



# CITY PLAN DEPARTMENT MEMO

**To:** Route 34 West MDP Stakeholder Committee (members list attached)  
**From:** Susmitha Attota, Justin Elicker  
**Date:** July 30, 2008  
**Subject:** Route 34 West MDP Stakeholder Meeting I-Conducted on July 29, 2008- Meeting Summary

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List of Attendees:

Approximately 25-30 people attended the meeting. Please see attached sign-in sheet.

## **I. Introductions, Overview of Agenda, Plan Goals and Outline, and Discussion of Project Work Plan**

Following introductions by all of the advisory committee members (stakeholders) and the City Staff, Karyn Gilvarg opened the meeting and explained the goals of the meeting as follows:

- To encourage maximum public input for the preparation of Route 34 West Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and
- To prepare the local community based organizations and educational institutions to participate in the new development

Karyn gave an overview of the overall MDP process and the amount of involvement needed by the community stakeholders in the preparation of this MDP, as outlined in the project work plan. Based on the work plan, she said that the City will seek board and commission approvals on the final plan document in Spring 2009.

## **II. Existing Conditions and Plan Content Presentation**

### *a. Introduction, Project History, and Background*

Karyn spoke on the project goals and background information. The project purpose(s) were stated as (including, but not limited to):

- Creation of additional jobs for residents and additional tax revenues for City/State
- Creation of work force housing and
- Re-connection of West River, Dwight, and Hill neighborhoods across the corridor; to central employment places; and to various transportation nodes in the City.

Karyn explained that issues relating to public safety and education are not included in the project scope and are therefore only partially dealt with this MDP. She also elaborated on the ten core initiatives proposed to be achieved with the help of this MDP, as outlined in the handout provided (see attached).

Karyn then indicated to the group that Route 34 West is also one of the infill areas included in the Mayor's Future Framework for the City. She said that the City's population is growing and the core industries, educational/medical sectors, regional art centers, and design sectors are also growing in the City. However, the City has only 18 square miles of area and has no new land to accommodate this growth. Therefore, the City has to use its existing parking lots, vacant parcels, and excess transportation rights of way for infill development as shown in the Mayor's Future Framework for the City. She then briefly went through the 'Introduction' slides on the 'Existing Conditions and Plan Content' PowerPoint presentation.

*b. Discussion of Socio-Economic and Housing Trends*

Justin Elicker presented the findings from census data analysis of the three adjacent neighborhoods— Hill, Dwight and West River, which abut the Route 34 West corridor. The key planning opportunities with respect to census trends are:

- New Haven’s population is on the rise and there exists a need for new housing units to accommodate this population growth
- Strong working age population in the three neighborhoods
- High employment potential within the three neighborhoods

The planning issues with respect to census trends were summarized as:

- High levels of poverty and unemployment—indicating need for additional jobs and wage growth
- High housing cost burden—indicating need for work force housing and better wage jobs
- Low owner occupancy rates—indicating need for home-ownership programs and opportunities
- High vacancy rates in West River and Hill neighborhoods—indicating presence of absentee landlords and/or derelict building stock
- High percentage of “commuters to work” along the corridor—indicating need for new jobs that employ local residents
- High percentage of residents taking motorized transportation to work—indicating need for additional research on existing public transit opportunities and biking/walking routes (City’s research indicates that the public transit facilities along Route 34 West corridor are fairly adequate but more research is needed in terms of bus frequency, ridership, bus stops available, etc., as explained under Public Services presentation)

*c. Discussion of Physical Characteristics, Natural Resources, and Public Services*

Susmitha Attota gave a presentation on the existing physical characteristics, natural features, and public services (relating to transportation only) of the area. She said that land uses within a quarter-mile boundary around the vacant parcels were surveyed by the City staff to understand how the new development proposed on these vacant parcels would fit into the context of the surrounding neighborhoods. Key planning opportunities related to land use and zoning are summarized as:

- Project parcels surrounded by interesting mix of land uses
- Close proximity of Project parcels’ to downtown office and educational institutions
- Variety of transportation choices currently available for residents

Key planning issues are:

- Existence of unmaintained lots, majority of which are due to absentee landlords—indicating need for vigorous code enforcement,
- Loss of potential tax dollars from vacant parcels along Route 34 West
- Lack of pedestrian/vehicular connectivity between northern and southern sections of Route 34 West corridor
- Availability of only a few retail services (approximately 2% of total project area within a quarter-mile of project parcels) within the Project area.

