



## West End Neighborhood Study, Bristol CT

### Community Visioning Workshop

Saturday, May 3, 2008 9 a.m. to 12 noon  
Bristol Boys & Girls Club, 105 Laurel Street

### Workshop Summary

On Saturday, May 3, 2008, 65 individuals gathered to participate in a “Community Visioning Workshop,” the first of several public meetings associated with the city’s year-long West End Neighborhood Planning Study. During the three-hour session, a cross-section of neighborhood residents, business owners, and other stakeholders worked collaboratively to provide input into a collective vision for the neighborhood and to begin to identify specific neighborhood issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve that vision. While this summary is not a verbatim report, it is intended to provide a record of what happened and to provide a general sense of the discussion that took place.



### Welcome and Introductions

Bristol City Planner Alan Weiner welcomed the workshop’s attendees to the session and gave a brief history of the study to provide some background about the study and its status. In addition, Mr. Weiner read a letter from Mayor Art Ward, who could not attend the meeting, expressing his support and appreciation for the study and this workshop. Mr. Weiner next introduced Lisa Grossman of The Capstan Group, who in turn welcomed everyone and introduced the other members of the planning team. Ms. Grossman then provided an overview of the work completed since the study began in January, including collection of significant amounts of data about the West End. She explained that the purpose of today’s workshop is to work together to: (1) develop a sense of the vision for the neighborhood; and (2) identify some specific activities that will need to occur in order for the vision to take shape.

### Visioning Exercise

To begin to define a collective vision, Ms. Grossman asked everyone to personally envision their ideal West End neighborhood; to think about what it would be like to live, work, walk, and recreate there; and then to write down a short statement about their ideal neighborhood, in present tense, on colored Post-Its. Participants were then invited to share their vision statements with the entire group. The themes that emerged included:

- The area is family oriented, and neighbors know and help one another
- Houses are well maintained, and owners and renters have pride in their property
- Sidewalks and roads are kept in excellent condition
- Significant once-vacant properties such as the former Chic Miller auto dealership (on West Street) and the former IGA Supermarket (on Divinity Street) are redeveloped
- The neighborhood contains businesses such as a coffeehouse, tailor, grocery store and bookstore within walking distance of homes; ethnic businesses and restaurants attract both locals and out-of-towners; there are outdoor sitting areas
- There are community gathering places (e.g., churches) within walking distance
- Rockwell Park, the Pequabuck River, and Muzzy Field are safely accessible places of pride for the neighborhood;
- The neighborhood is safe for everyone at all times of the day and night



### Workgroups

Following the visioning exercise, workshop participants assembled into five smaller groups to start to identify opportunities to change the neighborhood and move it toward this collective vision. The five groups were: (1) *The Green Scene*: Recreation, Open Space, and the River; (2) *Dress for Success*: Blight & Abandonment; (3) *Be My Neighbor*: Public Safety & Quality of Life; (4) *Oh the Places You’ll Go (And How You’ll Get There)*: Traffic, Transportation, Parking & Pedestrians; and (5) *Our Ugly Ducklings*: Prime Development Opportunities. Each group had a facilitator, a recorder, a reporter, and a referee to make sure everyone had a chance to speak and the group stayed on topic. The groups met for one hour and then came together to report on their discussions.

### **GROUP – *Be My Neighbor: Public Safety & Quality of Life***

The group discussed what creates a high quality of life in the West End and how the quality of life can be improved. The group identified that open space and the community and religious institutions strongly improve the quality of life. The open spaces include Rockwell Park, Muzzy Field, and the Pequabuck River. The community and faith-based institutions include the Boys & Girls Club, Family Center, O’Connell School, St. Ann Church, and Saint Anthony Church.

*Priority Issues.* The group identified major areas for improvement including:

- Public perception of criminal activity in the neighborhood
- Sense that neighborhood is unsafe after dark
- Properties that are not well maintained
- Commercial corridors
- The area between Park and Divinity streets (needs improvement)



*Suggestions and Ideas.* The group identified several ideas for improving the quality of life and safety of the neighborhood including:

- Establish neighborhood block watch groups
- Increase police presence; assign police officer(s) to a West End “beat”
- Hold regular neighborhood social gatherings (e.g., block parties) that include food and getting to know each other
- Engage community youth (e.g., via local mentoring programs with local businesses and/or police ride-alongs)
- Provide grants and information on funding sources for residents, property owners, and business owners interested in repairing/renovating/improving their property
- Creating trust between different groups of people (tenants, landlords, City officials, police, etc.)
- Enforcing applicable laws

### **GROUP – *The Green Scene: Recreation, Open Space & The River***

The group tackled the question of how the parks, the Pequabuck River, and other open spaces in the West End work in the neighborhood and could be improved.

