

April 20, 2018 Nancy On Norwalk

**NORWALK, Conn. – Here’s a collection of Central Norwalk doings:**

1. **Library parking lot open – to all, temporarily**
2. Uprising against Head of the Harbor North
3. Move for Wall Street train STOP

1.

**Parking open next to library**

Norwalk officials got out the scissors Thursday to celebrate the 38 newly-created parking spots next to the Norwalk Public Library.

“This is actually something that has been needed for a very, very long time,” Rilling said after the ceremonial ribbon cutting along Mott Avenue.

“... (Lack of parking) been a problem here for many, many years. It’s not something that started on my watch, I said it will be something that will end on my watch and it did. So, we got it done.”

Former Mayor Alex Knopp, Norwalk Public Library Board of Trustees Chairman, thanked Parking Authority Chairman Dick Brescia for putting the project first on the construction list for this “summer,” and Senior Civil Engineer Vanessa Valadares was lauded for getting the work done on schedule, in two weeks.

The new parking lot, which will be free for library patrons, is the product of a deal made between the city and Milligan, a developer who owns the lot.

Milligan was set to build a 69-unit apartment building on the lot, but Knopp led the Library Board to appeal the Zoning Commission’s approval of the project. Eventually, the city paid Milligan \$460,000 for a six-year purchase option for his property, with a fixed purchase price of \$4,885,000.

Rilling, in the run up to last year’s election, said the library parking problem would end on his watch.

The 38 parking spaces include two handicapped spots. Gates are not yet installed and anyone can use the lot; Valderes said she expects the gates to be installed in June and for parking rates to be enforced in July.

Library patrons will be able to get their tickets validated and park for free. Other parkers will pay the standard Parking Authority rate of 50 cents an hour, she said.

There were formerly 28 spaces in the lot, but Milligan closed it off for more than a year as the legal battle wore on.

“We are very grateful for the Mayor’s support, which made the lease arrangement possible,” Knopp said.

“It looks rather beautiful, I love the fence down at the end,” Rilling said. “So, this will provide parking for library patrons. I don’t have to tell anybody, drive through here, it’s tough to find a parking spot. Now they have the area where they can park.”

There were also some quips.

“My wife is the vice chairman of the library and if we hadn’t gotten this thing put together, life would have been very miserable,” Brescia said.



From left, Norwalk Parking Authority Chairman Dick Brescia, Norwalk Public Library Board of Trustees Chairman Alex Knopp, Norwalk Mayor Harry Rilling, Norwalk Public Library Assistant Director Sherelle Harris, Norwalk Public Library Trustee Patsy Brescia and Senior Civil Engineer Vanessa Valadares cut a ribbon Thursday for the new parking lot next to the Norwalk Public Library.



Cynde Lahey, Dick Brescia, Alex Knopp, Harry Rilling, Sherelle Harris.

Rilling made note of the weather, saying, "As we enter winter, we are able to get this lot paved before the snow started."

Valderes noted that it snowed while the lot was being constructed, and it still was done in the planned two week timeframe.

"Gradually, we keep getting a little more parking, which is fabulous for the library. It allows us to get some additional things here for our city," Patsy Brescia said.

Knopp in June said purchase is only one option for the property, calling it 'entirely possible that the city could acquire what it needs for library expansion and parking with no additional expenditure at all.'

City officials would "explore all of the available opportunities and options to its advantage," he said.

"We would love to have a better project," Milligan said. "I hope the city never spends a dime acquiring the property, either. That's not what we're doing.. Stay tuned. I am sure the brightest minds will be involved in expanding the library."

Those efforts have not started, Knopp said Thursday, calling it a priority to "use the opportunity created by the option to purchase to provide the parking."

"Today is the end of that process and now we'll start working on the other aspects of the plan," Knopp said.

Milligan said Wednesday that the parking lot looks great.

"I am very happy. It certainly better than what it was," he said.

Of the plans for the future, he said, "I would be lying if I told you I was completely satisfied. I will tell you that I am very eager to kickstart that conversation. Thjs is the first step, hopefully that will begin soon."

Knopp said there are "really two big aspects" to the process ahead.

First, "Start a planning process that involves a lot of public consultations and dialogue about future needs and services that the library should provide to people in Norwalk," Knopp said. "The second is to start discussions about the various configurations of land use and acquisition that would make that possible."

#### Comments:

Wondering [April 20, 2018 at 7:43 am](#)

...about Norwalk's "authorities" (Parking, Redevelopment, Oak Hills, etc.). Does the City provide things like staff support, engineering services, office space, etc. for some or all of them? Weren't authorities originally set up to be self-supporting? From article looks like City engineering did work for this Parking Authority project.

## 2.

### **King: Nothing new on DiScala's plan for Main Street lot**

Nearly 1,000 people have signed [a petition to "Save Norwalk's Historic Downtown"](#) from a plan to sell "the Main/High Street municipal parking lot to a private developer to build apartments and a private garage."

Jackie Lightfield of Norwalk 2.0 started the petition Monday after NancyOnNorwalk quoted Redevelopment Agency Executive Director Tim Sheehan as saying "There is a draft agreement that still is being negotiated between the city" and developer M.F. DiScala for the Head of the Harbor North development, which would involve an apartment building over the Main Street lot.

