

# STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH AND VISIONING

## *For the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Plan*

### CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

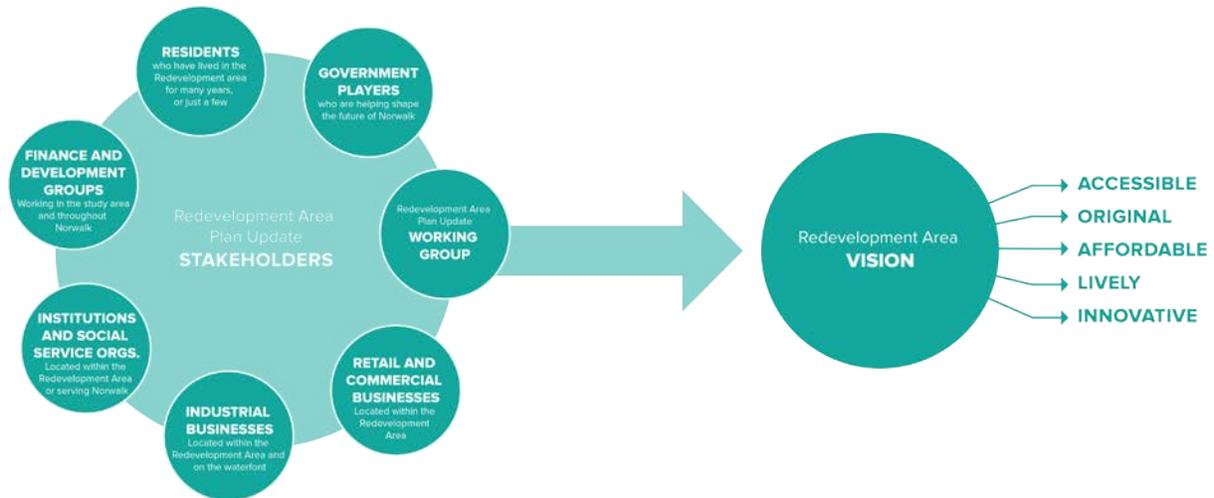
Norwalk Redevelopment Agency is working to update its redevelopment area plans for the Wall Street and West Avenue neighborhoods. Currently the Redevelopment Agency has two distinct plans for these areas- the West Avenue Corridor Redevelopment Plan, adopted in June 2006, and the Wall Street Redevelopment Area Plan, adopted in July 2004 and modified in March 2007. Consistent with State statute, these redevelopment area plans must be updated every ten years to remain in effect. The City of Norwalk has approved an extension of these existing plans, as the Redevelopment Agency is currently in the process of updating these plans.

This plan update is being led by Norwalk Redevelopment Agency staff in collaboration with Regional Plan Association (RPA), who have been hired as consultants to the Agency, and is being guided by a working group composed of representatives from City boards, commissions and agencies, neighborhood institutions and business owners and residents, who serve as an advisory group to the Agency and RPA on the development of the plan. A key component of this plan update process has been a carefully designed stakeholder outreach strategy intended to engage the myriad of stakeholders with vested interests in this area. The purpose of this strategy is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges in these neighborhoods and develop a shared vision for the future.

Between Spring and Summer of 2017 the Redevelopment Agency and RPA conducted focus groups and one-on-one stakeholder conversations with community residents, local retail and commercial businesses, waterfront industrial property owners, neighborhood institutions and social service organizations, local real estate developers, and government department and agency staff to understand the multiple viewpoints on the current status and desired future of the Wall Street and West Avenue areas. The Agency and RPA also designed and conducted a business owner survey in order to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and concerns of existing businesses in the areas' commercial corridors.

Based on discussions with the working group and feedback from stakeholders, it was determined that as revitalization has occurred in both the Wall Street and West Avenue areas over the last ten years, these neighborhoods are becoming more economically and physically connected. Looking forward towards the next ten years these areas will become increasingly linked and their geographies should be combined into one cohesive redevelopment area plan. As illustrated in Figure 1 and discussed in detail in this report, the comprehensive vision for the future of the Wall Street-West Avenue area is an accessible, affordable and lively neighborhood with an original character anchored by a creative, innovation-based economy.

**Figure 1:** The Redevelopment Area Plan Update for the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Area engaged a wide range of stakeholders to form a guiding vision for the future of the area. This will be incorporated into all aspects of the plan. (Source: RPA)



This report describes how this vision was developed, and offers details about our conversations with each stakeholder group. At the end of this report, RPA also describes how this feedback will be used in creating the redevelopment area plan update.

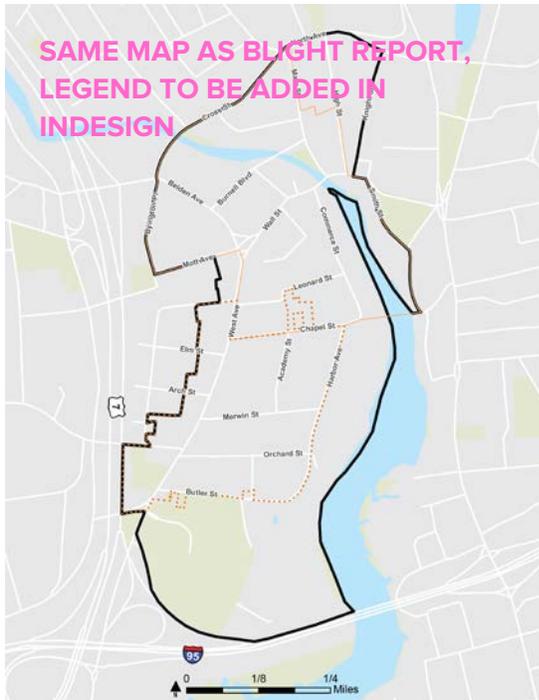
## CHAPTER 2: PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency (NRA) hired Regional Plan Association (RPA) to complete an update of their redevelopment plan for the Wall Street and West Avenue redevelopment areas. RPA began by diving into research about the existing residents, businesses, and zoning of the neighborhood through data. In order to verify our analysis, we created an ambitious outreach process to inform the plan, which will be released for public comment in the fall of 2017.