Susmitha mentioned that the existing land uses are fairly consistent with the current zoning of the Project area and then continued presenting the existing conditions along the corridor by referring to each photograph on the slide. She said that although Route 34 West is a three lane road between Park and Howe Streets along North Frontage Road, from this point onward (until it terminates at Route 10) it becomes a two-lane road with speed limit of 35 m.p.h. indicating need for traffic calming options. Also there are no sidewalks along the vacant parcels’ side on North Frontage Road and Legion Avenue. Pointing to the photograph on the Greenwood Street closure, she said that residents in the abutting neighborhoods cross this corridor randomly at undesignated locations which is life threatening.

On the other hand, the Project parcels are very well-maintained and also consist of some mature trees. The Peace Garden on Parcels M & L, as shown on the existing land use map, is considered the West River neighborhood's pride and clean up/weed and seed activities are currently on-going on this site. Some of the existing trees surrounding the residential properties facing Project parcels (as seen on Photograph 6) may likely act as visual buffers for the proposed development. There are some triangular and oddly shaped parcels along the corridor that may not be suitable for housing development. In summary, the planning opportunities with respect to current conditions of Project parcels are:

- Well-maintained Project parcels
- Immediate access to West River Park
- Parcels located at the heart of the City forming a gateway to New Haven
- Actively involved neighborhood organizations who are also interested in being a part of the development along Route 34 West

Planning Issues have been summarized as follows:

- Traffic speeding along the corridor,
- Lack of adequate traffic calming options along the corridor,
- Lack of direct north-south pedestrian/vehicular connectivity and
- Lack of sidewalks along vacant parcels' side on North Frontage Road and Legion Avenue

Regarding existing property ownership information, Susmitha said that there is no acquisition of parcels needed at this time as most of the Project parcels are either City-owned or owned by private developers such as Intercontinental, Medical Center Realty, Inc., who have a good working relationship with the City.

The City staff has performed a detailed analysis on the existing slopes, soils, and topography and found out that the Project parcels are generally well-drained and suitable for development. There are very few steep slopes toward the eastern and western ends. There are some existing mature trees on-site that may have to be retained. Susmitha said that the City is coordinating with Colleen-Murphy Dunning, Director of Urban Resources Initiative with Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, regarding a tree survey on the Project parcels.

Susmitha then gave an overview of the existing infrastructure and said that further cost investment is needed to install new utilities on each individual parcel proposed for development.

Regarding the existing public transit options available along the corridor, Susmitha pointed to the slides on existing bus routes, bike paths, and rail lines and mentioned that the Route 34 corridor has adequate public transit facilities in place. However, further research is needed on bus service timings, frequency, ridership, number of bus stops located along the corridor and the like. She said that she will create a comprehensive map indicating the routes of these three modes of transportation in order to understand the existing link among these.

*d. Existing Traffic Conditions and Transportation Goals*

Mike (Michael) Piscitelli presented the traffic and transportation conditions of the Route 34 West Corridor, highlighting that most traffic was from individuals using North Frontage and Legion Avenues as transit corridors to other destinations rather than using the Route 34 West area as a destination. Mike also highlighted the possibility of restoring north-south links of roads and sidewalks as a way of traffic calming. He provided an overview of the

transportation goals of the MDP. Finally, traffic calming options such as intersecting knockdowns and mid-block chokers were presented as examples.

