

# Public Meeting re: Improvements to Ryan Park

December 4, 2012

Norwalk Police Department, Community Room

Mike Moccia of the City of Norwalk's Parks Department welcomed attendees and reviewed the purpose of the meeting. Gayle Epp of EJP Consulting Group, LLC provided some background on the South Norwalk Choice Neighborhoods planning process. Eva Erlich of Trinity Financial, the developer for the Washington Village redevelopment, set the context for park improvements. Eric Rains presented two concepts for Ryan Park that incorporated amenities identified by attendees of the South Norwalk Resident Information Fair on September 22, 2012. Copies of the two concepts are attached. At the conclusion of the presentation, participants offered the following comments and questions.

## Public Process

- All public meetings should be advertised in the Norwalk newspaper. A legal notice in the paper is not adequate, and neither is only publicizing on NHA's website.
- Flyers regarding future Ryan Park meetings should be provided to all residents and businesses that are located adjacent to the park.
- All Common Council members should be informed of meetings and meeting minutes via email.
- The City should post the two proposed concepts on their website.
- The meeting does not include sufficient representation from the South Norwalk neighborhood.
- Future meetings should be located at the South Norwalk Community Center since meetings in the Police Department could be perceived as sending a subliminal message of intimidation.
- Friends of Ryan Park should have been consulted before getting this far in the process.

## Washington Village Redevelopment

- **Is there a HUD requirement about the amount of open space in a CNI project?** No, typically decisions related to open space are left to local requirements.
- **If Ryan Park stays as is, can the redevelopment of Washington Village to forward?** Yes, but the quality of Ryan Park has a bearing on the revitalization of the neighborhood.
- **Will the affordable units be interspersed throughout the development?** Yes.
- **Will all units look the same regardless of subsidy?** Yes.
- **Will the affordable units be offered to Washington Village residents?** Yes. NHA and Trinity have made a commitment to prioritize current residents of Washington Village so long as they are in good standing.
- **What does good standing mean?** Good standing means that residents are lease compliant. NHA conducted a meeting with residents of Washington Village earlier tonight to discuss the definition of lease compliant.

- **Siting of workforce housing can be contentious. Sometimes developers meet the requirements by locating workforce housing in another neighborhood. This participant stated for the record that they do not favor the idea of locating workforce housing from this project in another neighborhood.** Trinity reiterated that they intend to building the workforce and public housing units in this project in the South Norwalk neighborhood.
- **Will there be basements in the new housing?** No, basements are not proposed. However, Trinity is exploring the opportunity to locate parking below the housing units.
- Bike lanes should be considered in the creation of the new streets, including bicycle racks.

### Park Design

- **Does concept #2 have an area large enough for a soccer field?** Yes. But there is not enough room for a regulation size Little League baseball field or soccer field.
- Problem with the existing park is that there are not enough activities or options for people of all ages and abilities. For the options presented, they like how the number of options for activities has increased despite the limited size of the site.
- A half-court basketball is not sufficient. A full-sized basketball court will enable more people to engage with each other at once.
- Basketball court will not double as a tennis court as trying to accommodate two different uses on the same space may make it unsuccessful for both.
- **Are any restrooms planned?** No. Currently, the City owns and maintains over 70 parks and 80% of them do not have restrooms because the City does not have enough funding and manpower to maintain the restrooms. As is currently the case, Port-O-Johns can be provided for special events by the event organizer.
- **Restrooms should be provided.**
- The fitness opportunities and community gardens envisioned for Ryan Park are related to health and wellness goals in the People Plan.
- **Could the proposed pavilion be rented?** Yes, much like other city parks, the pavilion could be rented for private events, family reunions, etc.
- The park was built with the intention of connecting it to NEON. The plan should resurrect this connection.
- One participant raised a concern about traffic around the park. However, others present indicated that Washington Street is much busier than Day Street and they did not see traffic as an issue. Suggested that they do crossing designations similar to what is found currently on Washington Street.
- Flowers or some other feature should be added at the intersection of Day and Raymond as a traffic calming device.
- **Has the flooding issue been considered?** Yes, the City has commissioned a study to look at the flooding issue. However, it is believed to be best to leave the park at grade, while the housing would be raised significantly.

- **Why is the children’s play area located close to the street versus the interior of the park?** Thought was to have the play areas closer to the street where there can be more eyes on the park. Additionally, fencing is provided to keep children out of the street.
- **What fencing is proposed?** There will be a fence around the playground for safety but it is not intended to be obtrusive or a visual barrier. There will be consistency in the fencing proposed.
- The proposed community garden was located to avoid shadowing by neighboring buildings.
- One participant expressed disappointment that neither option included the butterfly garden. That was an unfortunate oversight. However, the butterfly garden can be accommodated in either concept and will be included going forward.
- **Where will wheelchair accessible parking be located?** Near NEON.
- **A water feature sounds cool. How challenging is it to maintain?** Any water feature that is installed must be vandal-proof. The one currently located at Devon’s Place is sculptural and nautical and is easy to maintain.
- Several participants expressed concern about safety. One participant questioned whether a gate should be installed so the park can be closed at night. Another member objected to fencing and gating the park but supported enforcing a curfew. There seemed to be consensus that additional “eyes” on the park is a critical element to increase safety. Given the limited park department budget, the City noted that the community makes the difference regarding public safety. Synergy with the neighborhood to ensure the park is active and vibrant is key. However, Trinity indicated that they typically hire security at their redevelopment sites and might be able to include patrols of the park as part of this endeavor.
- A participant expressed an interest in seeing some “brightness” in the neighborhood. She advocated that improvements to both Washington Village and Ryan Park move forward to provide some motivation for South Norwalk to use the park productively and not for undesired activity.
- The proposed concepts attempted to build in flexibility and offer many options for users of all ages.
- One participant expressed a concern about liabilities. Allegedly there has been spillover from Saturday night party rentals in the South Norwalk Community Center that has led to undesired activity in the park late at night.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Public process regarding proposed improvements to continue.
- Trinity to present concepts to the Parks and Recreation Commission on December 19, 2012.
- Following the presentation to the Parks and Recreation Commission, NHA will include the two proposed concepts in the draft Transformation Plan due to HUD by December 31, 2012 as a placeholder. The draft plan will acknowledge that additional public process is needed to finalize the plans for improvements to Ryan Park.
- Larger public meeting on the South Norwalk Transformation Plan will be scheduled in January 2013.