moulton – Pequabuck River Watershed Association
Pat Napolitano – Patrick Napolitano Welding
Jim Nocera – Neighborhood Resident
Karen Pio – Greater Bristol Property Owners Association
Jerry Rafaniello – Bristol Board of Zoning Appeals
Chet Reed – Pequabuck River Watershed Association
Diana Silvestri – Greater Bristol Property Owners Association
William “Scotty” Smyth – Bristol Board of Education
Michael Suchopar – The Family Center / Boys & Girls Club
Sammy Vasile – South Side Meat Market
Sal Vitrano – Vitrano Preleski & Wynne
Bob Wollenberg – Beacon Pharmacy
Youla Ziotas – West End Pizza

City Planning Staff and Consultants

Alan Weiner – City Planner
Kacie Costello – Assistant City Planner
Lisa Grossman – The Capstan Group
Gloria Wang – The Capstan Group
Amber Walsh – The Capstan Group
Alan Plattus – Yale Urban Design Workshop
Vanessa Mendoza – Yale Urban Design Workshop

