



West End Neighborhood Study, Bristol CT

Neighborhood Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 27, 2008
Imagine Nation Children's Museum, 1 Pleasant Street, Bristol

Meeting Summary

On Thursday, March 27, 2008, the Neighborhood Advisory Committee for the West End Neighborhood Study met for the first time. The purpose of this meeting was to formally convene this group of neighborhood advisors and to have them review and provide feedback about the data that have been collected to date in connection with the study. The following is a summary of this meeting. While not a verbatim report, it is intended to provide a record of what transpired and to provide a general sense of the discussion that took place.

List of Attendees

Neighborhood Advisory Committee Members

Roger Albert – Saint Ann Church
Jan Bevivino – Neighborhood resident
Nancy Bonin – Neighborhood resident and property owner
Andy Cannici – Bristol Planning Commission
Ken Cockayne – Bristol City Council
John DiVenere – Bristol Police Chief
Brian Ewings – Bristol Planning Commission
Dave Hamelin – Hamelin & Sons
Joe Kelaita – Bristol Planning Commission
Lenny Lamothe – Neighborhood resident
Kevin McCauley – Bristol City Council
Mary Moulton – Pequabuck River Watershed Association
Karen Pio – Greater Bristol Property Owners Association
John, Nick, Karen (Paparello) Piotrowski - Residents
Thomas Ragaini – Neighborhood resident
Diana Silvestri – Greater Bristol Property Owners Association
Michael Suchopar – The Family Center/Boys & Girls Club

Other Attendees

Clifford Block – Bristol City Council
Jonna Chokas – Neighborhood stakeholder
Gerard Couture – Neighborhood resident
Jesse Jablon – Neighborhood stakeholder
Craig Minor – Bristol City Council

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

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began shortly after 7:00 p.m. Mr. Weiner welcomed the attendees, noting that this was the first meeting of the Neighborhood Advisory Committee and the second meeting during which public input has been sought from the neighborhood's stakeholders. Mr. Weiner introduced Ms. Grossman and the other members of the consulting team. Ms. Grossman invited everyone at the meeting to introduce themselves and to explain the capacity in which they are participating (e.g., as a business owner, as a neighborhood resident, as a representative of a community organization, as a property owner).

Role of the Neighborhood Advisory Committee

Ms. Grossman expressed that she was pleased at the turnout of Committee members, noting that the Committee's primary role will be to serve as an advisory group to the consultants and city staff throughout the West End Neighborhood Study. Ms. Grossman noted that the Committee's immediate task is to help review the information that is being collected for this study and to provide feedback as to whether the data accurately represent people's perceptions of and experiences within the neighborhood.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Ms. Grossman emphasized that this first meeting of the Committee would primarily focus on data in order to ensure that everyone understands the neighborhood's current demographics, as these data create a baseline for the study.

Data Source

Ms. Grossman explained that, during the February 28 meeting, several participants asked for a more in-depth explanation about the source and accuracy of the DemographicsNow data that are being used in portions of this study. In response, the consultants described the data source in more detail, explaining that the neighborhood data are the result of detailed

algorithms which utilize information from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, Medicare, credit reporting information, commercial shipping data, social security information, IRS information, and the U.S. Postal Service.

Race and Ethnicity Trends

Ms. Grossman presented three charts showing the composition of and changes to the neighborhood's population in terms of race, ethnicity, and ancestry since 1990. The data indicate that in recent years the cultural make-up of the neighborhood has remained generally stable, although the Hispanic population in the neighborhood has grown, increasing significantly between 1990 and 2000 and slightly between 2000 and 2007. In response to questions raised at the last meeting, The Capstan Group also examined ancestry data to see if significant changes had occurred in the population that might not be evident in comparisons of race but rather in comparisons of ancestry (e.g., influx of certain cultural groups, exodus of others). Analysis of this data seemed to indicate that, except for the increase in the Hispanic population, changes in the race and ethnic composition of the West End neighborhood between 1990 and 2007 have not been significant.

The following were among the comments, observations, and suggestions made during the discussion of these data:

- The data do not appear to include people who reside in the neighborhood but who are not otherwise readily accounted for (e.g., no known mailing address). Inclusion of those residents might alter some of the data. Chief Divenere offered to provide the information the Police Department has regarding the homeless population living within the West End neighborhood.
- Some of the cultural institutions that were once associated with the West End (e.g., schools affiliated with different ethnic groups) either do not exist anymore or no longer have deep ties to the neighborhood.
- The school district may be a good resource for historical population data.
- If possible, the data for the neighborhood's Hispanic population should be disaggregated further by country of ancestry.
- Race and ethnicity data for the neighborhood should be examined back to 1970, as doing so would provide a more accurate picture of demographic changes that have occurred in the West End than data dating back only to 1990. Others commented that, because the study is intended to focus on the neighborhood's future, examining older data might be interesting but not especially relevant to the study, as the purpose of the data is to provide a better understanding of the neighborhood's current conditions as an initial step in planning for its future.