### *Combining Geographies from Past Plans*

The redevelopment areas of West Avenue and Wall Street have historically been planned for separately, even though they are economically and physically linked. This plan joins the two areas into one plan because they are connected through mobility, access, and economic conditions and also have a shared identity. The former and current boundary for the redevelopment area (or “neighborhood” as we will refer to it) is shown in Figure 2.

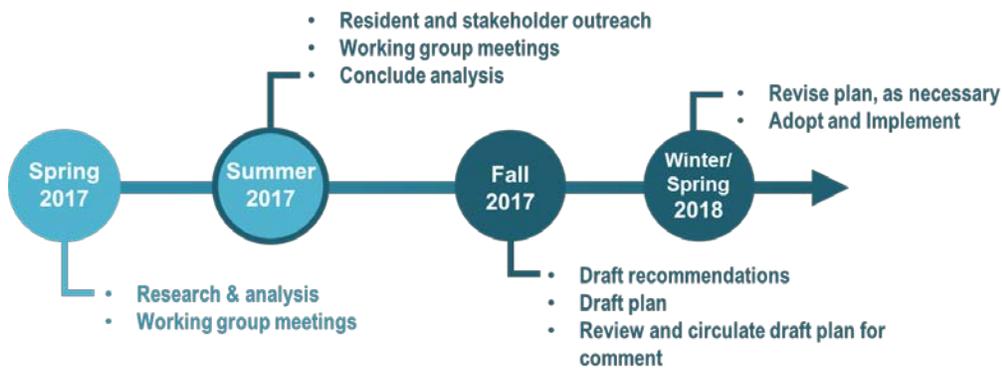
**Figure 2:** The Wall Street and West Avenue Redevelopment Areas were previously planned for separately. With this Redevelopment Plan Area Update, RPA and NRA are treating the two areas as a combined single redevelopment area in order to plan more comprehensively. (Source: RPA; Norwalk GIS)



### Timeline

The Redevelopment Area Plan Update process began in the Spring of 2017 and will be completed in the Fall of 2017. The final plan will provide a vision for the Wall Street-West Avenue area and a strategy for achieving the vision through the right combination of zoning and policy initiatives.

**Figure 3:** The Wall Street and West Avenue Redevelopment Area Plan Update has been carried out over many months, and the plan will be released this fall. (Source: RPA)



During the spring, RPA began by analyzing existing conditions for the area. Generous amounts of data were analyzed to assess the demographic, economic, and environmental forces within the study area. RPA also analyzed the existing zoning allowances and infrastructure in the area. This data will be presented in the final report, and has been used as the foundation for the plan’s recommendations.

The engagement process for the plan was completed through the spring and summer of 2017. First, NRA formed the Redevelopment Area Plan Update Working Group (“the working group”) through a combination of public notice and targeted outreach to government staff, invested residents, and other individual stakeholders. The working group meetings were designed to have RPA and NRA present the latest research on the plan and gather feedback and guidance from working group members.

While the working group provides valuable input, RPA also needed to speak to other voices. Multiple stakeholder roundtables and individual meetings were held throughout the Spring and Summer of 2017. This was the bulk of our outreach for the plan, which is summarized through this report.

Following the outreach time period, RPA will draft the final recommendations for the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Area Plan Update. The plan will then be reviewed with NRA staff, circulated for comment, and revised as necessary. Once the review is complete, the plan will be sent for adoption and implemented for many years to come.

## CHAPTER 3: OUTREACH STRATEGY

Maps and data are extremely valuable tools for a redevelopment plan, but they do not convey the entire story. RPA and NRA know the importance of community engagement, and worked to incorporate the concerns and vision of numerous stakeholders in the Wall Street-West Avenue Updated Redevelopment Plan. Instead of posting public meetings and hoping a wide array of interested parties would show, we targeted our outreach for different stakeholder groups who we believed would have valuable input into the plan, and offer differing opinions from each other. For each group of stakeholders we tailored the engagement approach, ranging from roundtables, to surveys, to interviews.

### *Targeting Strategy*

In targeting stakeholders, we asked three main questions:

- **WHO WOULD BE MOST IMPACTED BY THE PLAN?** – Current residents, business owners, and property owners in the study area are all affected by the recommendations that would be in the plan, in terms of their property values, jobs, and lifestyle.
- **WHO UNDERSTANDS THE NEIGHBORHOOD BEST TODAY?** – To understand the neighborhood, we needed to speak with current residents, government staff, developers working in the neighborhood, and businesses who have been located here for decades.
- **WHO WILL BE INFLUENTIAL IN ACHIEVING THE PLAN?** – In order to achieve the plan, there must be buy-in from financial intuitions, government, property and business owners, as well as residents.
- **WHO WILL HAVE DIFFERING VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD?** – Finally, we knew it was important to understand the different perspectives for how the neighborhood should grow, and tried to capture this through all of our outreach efforts.

Using these questions, we asked local residents, commercial businesses, industrial businesses, private citizens, social organizations, private organizations and government officials to speak with us in various ways.

### *Outreach Methods*

Understandably, there is never a “one-size-fits-all” approach to managing an effective outreach process. For this reason we chose several different methods to gather information from different stakeholders. Table 1 describes the different stakeholder groups and the methods we used to gather information from them.