*Priority Issues.* The group saw the major issues associated with green spaces as:

- Lack of public safety
- Imbalance of resident vs. non-resident use
- Distressed condition of some recreational areas (paths, river, pond, parking)
- Lack of access to the Pequabuck River, other than in Rockwell Park



*Suggestions and Ideas.* Ideas for improving the park included:

- Restore the river & ponds
- Create access to the river, especially between Jacobs and West streets
- Include benches, gardens, trails, fishing, and fitness trails
- Improve the condition of the paths
- Improve the balance of resident versus non-resident use
- Improve the safety of the park by increasing police patrols and consider bringing a police substation to the area
- Provide better (and more) connections between walking/biking paths in park and nearby sidewalks/bikeways in town
- Create sufficient parking for the park in appropriate locations.

### **GROUP – *Oh the Places You’ll Go (and How You’ll Get There): Traffic, Transportation, Pedestrians, and Parking***

The group discussed the issues associated with getting around the neighborhood—by car, bus, bike, and foot—and how vehicular and pedestrian pathways could be improved to make the neighborhood function better. The group recognized that neighborhood gateways at both the eastern and western intersections of Park and Divinity streets are an asset.

*Priority Issues.* The group saw the major issues as:

- Lack of clearly defined & attractive gateways to the neighborhood
- Heavy traffic along Route 72
- Lack of public transportation and bike / pedestrian paths in neighborhood
- Limited connectivity between the Muzzy Field/Rockwell Park/Park Street area and the West End’s southernmost and northernmost residential streets



*Suggestions and Ideas.* Ideas for improving the neighborhood were:

- Create well-signed and attractive gateways to the neighborhood, particularly at the intersection of Park and Divinity
- Consider providing traffic lights along Route 72 to slow and control the heavy traffic driving through the neighborhood
- Create an additional street connection between Park and Divinity streets in the vicinity of Muzzy Field
- Enhance Tulip Street as a more pedestrian-friendly walkway
- Provide a footbridge over the Pequabuck River in the vicinity of Gaylord / Wave streets
- Realign the intersection of Park and Divinity streets (just west of West Street) and consider widening Route 72 at/near that intersection to mediate heavy truck traffic and improve traffic flow
- Create a walking / bicycle path along the Pequabuck River between Rockwell Park and Brackett Park / West Street
- Provide public transportation that serves the West End
- Place overhead utilities underground to improve the visual quality of the neighborhood
- Use future development sites (e.g., IGA site) in solutions to create pathways and routes in the neighborhood

### **GROUP – Our Ugly Ducklings: Prime Development Opportunities**

The group discussed the major development sites that exist in the neighborhood and identified potential uses for these sites, paying particular attention to their nearby assets to strategically connect the neighborhood's best features.

*Suggestions and Ideas.* Ideas for these development sites included:

- *Former Chic Miller auto dealership site:* Potential re-uses include relocated Boys & Girls Club, new police/fire complex, or residential use to complement surrounding uses.
- *O'Connell School:* Location is well-suited for a relocated Boys & Girls Club, given the school's new gym, or to residential uses. Reuse should take advantage of the River.
- *Former IGA Supermarket Site.* Potential re-uses include a reception hall, arts/cultural uses (e.g., theatre, performing arts center, comedy club, or cabaret use), and residential uses, allowing commercial uses to be focused in commercial areas
- *Former UAW Union Hall:* Location is well-suited for a Sports Hall of Fame associated with Muzzy Field or a restaurant with outdoor dining.
- *Intersection of Routes 72 and 69:* Potential exists to improve / revitalize commercial area to reinforce the gateway entrance (e.g., with façade improvements), with particular attention to reuses that include nice shopping, restaurants, coffee shop, and outdoor seating to create a neighborhood atmosphere.
- *Rockwell Park.* Potential to attract visitors to the neighborhood (e.g., concerts in the park, street vendors along Muzzy Street during park / Muzzy Field events, creating a family-friendly atmosphere on game days, creating nearby sports-oriented restaurants and stores that sell souvenirs for people to go after the game).



### **GROUP – Dress for Success: Blight and Abandonment**

This group focused on defining blight, identifying why and where blight occurs, identifying the first impressions that the neighborhood could be making, and suggesting ideas to improving the neighborhood's perception. The group said that, ultimately, they would like the neighborhood to be seen as clean, safe place with thriving businesses, people who seem happy as they walk the streets, good landscaping and care for properties, and adequate parking and amenities.