Ms. Grossman agreed that population data from before 1990 would be obtained and analyzed if it provides additional insight into the West End neighborhood as it exists today. She thought it might also be useful to compare and contrast present-day neighborhood institutions (e.g., churches and schools) and activities with those of earlier eras.

Income Trends

Ms. Grossman displayed several charts illustrating household income trends in the neighborhood. The following were among the comments, observations, and suggestions made during the discussion of these data:

- The information regarding the distribution of different income groups within the neighborhood appears to be generally accurate.
- The assessment of income trends should perhaps include the number of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in neighborhood schools. It was acknowledged that this is important information which has been requested from the school district.
- The income information for the Gridley Street area should be double-checked.
- The income trends should be compared with the rate of inflation in order for the data to provide a more complete picture of the economic status of neighborhood residents.

Home Ownership Trends

Ms. Grossman next presented a variety of data regarding the number and distribution of homeowners, renters, and residential vacancies in the neighborhood. Mr. Plattus pointed out that one shortcoming of the data is that they don't account for the qualitative impact of specific housing types on a neighborhood; he noted, for example, that while units in an elderly housing project might inflate the number of renters in the neighborhood, senior housing might have a positive impact on the quality of life in that neighborhood. The following were among the comments, observations, and suggestions made during the discussion of these data:

- The residents of Gaylord Towers and Kennedy Apartments include not only senior citizens but also a significant number of disabled persons.
- Divinity Street seems to contain more renter-occupied dwelling units than the data suggest.
- The high percentage of renters in the West End neighborhood is largely the result of the significant amount of multi-family housing located there.



- An unusually high vacancy rate on just one or two blocks within a larger block group might skew the vacancy rate for the entire block group.
- Factors that may have contributed to an increasing residential vacancy rate within the West End include uncertainty about the location of a proposed new school for the area, the perception of the neighborhood as an unsafe place, the loss of manufacturing jobs within the city, the condition of older residential buildings in the neighborhood, and general economic conditions.

Educational Attainment Trends

Ms. Grossman next presented data regarding the levels of educational attainment of residents in the neighborhood from 1990 to 2012 (projected). The following were among the comments, observations, and suggestions made during the discussion of these data:

- The data should be compared with those of peer schools and school districts.
- In addition to the educational attainment data, it might be useful to examine standardized test scores and similar measures to provide a more complete picture of neighborhood residents' skills and abilities.

Crime Trends

Ms. Grossman presented information provided by the Bristol Police Department showing the level of police activity in the West End neighborhood between 2003 through 2007 by type of incident. Chief DiVenere discussed the data in some detail, noting that the Department's proactive community policing efforts—in the form of new foot and bicycle patrols—have led to an increase in the number of crimes being reported and, at the same time, a decrease in some forms of criminal activity. He also pointed out that the increase in motor vehicle arrests is a result of more officers working in the neighborhood and that those arrested are not necessarily neighborhood residents. Chief DiVenere also noted that the Department is stepping up police activity in both Brackett Park and Rockwell Park.

The following were among the comments, observations, and suggestions made during the discussion of these data:

- There was general agreement that people perceive the West End to be a less safe place than the data seem to indicate. It was also generally agreed that this perception is an important consideration for the revitalization of the neighborhood.
- Some low-level or potential criminal activity in the neighborhood (e.g., people loitering on the sidewalk or at Rockwell Park) often goes unreported to the police.
- The renovation work at Rockwell Park includes increased security measures such as the installation of better lighting and security cameras.
- The study presents an opportunity to improve the public's perception of safety in the West End: educating people about the need to report suspicious activities to the police; working with the Police to help prioritize the calls that officers respond to; creating an anonymous "tip line" or hotline; and forming a neighborhood block watch-type organization.

Preparation for the May 3 workshop

Ms. Grossman announced that the first community-wide workshop—a "hands-on" work session where participants will get together and start to talk about their vision for the West End neighborhood—will be held on Saturday, May 3, from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, at a location to be announced. She emphasized the importance of having a large, diverse group of neighborhood stakeholders present in order to bring a variety of perspectives to the table. Mr. Plattus explained that this workshop will focus on land use, zoning, and neighborhood boundaries and will utilize visual tools such as maps and graphics to help people define their perceptions of the neighborhood.

It was suggested that, in order to generate neighborhood interest in the workshop, an informational flyer be developed for distribution throughout the West End. It was further suggested that the flyer include some of the questions about the neighborhood that people will be asked during the workshop, so that people can think about them ahead of time. Ms. Grossman indicated that The Capstan Group would prepare such a flyer and then distribute it to all committee members for their help with broader distribution. Finally, the suggestion was made that the O'Connell School PTO be contacted for assistance with distributing the workshop flyer in the neighborhood.

Mr. Plattus encouraged people to take photographs of the things in the neighborhood that they do and/or do not like and then either bring those photographs to the workshop or email them ahead of time to Gloria Wang at wang@cpstn.com.

Ms. Grossman noted that a summary of tonight's meeting and a copy of the workshop flyer would be posted to the study website at www.cpstn.com/westend. She thanked those in attendance for their participation, insights, comments, and commitment to the West End neighborhood. The meeting ended at approximately 8:45 p.m.