**Table 1:** RPA and NRA used different methods to gather information from various stakeholder groups in order to create a more informed redevelopment area plan. (Source: RPA)

<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b>	<b>OUTREACH METHODS</b>
<b>Working Group</b>	Presentations and facilitated small group workshops
<b>Residents</b>	Presentations and facilitated small group discussions (at Waypointe and the Carver Center*)
<b>Finance and Development Groups</b>	Focus Group with key players in the study area and Norwalk
<b>Government Players</b>	Individual conversations and meetings with various public servants who know the infrastructure, policy, and zoning in the neighborhood.
<b>Retail and Commercial Businesses</b>	Business Owner Survey (in English and Spanish) was distributed to 44 business owners within the study area, with 20 surveys completed
<b>Waterfront Businesses</b>	Focus Group with large industrial businesses in the study area and on the waterfront.
<b>Institutions and Social Service Organizations</b>	Focus Group with organizations working in the Study Area

For most of the stakeholder groups, we employed a traditional “focus group” meeting format. RPA gave a presentation about the objectives of the plan and our existing conditions research, and then facilitated small group discussions around a map of the study area. This format gave participants an opportunity to voice their concerns and vision for the area, while discussing how it fits into the larger Norwalk context. Focus groups were conducted with a variety of stakeholder groups that included: local social institutions, banks, developers, industrial business owners, and some Norwalk government staff.

For the retail and commercial businesses in the study area, RPA realized it may be difficult to gather their opinions through meetings. For this reason, we distributed a business survey to 44 businesses in the study area, and received 20 completed surveys back (an incredible response rate). The business survey focused on information regarding business owner’s experiences with the city of Norwalk. The completed business owner surveys are available in the appendix.

For residents of the study area, we attempted to create a more personal meeting style. After RPA presented the current trends observed in the neighborhood, we then asked residents to answer a series of digital polls using an online software called Poll Everywhere. Using this software allowed RPA to gather real data from the participants of the resident meetings, while also allowing people to see their responses being recorded and acknowledged by NRA staff. Following the polls, RPA facilitated small-group discussions around maps of the study area, allowing residents to find where they live and discuss their concerns and vision for the neighborhood.

While our methods do not gather information from all residents of the area, we do feel that we have gathered a sufficient number of perspectives to inform the plan. As the plan is written and implemented, we hope the NRA will continue to perform regular outreach, ensuring as many members of the community as possible are involved in the shaping of their neighborhood.

## CHAPTER 4: SUMMARIZING WHAT WE HEARD

Forming a collective set of opinions from a diverse set of stakeholders is an ambitious task. However, we recognized clear themes and recurring issues throughout the engagement process. The first part of this chapter presents a summary of the current conditions in the neighborhood—what stakeholders like now, and what they would prefer to change. Next we offer a shared vision for the neighborhood based on what we heard in meetings, surveys, and interviews.

### *The Neighborhood Now*

The first questions we asked at each outreach session were about the neighborhood as it exists today. We asked participants what they liked about their neighborhood and also what they did not like. This is summarized in a short list of Assets and Weaknesses for the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Area.

#### **ASSETS**

There are many reasons that residents decided to move to the neighborhood and that businesses located here. Stakeholders across the board expressed the importance of maintaining a neighborhood that is:

##### **1. Urban**

Residents, businesses, and developers mentioned that they decided to locate their homes, businesses, or projects in the Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood because of its urban character. They like the neighborhood's street grid, open spaces, building density, and potential for rich street life.

##### **2. Historic**

The neighborhood's history is preserved in much of its architecture. Multiple groups of people involved in our outreach stressed the importance of preserving the historic buildings in Norwalk, as well as its existing street network.

##### **3. Mixed Use**

Across the board, those we spoke to about the Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood were interested in preserving the mixed-use quality of the neighborhood. Residents and people who work in the neighborhood enjoy the dining and retail options, but wish it were more active during different parts of the day.

##### **4. Central**

The Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood is close to the geographic center of Norwalk, and contains a wealth of the city's institutions. While the neighborhood does not have a train station, it is between the Merritt 7 and South Norwalk Stations, and contains the Pulse Point Bus Hub. Its location is beneficial for business too, since it is located between I-95, US 7 and the Norwalk River, which transports freight without interrupting or adding to vehicle traffic.

## SHORTCOMINGS

While the area has many assets, most representatives and stakeholders we spoke with felt that there were many existing issues to address before the vision for the area can be realized.

### *1. Difficult to Navigate by Car*

A majority of the stakeholders were most concerned with access and availability of parking spaces within the study area. More specifically, the lack of street parking on Wall Street and Main Street were among their top concerns. Stakeholders specifically referenced accessibility and wayfinding to the Yankee Doodle Garage as their biggest barriers. Transportation to and from the South Norwalk train station is seen as insufficient and not attractive to residents. Traffic and congestion within and around the study area was seen as a drawback for residents and business owners. There is a parking study underway for Norwalk as a whole, but the redevelopment plan for Wall Street-West Avenue will address certain aspects of parking for the area. While both the industrial and business community felt the area was beneficial due to its proximity to the highway, they mentioned how difficult it was for them to receive truck deliveries. Residents and business owners stressed the lack of parking in the area.

### *2. Difficult to Navigate on Foot*

The street design in the study area was seen as needing improvement from various stakeholder groups. Stakeholders indicated that street beautification is a need that would improve the area for pedestrians and businesses alike. Trash receptacles were not as frequent or numerous as the stakeholders saw fit for the area and therefore trash was found frequently on the sidewalks. Pedestrian flow was hindered by the lack of crosswalks and connectivity of streets within the area, predominantly on Wall Street and the intersection of Wall Street and West Avenue. Physical street impediments, i.e. narrow curbs, were seen as a hindrance for commercial truck traffic to effectively navigate the area when making deliveries to local businesses.

