

## CENTRAL NORWALK

# Input sought in city's urban core design

### Neighborhood Plan open for public comment, suggestions

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency is welcoming input on a draft plan for the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Area.

Wall Street and West Avenue — the city's urban core — have been subject to their respective plans, as approved more than a decade ago, but much has changed since then, according to the draft Norwalk Center Neighborhood Plan that's open for public comment through March 13.

"Since last updating its plans for the Wall Street and West Avenue Corridor redevelopment areas a decade ago the City of Norwalk has seen tremendous change and growth in these neighborhoods. Between 2010 and 2017 over 800 new apartments and 100,000 square feet of commercial space have been created, Wall Street's Globe Theater has been restored and a master plan for enhancing Freese Park has been completed," reads the executive summary of the 60-page draft plan.

At the same time, the local community and the neighborhood's anchor institutions such as Norwalk Hospital, Norwalk Public Library, Stepping Stones Museum for Children and the Wall Street Theater have leveraged human capital to foster art, culture and health and wellness, according to the draft plan.

"This new plan doesn't focus so much on redevelopment, but it focuses on the neighborhood and capitalizing on the assets that are already there, and calls for a collaboration between those assets to determine the future of the neighborhood," said Tami Strauss, director of community development planning at the Re-

*See Design on A4*



The intersection of Main and Wall Streets in Norwalk.

development Agency.

The draft plan, prepared for the Redevelopment Agency by consultant Regional Plan Association, recommends actions in five key areas: zoning changes and design guidelines, connectivity and mobility improvements, development of opportunity sites, collaborative planning and investment, and creative financing tools.

The 230-acre plan area reaches from Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Park to Route 1 and includes Norwalk Hospital and the Norwalk courthouse on Belden Avenue. Commercial uses occupy 29 percent of the acreage followed by institutional/government (15 percent), 'Other or No Land Use Defined' (14 percent) and three- or more-family residential (11 percent), according to

RPA.

The majority of the plan areas is zoned as Central Business District, Industrial No. 1, Neighborhood Business District and D Residence.

The draft plan recommends, among other things, combining Central Business Design Districts subareas A and B — essentially West Avenue and Wall Street — and adding live/work space, maker space, community cultural space and light manufacturing as permitted uses. Current uses include retail, restaurants, banks, theaters, day-care centers, museums, libraries and meeting halls and mixed-use buildings with retail stores.

"We're not so focused on ground-floor retail but on ground-floor activation, because retail is changing," Strauss said. "We're going to have a retail anchor in the city and we need to look at what different uses activate sidewalks, because it

may not necessarily be retail."

The draft plans also recommend incentives for increased building height and density to encourage installation of public art, roof gardens, green roofs and cultural and/or community spaces. Current allowed heights range from six to eight stories.

The plan area is governed by the Wall Street Redevelopment Plan (2004) and the West Avenue Redevelopment Plan (2006), indicating that the city earlier treated Wall Street and West Avenue as two distinct areas for planning purposes.

"In order to get development in the area moving, we in fact separated West Avenue from Wall Street," because at that time Stanley Seligson had been given exclusive developer rights to the entire area," said Alex Knopp, who served as Norwalk mayor from 2001 until 2005. "I wanted to get Wall Street moving and I felt that as long as he had both areas, he'd do West Avenue first and wouldn't get to Wall Street until too late."

Since then, hundreds of new apartments have sprung up along West Avenue as part of the Seligson-inspired development known as Waypointe. In the Wall Street neighborhood, residents are living at an AvalonBay development, and M.F DiScala & Co. is completing apartments as part of Head of the Harbor North. The city is looking to restart Wall Street Place to the west.

"Now it makes sense since there's been so much activity to put them back together again," Knopp said of the draft plan that includes both areas.

Jackie Lightfield, chairwoman of the Norwalk Center Task Force and a member of the working group overseeing development of the new plan, said the group is reviewing the draft.

"It was a lot of data that needed to be gathered, and I'm looking forward to see how the public receives it," Lightfield said.

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► The draft plan can be found at [www.norwalkct.org/1620/Redevelopment-Urban-Renewal-Plans](http://www.norwalkct.org/1620/Redevelopment-Urban-Renewal-Plans).