*e. Economic Development and Business Sustainability*

Richard Yao and Clay Williams presented the ‘Economic Development and Business Sustainability’ portion of the presentation. Richard summarized the economic opportunities in the area based on the findings of the Market Study done by RKG Associates in 2006. These are:

- Medical/bio-Medical sector is showing growth
- Apartment rentals in New Haven are profitable
- Retail sector is a strong market segment

Clay explained his role in the economic development process of Route 34 West, which included obtaining community input on potential business opportunities, survey of current and projected business needs of the area, providing technical assistance to local businesses such as: educating people about business start ups, ways to access capital, financing, etc., and engaging people in neighborhood entrepreneurship programs. Clay said he will also be working with the West Side Entrepreneurial Center of the West River Neighborhood to develop a job hosting referral system for custom tailored job training. With this, the City Staff ended their presentation; the group took a short break and resumed a general discussion with stakeholders.

### **III. General Discussion—Stakeholder Input**

Karyn opened the general discussion session by asking the advisory committee members (stakeholders) to raise their concerns regarding the development of Route 34 West. The comments received are as follows:

*Educational Institutions (Yale, Gateway):*

- More focus is needed on existing education assets such as the Gateway Community College, Yale University, Hill Career High School, etc
- Variety of job training/ educational programs needed in Radiology/Bio-Tech, Nuclear Medicine, Ultrasound, Oncology Medicine Tech, etc. Majority of these jobs may only require High School graduation as a pre-requisite
- Need for more nurses. Gateway Community College and Yale New Haven Hospital (YNHH) are collaborating on nursing program. More slots can be opened developed, as the graduates were hired. Obtaining a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistance) degree is needed for those similar lesser skilled nursing jobs; and opportunities exist for these

*Patricia Dillon, State Representative:*

- State tuition support programs are available for some job training programs

*West River Neighborhood:*

- More focus on entrepreneurial training for residents is needed

*Housing Authority:*

- Interested in senior/middle-income housing (referred to 904 Howard Avenue senior home)

Members had some general questions for Livable City Initiative (LCI) regarding code enforcement. Then they discussed tenant management programs such as Ready to Rent Program that the Mutual Housing organization in the City currently operates. Members also discussed on the federal bill for foreclosure assistance as well as recent state legislation.

### **IV. Overview of Next Steps**

Karyn closed the meeting by mentioning to the group that there is a public informational workshop scheduled in September, instead of August, since the City would have hired consultants

by then. Apart from the stakeholders, residents from the three neighborhoods will also be invited to the workshop.

Route 34 West - Designing a Reuevelopment Plan

Stakeholder Meeting

July 29, 2008

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REP. PATRICIA DILLON

06711

**#1: Project Purpose: Ten Core Initiatives of the MDP:**

To advance the revitalization of Route 34 in a manner consistent with the West River Neighborhood Revitalization Plan and Dwight and Hill neighborhood objectives, as well as the City's Comprehensive Plan the MDP proposes ten core initiatives:

- Develop commercial space, bio-science, and health-care related offices and laboratories, as well as retail space on currently vacant land to provide new jobs, and to increase the City and State tax base
- Work with local community based organizations and educational institutions to develop the entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and opportunities of neighborhood residents in order to prepare them to participate in the new development
- Provide work-force housing that is financially accessible to all income levels, including both home owners and renters
- Build environmentally sustainable buildings, utilizing green building techniques and materials
- Develop neighborhood services within the corridor to provide business opportunities and to ensure that services are within walking, rather than driving distance for residents
- Reintegrate the corridor into the West River, Dwight and Hill neighborhoods through the re-construction of once-truncated streets, and by developing new buildings that are compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods
- Connect the corridor to the employment and service centers of the medical district and downtown
- Increase walk-ability, and bike-ability of the neighborhood including usable and well-maintained open space and a pleasing and sustainable streetscape
- Incorporate traffic-calming and pedestrian safety measures
- Increase the viability of transit along the corridor and improve transit connections to the train station
- Create a special services district to market and maintain the area

With these initiatives, the MDP seeks to create an environment for additional jobs and tax revenues to the City/State and to re-connect the West River, Dwight, and Hill neighborhoods to central employment places and to various transportation nodes. The MDP also provides for significant expansion of available commercial, retail, a health-care and biomedical space in an area conducive to such growth as a result of its proximity to Yale University School of Medicine, Yale New Haven Hospital, the new Yale-New Haven Cancer Center and St. Raphael's Hospital.