### *3. Feels unsafe to walk, especially at night.*

Safety issues were raised by several groups of stakeholders. Streets in the study area are perceived as unsafe at night because of the lack of foot traffic, underutilized/abandoned buildings and the lack of streetlights. Vacant or neglected commercial spaces on the ground floor are seen as a deterrent to possible customers. Stakeholders also expressed reservations with allowing pedestrian access to the waterfront because it is currently a working waterfront that may not be safe for pedestrians to access. Feeds into a lack of retail space.

### *4. Lacks an Identity*

Stakeholders were concerned with the lack of identity of the area. The mix of uses ranging from single family residential to industrial waterfront businesses makes it difficult for the area to solidify its status within greater Norwalk.

### *5. Expensive*

From residents to developers to business owners we heard the numerous ways the neighborhood is too expensive. Residents stressed frustration with their inability to buy in the neighborhood, and that rents were too expensive. Businesses also stressed the same frustration with rents- both their commercial rent and the inability of their employees to live nearby due to high rents.

## *The Neighborhood in the Future*

Based on the wealth of feedback received from stakeholders throughout the engagement process, RPA has summarized a collective vision for the area—a neighborhood that is accessible, original, affordable, and lively.

#### **ACCESSIBLE**

with adequate parking, easy connection to SoNo train station, better streets and sidewalks for walking, bicycle infrastructure, waterfront access, and designated truck routes.

#### **ORIGINAL**

with preserved historic character, growing arts organizations, local restaurants, connections to the waterfront, preserved industrial uses as well as new “maker” uses.

#### **AFFORDABLE**

for residents in terms of renting and buying homes, for business owners in terms of space, for parking, for developers to conduct business here, for industrial businesses to keep working and using the waterway, and for the government to maintain public spaces and assets in a more effective way.

#### **LIVELY**

with more people, more shops, fewer vacant storefronts and stalled developments, more activities, well-maintained and programmed public spaces, nightlife, daytime uses, and cultural opportunities.

## **CHAPTER 5: DETAILS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

This chapter provides more detail about what we heard throughout the outreach process from each stakeholder group. For each group, we describe who the group represents and why it was important to involve them in the process. We also summarize the group’s opinions assets and shortcomings—both for themselves, and the neighborhood— as well as how they envision the future of the neighborhood and their role within that future.

### *Redevelopment Area Plan Update Working Group*

The Working Group was the initial outreach component of the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Area Plan Update. The group consists of representatives from various backgrounds including private citizens, government employees and other engaged and interested individuals from the community. The general public is also invited to attend the working group meetings, and the agendas have designated space for public comment. The first three meetings were designed in order to gather members’ feedback on the future of the neighborhood, with the next few meetings asking for more direct input on the recommendations within the redevelopment area plan.

The Working Group has met multiple times over the course of this outreach strategy to inform the scope of the plan’s research and recommendations within the plan. Working Group meetings were held at Norwalk City Hall with public notice. Meeting minutes and materials posted online at the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency’s website. So far, there have been four meetings held on: March 3, May 12, June 7, and September 15, 2017.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- Members like the existing character of Norwalk’s land use mix, diversity, and built environment. They hope to grow the focus on historic buildings and existing institutions to create a more vibrant neighborhood.
- Walkability is listed as a key goal, but also as a current strength. Residents enjoy the character of buildings and the existing street layout (saying the neighborhood has “good bones”), but would like to see better use of the urban fabric to fill vacant storefronts, densify, and beautify the area.
- Members enjoy many of the new and old businesses in the area as well as the neighborhood cultural institutions. The study area has a concentration of historic buildings in the Wall Street area with character that working group members enjoy. These existing resources could be leveraged and enhanced to create a sense of place and neighborhood identity for the study area.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- Working group members were concerned that infrastructure is inadequate, especially for newer, denser development. Residents stressed the need to have adequate gas, sewer, water, fire and police to serve existing, and future, residents of the area. Desire for streetscape and façade improvements was also noted.
- Lack of a transit access and adequate parking were also mentioned as challenges for the area for residents and businesses. Many members mentioned the idea of a bus or trolley circulator that could carry people from this neighborhood to the South Norwalk or Merritt 7 train stations and facilitate better connectivity. They also mentioned that the Pulse Point Bus Hub could be a better neighborhood asset with some design improvements and more amenities.
- Parking looms as a large unsolved problem for the area. While working group members dislike Yankee Doodle garage’s centralized parking, some seem adverse to dispersed parking garages throughout the area. Many residents are opposed to paying for parking, but noted that parking is largely unavailable due to cars being parked for long periods of time.

#### **FUTURE VISION**

- Members had some disagreement over appropriate type of new development. While some would like to see “contextual”/lower density developments, others suggested the need for density to support revitalization. There is consensus that new development should not just be luxury housing.
- The study area has a concentration of historic buildings in the Wall Street area with character that residents enjoy. These existing resources could be leveraged and enhanced to create a sense of place and neighborhood identity for the study area.
- Unoccupied and vacant spaces create clear opportunities for businesses and residences. Some residents wish to see these become areas for entrepreneurs, arts organizations, or other community-serving needs, in addition to more restaurants. They hope to see a nice mix of day and night activity.
- Access to the waterfront was desired by many residents to create space for recreation and “hanging out.” Many also expressed the desire to maintain manufacturing from both the perspective of jobs and neighborhood character.