The city would retain the public's rights to park on the lot, in the draft agreement that was presented more than a year ago. Construction would take 16 to 18 months, during which time people would be forced to seek alternative parking areas, Jason Enters of M.F. DiScala said at the time.

"The businesses surrounding the lot and the public park will lose parking that they depend on," Lightfield's petition states. "Please sign our petition and say NO to selling or giving away the Main High Street lot."

As of 2 a.m. Friday, 979 people had signed the petition.

Assistant to the Mayor Laoise King said in a Thursday email that Sheehan's comment "is accurate in that there is no final agreement so it still needs to be negotiated – however, there have been no recent discussions between the city and the preferred developer.... There has been no change in status with this project."

Sheehan is out of the office until Monday.

"I believe the developer has been focusing on completing {Head of the Harbor South}," King wrote. "I am sure discussions will begin again once they finish, but that process will include an open and public process before any final agreement is made."

M.F. DiScala said more than a year ago that it would build an 80-apartment building over the lot, work to make the lot more level and replace its 91 public parking spaces with 93 public parking spaces.

The project drew criticism during the 2017 mayoral campaign with unaffiliated candidate Lisa Brinton Thomson charging that the city was planning to "give away" valuable land for a dollar. Sheehan responded that "a conditioned Option Agreement" was being discussed, which would have a deadline for DiScala to buy the property and an associated fee, with the value of the land determined by an appraiser. City approvals would be factored into the appraisal.

Enters said in March that M.F. DiScala hopes to get an agreement by the spring.

"We have done a schematic design and we have an as-of-right building to go there and we are working with Redevelopment to get an agreement in place," he said.

Lightfield's response to a Thursday NancyOnNorwalk email did not comment directly on the Main Street lot issue.

3.

### **Not a station, but a stop**

A group of committed Wall Street area stakeholders have adjusted their appeal for a Wall Street train facility by calling for a Wall Street train "stop."

This would be not a station or a platform, but just a concrete pad level with the train, said Wall Street Neighborhood Association Board member Jason Milligan on Wednesday.

"The train goes by there 14 times per day. We just need to get the train to briefly stop to let people on and off just like Merritt 7 stop does now. Let's get a trial going where we measure the amount of riders for a year or two. If ridership is high we can explore a platform or station..." Milligan wrote Wednesday to Mayor Harry Rilling, State Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff (D-25) and Corporation Counsel Mario Coppola.

"I think Jason's ideas are great. The more involved knowledgeable people are in the process the better the outcome," said Mike McGuire, the driving force behind the push for a Wall Street train station.

“The best ‘tonic’ for getting the Wall Street area vibrant and thriving again is to reactive a Wall Street Train Stop,” McGuire said. “You can apply all the incentives as noted in the Innovation District but they will only go so far, plus you get a huge pushback from taxpayers that don’t want to subsidize businesses. It’s never a good plan politically to alienated your voters when a simple, elegant solution that would make you look like a star is available.”

Rilling met recently with Connecticut Department of Transportation Commissioner James Redeker and discussed a Wall Street train station.

The city isn’t going to build a platform “unless we get people to say, ‘Yes, we will stop there.’ According to Redeker, the answer right now is no,” Rilling said Thursday. “Now, I don’t know whether that will change. I have written a letter, I have asked about it. Redeker said that he doesn’t see this in the near future.”

“It’s an interesting idea, but there are so many considerations. You know, we have a bus terminal right there, we have the shuttles that are going back and forth to the railroad station,” Rilling said. “They have one on Glover Avenue. They go a couple of miles and have to stop again, and pick up the speed again. I don’t know if Metro North would agree that this is an ideal location. Now maybe at some point. I don’t know whether you build it and hope they will come or whether they come and then you build it. So, we’ll continue to explore the option, I just don’t know if it’s something that would be embraced by Metro North or ConnDOT.”

Asked if Redeker gave any reasons for denying a Wall Street train station, Rilling said, “He didn’t really get into it, he just talked about who is going to build the station.”

The cement pad would be paid for locally, Milligan said.

“Everyone agrees that having the ability to get on or off the train at Wall st would be great,” Milligan wrote. “The disagreement comes with the potential cost, and if it is worth it. A ‘stop’ should be free or close to it, and we could monitor how mush usage it generates. Any cost that is associated with creating a flat pad to get on or off the train could be easily raised privately or potentially funded by the parking authority or some other city agency.”

McGuire wrote:

“Interesting statistic – the Wall Street neighborhood is the 3rd largest CBD (Central Business District) in terms of total office space and residential housing units in Fairfield County, its only surpassed by Stamford and Bridgeport for sheer size (total square footage of space used for office and apartments – see attachment).

“The Wall Street Neighborhood has seen some pretty amazing growth over the past two decades, as had most of the Norwalk Commercial Districts. The best thing the City can do for Wall Street now is clean up the POKO/Duleep messes, and fight for a Train Stop, then get out of the way and let the private sector take over. Now that would lead to real Grand List Growth.”

#### [Wall St Train Stop](#)