*Priority Issues.* The group saw the major issues today as including:

- Blight (litter, abandoned/unkempt properties, streets not well-maintained, sidewalks in poor condition, graffiti, dog droppings)
- Private properties and public places that are poorly maintained
- Lack of pride and accountability by some neighborhood property owners / residents
- Outsiders who disrespect the neighborhood (i.e. absentee landlords that do not take care of their properties, people who drive through and dump garbage in the street)

*Suggestions and Ideas.* Ideas for these development sites included:

- Provide adequate parking for residents and businesses
- Provide streetscape amenities to help beautify the neighborhood
- Strengthen the city's code enforcement efforts in the neighborhood
- Improve city maintenance of the neighborhood's streets, sidewalks, and public spaces
- Organize neighborhood support for pride and accountability in the neighborhood
- Educate neighborhood stakeholders about the importance and benefits of ongoing property maintenance
- Provide financial assistance for property owners to upgrade/improve their property



### **Wrap-Up**

A representative of each group reported on his / her group's discussion and suggestions to the entire gathering. It was noted that many of the issues raised are inter-related and that many of the suggestions and ideas offered are similar or complementary to one another. In closing, Mr. Weiner thanked everyone for attending the workshop, noting the excellent level of participation. Ms. Grossman added her appreciation for all of the ideas developed during this workshop and thanked the participants for their involvement in this planning exercise. She explained that a summary of the workshop will be posted on the study website, [www.cpstn.com/westend](http://www.cpstn.com/westend), and information about future public sessions will be widely publicized.

*Please note:* This summary is intended to be a general representation of the event, but is not intended to be a verbatim report of the proceedings. Please be assured that all ideas (whether contained in the summary or not) will be given further consideration as the study proceeds. 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](mailto:westend@cpstn.com). Thank you again!



## List of Attendees

### Community Members

Melanie Adamski – Neighborhood Resident  
Roger Albert – St. Ann Church  
Michael Audette – O’Connell School  
Ryan Bessette – Homeowner  
Jan Bevivino – Neighborhood Resident  
Nancy Bonin – Property Owner  
Audra Camben – Neighborhood Stakeholder  
Andy Cannici – Bristol Planning Commission  
Fortunata Castaneda – Neighborhood Stakeholder  
Hector Castaneda – Neighborhood Stakeholder  
Kathy Castaneda – Property Owner  
Daria Cesario – Neighborhood Resident  
Gerald Chamberland – Neighborhood Resident  
Alfred Cianchetti – Neighborhood Resident  
Ron Ciarcia – Neighborhood Stakeholder  
Ken Cockayne – Bristol City Council member  
John Cswercko – Homeowner  
Leslie Czerwinski – Neighborhood Resident  
Jan Deveau – Property Owner  
Steve Deveau – Property Owner  
Brian Ewings – Bristol Planning Commission  
David Ferraro – Neighborhood Resident  
Robin Ferraro – Neighborhood Resident  
Rev. Alphonso Fontana – Saint Anthony Church  
Lt. Thomas Grimaldi – Bristol Police Department  
David Hamelin – Hamelin & Sons  
Jesse Jablon – Property Owner  
Joe Kelaita – Bristol Planning Commission  
Robert Kelly – Neighborhood Resident  
Tammy Kelly – Neighborhood Resident  
Leonard Lamothe – Neighborhood Resident  
John Leone – Greater Bristol Chamber of Commerce  
Phil Lysiak – St. Vincent DePaul Mission of Bristol  
Jackie Majerus – *Bristol Press*  
Kevin McCauley – Bristol City Council member  
Clark Michaud – Neighborhood Stakeholder  
Craig Minor – Bristol City Councilman  
Mary Moulton – Pequabuck River Watershed Association  
Elliot Nelson – Homeowner  
Andrew Nigro – Neighborhood Youth  
Janet Nigro – Neighborhood Resident  
James Orr – Property Owner  
Ruth Orr – Property Owner  
Jay Pax – Neighborhood Stakeholder  
Sandie Pelletier – Homeowner  
Karen Pio – Greater Bristol Property Owners Association  
John Piotrowski – Property Owner  
Nick Piotrowski – Neighborhood Resident  
Chet Reed – Pequabuck River Watershed Association  
Sylvia Roy – Property Owner  
Diana Silvestri – Property Owner  
Donald Stacom – *Hartford Courant*  
Michael Suchopar – The Family Center, Bristol Boys & Girls Club

Joan Vallee – Neighborhood Resident  
William Veits – Bristol Planning Commission  
Sal Vitrano – Vitrano Preleski & Wynne  
Lawrence Zahnke – Neighborhood Stakeholder

### 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  
Andrei Harwell – Yale Urban Design Workshop  
Vanessa Mendoza – Yale Urban Design Workshop



**Additional Photos from the Workshop**  
Photographs by Amber Walsh and Andrew Nigro



**Additional Photos from the Workshop**  
Photographs by Amber Walsh and Andrew Nigro