#### *Retail and Commercial Business Owners*

Business owners are a key group to involve in any redevelopment plan, as they have decided to invest in a neighborhood, and could decide to take their investment elsewhere if they are not satisfied. To gather the

most information from retail and commercial business owners, we decided it was best to reach them at their businesses, rather than asking them to come to a separate meeting. RPA distributed 44 business owner surveys over the course of a month, held conversations with individual business owners who wished to speak to us one-on-one while delivering these surveys, and collected 20 completed surveys to inform the plan. The complete survey results can be found in the appendix of this report.

The businesses surveyed cover a wide range of sectors from restaurants to sporting goods stores, with the majority being locally owned and operated. The businesses have varying degrees of tenure within the area and have been located there from one year to over 70 years. 75 percent of the businesses rent their current location and only 25 percent own. The majority of the businesses employ less than five people, 60 percent, and 70 percent of those surveyed say their employees drive to work.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- The top three things that business owners like about the neighborhood are the free parking, the mix of uses and the affordability of the area. Half of the business owners are optimistic about the future of the neighborhood and Norwalk as a whole and feel that it is on a positive track.
- The top three advantages that the neighborhood provides identified by the business owners were: Location/Accessibility, neighborhood is up and coming and the free parking in the area.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- The top three disadvantages identified by business owners in the survey were: perceived safety, mobility and foot traffic/walkability.
- The survey showed an intense concern with parking access and location. Business owners feel that parking is the biggest issue they face in keeping their businesses successful and keeping and attracting customers to their location.
- 62 percent of those surveyed cited mobility as what they like least about the neighborhood.

#### **FUTURE VISION**

- The majority of business owners, 65 percent, believe the new residential developments in the area will have a positive impact on the neighborhood. Almost 90 percent of the business owners would like to see more businesses located in the area.
- The top three most important factors identified by business owners for keeping their business in the neighborhood was new customers, maintaining customers and lower rents.
- Half of the business owners cited the idea that the neighborhood was up and coming for being the reason they located their business in the area.

### *Waterfront Business Owners*

Norwalk is an historically industrial city which still has a working waterfront. For this reason, it was essential to gather information from the current industrial business owners within the study area to explore their plans and ideas for the future. RPA decided to hold a focus group with major industrial business owners instead of surveying industrial businesses in the study area in the same way as the retail and commercial businesses. This meeting was held on August 8, 2017 at Norwalk City Hall.

Understandably, the industrial business owners had different concerns and ambitions than residents or retail businesses. They were less interested in increasing foot traffic, especially near their businesses as

this could cause dangerous situations with trucks or heavy machinery. However, they did mention serious concerns around parking, truck movement, and maintaining a working waterfront.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- Most of the business owners stressed that the location was the biggest asset of the neighborhood. Sitting between I-95 and US 7 makes deliveries easy (in certain ways) for businesses that rely on tractor-trailers to stock their goods.
- The Norwalk River is a federally dredged waterway, which allows certain businesses to receive freight by barge. This reduces trucks on the road, and maintains a working waterfront.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- Industrial business owners were very concerned with the difficulty of tractor-trailers and other large trucks to navigate the streets within the study area. Unpredictable street closers and obstructions due to new residential construction has been impacting their businesses' ability to receive deliveries.
- Owners also expressed frustration that many of their employees cannot afford to live near their workplace, as the area has become too expensive. Their employees must live further out, and often have to contend with heavy traffic when traveling to and from work.

#### **FUTURE VISION**

- Business owners expressed desire for designated truck routes through the study area, which would both decrease traffic throughout residential streets while ensuring smoother driving for heavier trucks making deliveries. In order to do this, they also mentioned the idea of creating curbs that are wide enough to accommodate tractor-trailers along these routes, as right now the trailers must make several-point turns. Business owners noted about many difficulties regarding traffic, and expressed concern about the future traffic effects of the mall opening in the area.
- Industrial business owners want to maintain an industrially zoned waterfront. This would not only ensure an industrial future for the area, but is also a necessity for the Norwalk River to receive federal assistance in dredging the waterway. This will also be beneficial to boating clubs along the river. Business owners were less interested in pedestrian access to the water, but noted this is already being achieved on the opposite side of the river.
- While they want to maintain the industrial character of part of the neighborhood, the business owners were also interested in seeing a mixed-use community. They were intrigued by the idea of tapering the “heaviness” of industrial uses: from the heaviest on the waterfront, to more light manufacturing or “live-work” spaces behind, to residential and commercial areas closer to West Avenue.

#### *Institutions and Social Service Organizations*

Multiple institutions, religious organizations, and social service groups are located within the Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood. In reaching out to these organizations, we hoped to gather information not only about their future plans for the neighborhood, but also what they've heard from residents who use their services. We held a focus group with several institutions within the study area on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at Norwalk City Hall.

The organizations we spoke with are all interested in staying in the neighborhood (or returning to the neighborhood) and investing in the future of Norwalk. Throughout their work, they are concerned with the lack of affordability in the neighborhood.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- The institutions and social services themselves are an incredible asset to the neighborhood. They provide multiple layers of support, education, childcare, and health services to the neighborhood and Norwalk.
- Representatives from these organizations mentioned that the new residential developments have brought more interest and attendance to local institutions.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- Parking needs to be expanded to accommodate some institutions (mainly the library, the Carver Center and Cornerstone Church have had issues with parking) The Yankee Doodle Garage is seen as underutilized because it is perceived as unsafe and unwelcoming-needs better wayfinding and design.
- The stalled or abandoned developments are causing problems with the appearance of the area.

#### **Future Vision**

- A need for mobility is a major idea between and among the institutions in the area, which could be facilitated by connecting bike lanes, pathways or sidewalks that are designed as user friendly.
- As the neighborhood becomes more dense and gains population, there will be a need to increase capacity at local intuitions. Many of those we spoke with are looking to expand capacity through purchasing another building/lot for parking or physical building space. Some are concerned about a lack of funding for social services as the area redevelops.

