



West End Neighborhood Study, Bristol CT
Neighborhood Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, June 12, 2008
Imagine Nation Children's Museum, 1 Pleasant Street, Bristol

Meeting Summary

On Thursday, June 12, 2008, the Neighborhood Advisory Committee for the West End Neighborhood Study met for the second time. The purpose of this meeting was to provide feedback about the May 3rd community visioning workshop, provide input on the draft Vision Statement for the neighborhood, and prioritize those issues on which the Committee will work with the consultants most closely during the next phase of 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.

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Weiner welcomed the attendees and introduced Ms. Grossman and the other members of the consulting team. Ms. Grossman welcomed the members of the Committee and other attendees.

Review of the Neighborhood Visioning Workshop

Ms. Grossman summarized the May 3rd community visioning workshop and commented that it had generated a lot of good ideas and had allowed a lot of new people to become involved with the study. She noted that much of the post-meeting feedback was quite positive; several people commented that the workshop was terrific, that it was fun, and that they were excited about the project and appreciative of having had an opportunity to participate in the planning process and share their ideas. However, a few individuals had expressed their disappointment and frustration about the meeting; they felt that the consultants and city staff had pandered to absentee landlords, that the workshop was a waste of time, that the plan was going nowhere, and that an increasing number of people were thinking about selling their house and moving out of the neighborhood. Ms. Grossman sought the Committee's advice as to whether this negative feedback was representative of a more widespread neighborhood dissatisfaction with the tone and direction of the study or if it was merely the sentiment of a small number of people.

Diana Silvestri commented that there are residents who are thinking about leaving the neighborhood, but she felt that this was not prompted by the study. Noting that a lot of people have opinions about the study, Nicholas Piotrowski expressed disappointment that more of them did not participate in the workshop. David Hamelin stated that he felt that the negative comments were from a small number of individuals with a personal and specific interest and that there will continue to be some level of skepticism about the study until a formal vision and plan is developed. It was agreed that making visible and tangible progress on the plan will be important to getting and maintaining "buy-in" from the community.

Drafting of a Neighborhood Vision Statement

Ms. Grossman explained the concept and importance of a neighborhood vision statement and shared some examples from other communities around the country. She summarized the main themes that emerged from the May 3rd workshop and indicated that they would be used to help define the vision for the West End. She then presented to the Committee for its consideration a preliminary draft of a possible vision statement for the West End neighborhood. Mr. Weiner noted that, although the West End's vision statement would contain many of the same themes as those of neighborhoods elsewhere, the challenge would be to identify and incorporate into the vision statement those characteristics that make the West End a unique place.

The Committee next discussed in detail the draft statement presented by Ms. Grossman; a number of suggestions to clarify and improve it were offered and agreed upon by the Committee. These included: emphasizing and encouraging civic responsibility (i.e., people not only having pride in their neighborhood, but being actively involved in helping to improve it); recognizing the West End as an important part of and contributor to a larger, growing city; and identifying the City as an important partner in the neighborhood's revitalization efforts, whose interest and involvement will be critical to the success of those efforts.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding the relationship between the West End Neighborhood and downtown Bristol. Some people saw the West End as largely an extension of – and thus part of – the downtown, while others felt that the

neighborhood, although adjacent to the downtown, has its own distinctive identity and center. Ultimately, there was general agreement that the West End Neighborhood has its own identity but also has a fundamental and intrinsic relationship with downtown Bristol and that the vision statement should highlight their connectivity and cohesiveness.

A lengthy discussion also took place regarding the West End Neighborhood's role as a "gateway" into Bristol. Some people felt that the neighborhood's identity as a gateway to the downtown should be emphasized; others were concerned that the word "gateway" might imply that the West End is viewed as a place to pass through on the way to someplace else rather than a destination. There was general agreement that one of the unique aspects of the neighborhood is its status as both a gateway to downtown Bristol and a distinctive destination.

Ms. Grossman thanked the group for its suggestions and indicated that the draft statement would be revised to incorporate the agreed-upon revisions and then distributed to the Committee prior to its next meeting; she encouraged Committee members to suggest additional changes to the next draft as well. At the request of the Committee, Ms. Grossman agreed to make the next draft of the vision statement available to Committee members electronically in Word format to facilitate additional editing and suggested revisions.

Priority Areas for Neighborhood Advisory Committee Involvement

Ms. Grossman summarized the study's progress thus far and its overall timeline; she indicated that the next step following the development of a neighborhood vision statement will be the development of specific strategies to implement the vision. To initiate this process, the consultants and the city's planning staff have developed an extensive list of suggested strategies, all of which will be considered further and many of which will likely be incorporated into the final plan.

However, to make the most productive use of the Committee's time and input, Ms. Grossman asked the group to select those strategies which the Committee wishes to be most directly involved in developing with the consultants. For example, the Committee may prefer to spend its time assisting the consultants in developing ideas for the reuse of prime re-development sites in the neighborhood rather than helping to develop a bike path plan. She also pointed out that those strategies not selected by the Committee will be initially developed by the consultants independently of the Committee but brought back to the Committee for its input.

The three strategies identified by those present as having the highest priority for the Committee's in-depth involvement were: (1) streetscape improvements; (2) the possible re-use of the former Chic Miller auto dealership property; and (2) new locations for business-related parking.

Conclusion and Announcements

Mayor Ward expressed his appreciation to the Committee for their work to date and for the interest it has generated throughout the community. Noting his roots in the West End, he indicated that he is encouraged by the community activism evident at these meetings and the hands-on involvement of all the participants.

City Council member Ken Cockayne announced that he is organizing a West End Clean-Up Day, which will be held on Sunday, June 29th from 9:00 AM to 12 noon. People interested in participating should meet in front of the South Side Meat Market on West Street. He noted that this activity has received significant support from local businesses and the city's Public Works Department.

Officer Kevin Ward of the Bristol Police Department addressed the meeting regarding the process for organizing neighborhood block watch groups in the West End. He encouraged people to establish them, noting that most crimes are stopped through community involvement. He pointed out that, given the size of the West End, it would be difficult for just one group to cover the entire neighborhood and suggested instead that people organize with their closest neighbors on their block. Officer Ward asked anyone interested in forming a block watch group to contact him for further information.

Finally, Ms. Grossman announced that, as part of the economic development component of the study, The Capstan Group would be conducting two focus groups aimed specifically at West End business owners to develop strategies to improve the business environment in the neighborhood. These focus groups will be held at the Imagine Nation Museum on June 23rd from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM and on June 25th from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM., The businesses owners in attendance were encouraged to attend one of these two sessions and to invite other neighborhood business owners as well.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.



List of Attendees

Neighborhood Advisory Committee Members

Ken Cockayne – Bristol City Council
Brian Ewings – Bristol Planning Commission
Dave Hamelin – Resident and business owner
Lenny Lamothe – Neighborhood resident
Mary Moulton – Pequabuck River Watershed Association
Andy Nigro – Resident and business owner
John, Nick, Karen (Paparello) Piotrowski - Residents
Thomas Ragaini – Neighborhood resident (and former City Council member)
Diana Silvestri – Greater Bristol Property Owners Association

Other Attendees

Art Ward – Mayor
Clifford Block – Bristol City Council
Hector, Fortunata, Kathy and Jackie Castaneda – Residents and business owners
Jesse Jablon – Neighborhood stakeholder
Marie Keeton – Bristol Planning Commission
Janet and Valerie Nigro - Residents
William Veits – Bristol Planning Commission
Kevin Ward – Detective, Bristol Police Department

City Planning Staff and Consultants

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