#### **Residents**

Current residents are one of the most valuable groups to consult when creating a redevelopment plan. Residents are not only likely to be most affected by the recommendations within the plan, but can also provide valuable insight into why they moved to the neighborhood, why they choose to stay here, or why they are choosing—or are being forced to—leave. Residential outreach was performed through a stakeholder meeting within the Waypointe development on July 25, 2017. The meeting attracted over 25 people living within the development who expressed their views about the area.

Waypointe residents were involved in this process due to their clear interest in the neighborhood, having recently decided to live in Waypointe. RPA and NRA belived residents of this housing development would be a valuable voice to hear what they expected from the neighborhood, and what the neighborhood needs to meet those expectations.

At the beginning of the meeting, RPA staff presented our existing conditions research then asked the residents to participate in a brief polling exercise using an online software called PollEverywhere. From this polling, we were able to learn quite a bit about the participants. The vast majority of the residents that attended the Waypointe outreach meeting (80 percent) have lived in Norwalk for less than 2 years. These residents have been attracted to Norwalk from as far away as Phoenix and Chicago, or have chosen to relocate to Norwalk from New Canaan or Fairfield. There was a wide age range at the meeting, and their

reasons for moving to Waypointe include downsizing for the recently retired and close proximity to NYC for younger workers and families. The location of the Waypointe development was the most influential factor for drawing the participants into Norwalk. The amenities and the nearby train station were the top two factors attracting people into this particular neighborhood. About 60 percent of those living in the Waypointe work within Fairfield County and almost 20 percent of those surveyed work in NYC. This is supported by the modes of transportation to work with 50 percent driving to work and almost 20 percent taking the train.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- Residents like the mixed-use nature of the neighborhood, and like that they are living in an urban environment.
- While they wish there were more restaurants, they do like many of the existing offerings.
- Residents also enjoy the architecture of the neighborhood and hope to see this preserved.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- While they enjoy many of the restaurants within the neighborhood, residents do not feel safe walking home at night. They wish there were more people out on the streets in order for it to feel safer.
- One of the biggest complaints was the lack of a grocery store. Residents are dissatisfied with the current store options, and wish there were a larger store located in the neighborhood.
- Waypointe residents with children are dissatisfied with the daycare and children-friendly activities in the area. There are a few activities for children, but not enough.

#### **FUTURE VISION**

- Waypointe residents wish there were more stores, retail, bars, and restaurants. They also wish for there to be a gym in the area.
- In addition to hoping for a more walkable neighborhood, residents are also dissatisfied with the existing streets. They hope to see more bike lanes and more greenways along the waterfront.
- While they like the mixed-use nature of the neighborhood, they hope to see more creative uses such as galleries, maker spaces, or music venues in the neighborhood.

### *Finance and Development Groups*

The private sector plays an integral role in the future redevelopment of the Wall Street-West Avenue Neighborhood. For this reason, RPA facilitated a roundtable discussion with multiple developers, banks, and property owners working within the study area or within Norwalk as a whole. The meeting was held on June 7, 2017 at Norwalk City Hall.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- The large companies located north of the redevelopment area have attracted younger people, but keeping them invested in the area long term is a larger question.
- Developers also believe the existing urban fabric is an asset to the neighborhood, allowing it to have the potential to be a walkable urban space.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- The Yankee Doodle Garage is seen as underutilized and needs better wayfinding to make it more prominent and accessible. They recommend dividing parking into commercial prime and residential prime in order to capitalize on the existing parking in the area.
- Developers expressed difficulty in having their plans approved by Norwalk staff, and would like to see a more streamlined process.

#### **FUTURE VISION**

- Transit oriented development was identified as a major need for connecting the redevelopment area to the SONO train station. Foot traffic was identified as a main economic driver for the area.
- They believe that the redevelopment plan should be flexible in order to accommodate future changes in building technology and social trends. Smaller office buildings and a mix of uses were seen as a strength moving forward for the area.
- Arts and culture of the redevelopment area should be the feature of the plan and a way to keep younger folks invested here. This group also recommended investment in schools as an essential piece to drawing younger populations, as they may wish to have children in an urban area, rather than the suburbs.

#### *Government Players*

We spoke with multiple people involved in planning Norwalk to learn more about how planning and development approvals are carried out, as well as whether there are issues with infrastructure or utilities within the study area that could hinder redevelopment efforts. There was not a single focus group, but rather individual interviews with the following departments or groups involved in Norwalk:

- Planning and Zoning
- Economic Development
- Mayor’s Office
- Public Works
- Norwalk Chamber of Commerce
- Norwalk Transit District

As expected, each group had differing concerns around priorities toward shaping a stronger Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood. Overall, they primarily stressed concern over funding toward public space and infrastructure maintenance for any developments within the neighborhood, as well as different city agencies abilities to coordinate the approvals process.

#### **CURRENT ASSETS**

- Public works in the area are seen as adequate for the new developments now and in the future.
- The mixed-use quality of the area is important for city government to maintain, in particular the working waterfront.

#### **CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS**

- There was concern around the ad-hoc nature of development approvals within the study area and Norwalk as a whole. Several staff we spoke with were interested in reforming the planning approvals process for new developments into a more holistic and streamlined timeline.
- While the existing bus route would take travelers from the Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood directly to the South Norwalk Train Station, residents of the major new housing

developments are not using the bus very often. This could be due to inadequate education around bus resources, or residents believe the bus may take longer than the private shuttles provided at their residence.

- Multiple people mentioned difficulty around maintenance for Freese Park. There seems to be a lack of funding available to maintain existing public space.

#### **FUTURE VISION**

- Multiple staff stressed the difficulty in funding long-term maintenance for public spaces, public infrastructure, and other amenities within new developments. The possibility for TIF (tax increment financing) districts was raised, as well as the desire to tie maintenance to development approvals.
- In order to realize a holistic vision for the neighborhood, multiple staff stressed the importance of a more holistic planning approval process. This process could have a defined timeline, order of steps, and guaranteed end date. This would alleviate developer uncertainty, and ensure Norwalk staff are adequately informed of new developments.
- There is a general sense that the neighborhood has a great amount of potential based on its existing urban fabric and interest in creating somewhat of an “eclectic” or “artsy” identity for the neighborhood.

# APPENDIX 1 : RETAIL AND COMMERCIAL BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS

Throughout the month of July 2017, RPA staff wrote and distributed a retail and commercial business survey in English and Spanish to 44 businesses within the Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood and received 20 responses. A summary of the responses from each question is presented within this appendix.

Figure \*\*: English Language Business Owner Survey (Source: RPA)

**Norwalk Business Owners Survey**  
Regional Plan Association & Norwalk Redevelopment Agency  
July 2017

Región del Plan Asociacion & Norwalk Redevelopment Agency para solicitar la información para la Red Business Area en Norwalk. Este estudio de negocios comerciales dentro de la Red Business Area tiene como objetivo obtener información sobre los negocios comerciales que operan en esta zona. Si usted es un propietario de un negocio en esta zona, le pedimos que complete este cuestionario. El cuestionario es confidencial y solo se utilizará para fines de planificación y desarrollo urbano.

Gracias por su participación en este estudio de negocios comerciales.

**IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Year Business Established: \_\_\_\_\_  
Business Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Respondent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Respondent do you live in Norwalk?  
 Yes, I am a resident of Norwalk.  
 No

**SURVEY QUESTIONS**

- Do you own or rent the business location?  
 Own  
 Rent
- How many years has the business been in this location?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years in this location
- How many years has the business been in Norwalk, even if in a different location?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years in Norwalk
- Does this business currently have a single location or multiple locations?  
 Single location  
 Multiple Locations outside Norwalk

**5. What made you decide to locate your business in this part of Norwalk?**  
 I thought the neighborhood was "up and coming"  
 The rent was low  
 Poor traffic  
 I was located here before me  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What are the advantages of your current location to your business? What are the disadvantages?**  
Advantages: \_\_\_\_\_  
Disadvantages: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Do you feel the local Norwalk and the neighborhood is an area well suited for your business here currently? or in the past?**  
 Most favorable  
 Less favorable  
 Same  
Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. In what ways is the business environment in the neighborhood helpful or harmful to your business?**  
Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What do you think of the recent developments in the neighborhood? What impact do you think future residential developments will have on your business? What impact do you think future commercial developments will have on your business?**  
 Positive impact  
 Negative impact  
 Other/Neutral  
Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Do you believe the neighborhood needs more businesses to locate here?**  
 Yes  
 No  
Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. How long do you see your business staying in Norwalk?**  
 For the next 10-20 years  
 For the next 1-10 years  
 For the next 3-5 years  
 Less than 2 years  
Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. What are the three most important factors for keeping your business in the neighborhood versus other parts of Norwalk or the region?**  
 Maintaining existing customers  
 New customers  
 More business nearby  
 Lower costs  
 Lower property taxes  
 Access to the neighborhood  
 Employees are easy to find in the location  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**13. What is the top issue that would have the greatest impact on your ability to stay in the neighborhood?**  
 More business  
 Customer base  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**14. How many employees does your business have?**  
 0-4  
 5-9  
 10-19  
 20+

**15. When do the majority of your employees live?**  
 Within Norwalk  
 Adjacent to Norwalk  
 Elsewhere  
 I don't know

**16. Do you believe the Wall Street-West Avenue neighborhood has an identity?**  
 Yes  
 No  
Please explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. What infrastructure is most important to support your business?**  
 Parking  
 Transit access  
 Pedestrian/public spaces  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**18. What do you like best about the neighborhood that you would change if you could?**  
Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**19. What do you like least about the neighborhood that you would change if you could?**  
Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**20. What do you like most about the neighborhood that should never change?**  
Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure \*\*: Spanish Language Business Owner Survey (Source: RPA)

**Encuesta de Propietarios de Negocios en Norwalk**  
Regional Plan Association & Norwalk Redevelopment Agency  
Julio 2017

Región del Plan Asociacion & Norwalk Redevelopment Agency para solicitar la información para la Red Business Area en Norwalk. Este estudio de negocios comerciales dentro de la Red Business Area tiene como objetivo obtener información sobre los negocios comerciales que operan en esta zona. Si usted es un propietario de un negocio en esta zona, le pedimos que complete este cuestionario. El cuestionario es confidencial y solo se utilizará para fines de planificación y desarrollo urbano.

Gracias por su participación en este estudio de negocios comerciales.

**INFORMACIÓN IDENTIFICATIVA**

Nombre del Negocio: \_\_\_\_\_  
Año del Establecimiento: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dirección del Negocio: \_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre del Encuestado: \_\_\_\_\_  
¿Vive usted en Norwalk?  
 Sí  
 No

**PREGUNTAS DE LA ENCUESTA**

- ¿Es usted propietario o alquila la ubicación de la empresa?  
 Propietario  
 Alquila
- ¿Cuántos años tiene la ubicación de su negocio en esta zona?  
\_\_\_\_\_ años en esta ubicación
- ¿Cuántos años tiene la ubicación de su negocio en Norwalk, aunque en una ubicación diferente?  
\_\_\_\_\_ años en Norwalk
- ¿Su negocio actualmente tiene una sola ubicación o varias ubicaciones?  
 Una única  
 Múltiples lugares fuera de Norwalk

**5. ¿Qué le hizo decidir ubicar su negocio en esta parte de Norwalk?**  
 Me parecía que el barrio estaba creciendo.  
 El precio de alquiler estaba barato.  
 Estaba en una buena zona.  
 Estaba ubicado aquí antes.  
 Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. ¿Cuáles son los ventajas de la ubicación actual de su negocio? ¿Cuáles son las desventajas?**  
Ventajas: \_\_\_\_\_  
Desventajas: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. ¿Puede decir que esta parte de Norwalk es un área bien adecuada para su negocio aquí actualmente? o en el pasado?**  
 Más favorable  
 Menos favorable  
 Igual  
Explique su respuesta por favor: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. ¿En qué aspectos es el ambiente de negocios en esta zona útil o perjudicial para su negocio?**  
Respuesta: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. ¿Qué piensa del desarrollo reciente de la zona? ¿Qué impacto cree que tendrá desarrollo residencial adicional en su negocio? ¿Qué impacto cree que tendrá desarrollo comercial adicional en su negocio?**  
 Impacto positivo  
 Impacto negativo  
 No sé  
Explique su respuesta por favor: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. ¿Cree usted que el barrio necesita más negocios?**  
 Sí  
 No  
Explique su respuesta por favor: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. ¿Cuánto tiempo cree que su negocio va a estar en Norwalk?**  
 Próximo 10-20 años  
 Próximo 1-10 años  
 Próximo 3-5 años  
 Menos de 2 años  
Explique su respuesta por favor: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. ¿Cuáles son los tres factores más importantes para mantener su negocio en esta zona frente a otras partes de Norwalk o la región?**  
 Mantener a los clientes existentes  
 Nuevos clientes  
 Más negocios cerca  
 Menores costos  
 Menores impuestos  
 Acceso a la zona  
 Empleados fáciles de encontrar en la ubicación  
 Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. ¿Cuál es el problema que tendría el mayor impacto en la capacidad de quedarse en el barrio?**  
 Más negocios  
 Base de clientes  
 Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. ¿Cuántos empleados tiene su negocio?**  
 0-4  
 5-9  
 10-19  
 20+

**15. ¿Dónde vive la mayoría de sus empleados?**  
 Dentro de Norwalk  
 Adyacente a Norwalk  
 En otro lugar  
 No sé

**16. ¿Cree usted que el barrio de Wall Street-West Avenue tiene una identidad?**  
 Sí  
 No  
Explique su respuesta por favor: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. ¿Qué infraestructura es más importante para apoyar su negocio?**  
 Estacionamiento  
 Acceso al tránsito  
 Peatonal y espacios públicos  
 Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. ¿Qué le gusta menos sobre el barrio que cambiaría si pudiera?**  
Respuesta: \_\_\_\_\_

**19. ¿Qué le gusta más del barrio que nunca debe cambiar?**  
Respuesta: \_\_\_\_\_

## MULTIPLE CHOICE RESULTS

## APPENDIX 2: WAYPOINTE RESIDENTS MEETING REAL-TIME SURVEY RESULTS

At the July 25, 2017 Waypointe Residents Meeting, RPA used a software called PollEverywhere to gather input from the meeting participants about where they live and work, as well as what drew them to the neighborhood. These results are attached in full in this appendix.

### Q: How long have you lived in Norwalk?

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Less than 2 Years	12	80%
2 to 5 Years	3	20%
More than 5 years	0	0%
Total	15	100%

### Q: How did you get to and from work today?

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Drove	8	50%
Other	4	25%
Took the train	3	19%
Rode a bus	1	6%
Total	16	100%

### Q: How long do you plan to live in Norwalk?

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
the next 2-4 years	10	56%
For the foreseeable future	6	33%
Leaving in the next year	1	6%
the next 5-9 years	1	6%
Total	18	100%

### Q: Where do you work?

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
In Fairfield County (Outside Norwalk)	6	38%
Elsewhere	4	25%
In New York City	3	19%
In Norwalk	3	19%
Total	16	100%

### Q: If you aren't from Norwalk, where did you move from?

Astoria, Queens, NYC	Monroe, CT
Cambridge, MA	New Canaan, CT (2)
Chandler, AZ	New Rochelle, NY
Chicago, IL	Phoenix, AZ
Eastham, MA	Ridgefield
Fairfield, CT (3)	Stony Point, NY
Manhattan, NYC	Wilton, CT (2)
Monroe, CT	

**Q: What drew you to Norwalk?**

Proximity to Manhattan near beaches, restaurants and retail  
Work, Access, Restaurants  
Cheaper than Stamford  
New, relatively affordable, safe housing  
Cute and near New York  
New building, shorter commute  
Proximity  
Quaint area near SONO!  
Location/restaurants  
Location, restaurants, amenities  
Norwalk Redevelopment  
Family  
Proximity  
More space for less money  
Bar scene  
My birth :p  
Closest city to Stamford  
Job

**Q: What drew you to this particular neighborhood?**

Waypointe restaurants and shuttle to train station  
New neighborhood, luxury housing  
There r a lot of amenities in this bldg.  
Restaurants downstairs  
New, Waypointe  
Value train station walking  
Interesting transitional area  
Colony Grill  
Waypoint  
Ease of move in, Free 2 mos rent and close to train station  
It made my commute really easy  
"Luxury" Apartments  
Waypointe  
Only came for waypointe and amenities promised  
Waypointe  
Barcelona and bobby qs  
Modern facilities