

APPROVED

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Common Council of
The City of Norwalk

WALL STREET REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Norwalk, Connecticut

Summer 2004

GENERAL STATUTES OF CONNECTICUT
Revised to January 1, 2003

TITLE 8

ZONING, PLANNING, HOUSING, ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CHAPTER 130

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: REDEVELOPMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL; STATE AND FEDERAL AID; COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT; URBAN HOME-STEADING SEC. 8-125

(c) A "redevelopment plan" shall include: (1) A description of the redevelopment area and the condition, type and use of the structures therein; (2) the location and extent of the land uses proposed for and within the area, such as housing, recreation, business, industry, schools, civic activities, open spaces or other categories of public and private uses; (3) the location and extent of streets and other public utilities, facilities and works within the area; (4) schedules showing the number of families displaced by the proposed improvement, the method of temporary relocation of such families and the availability of sufficient suitable living accommodations at prices and rentals within the financial reach of such families and located within a reasonable distance of the area from which they are displaced; (5) present and proposed zoning regulations in the redevelopment area; (6) any other detail including financial aspects of redevelopment which, in the judgment of the redevelopment agency authorized herein, is necessary to give it adequate information

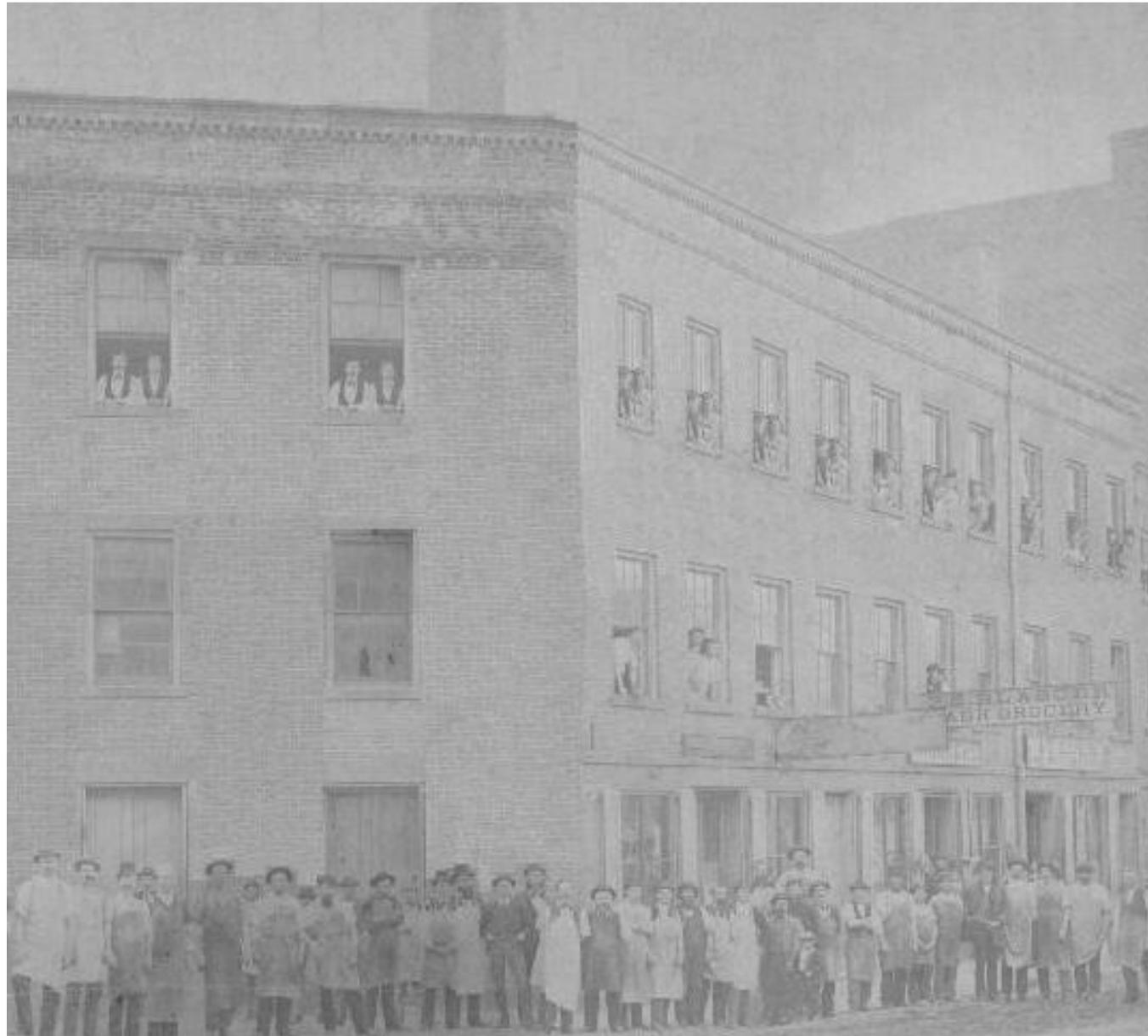


Figure 1: Pottery Factory on Wall Street, ca. 1890, courtesy the Norwalk Historical Society

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Description of Area

Land Use

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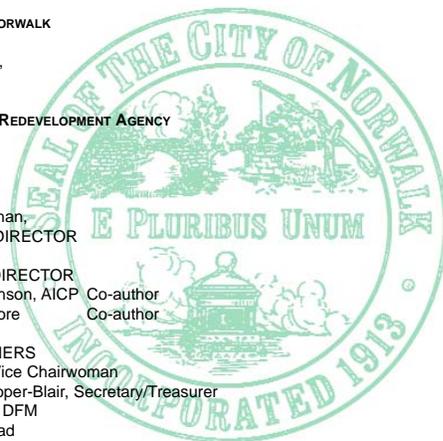
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INTRODUCTION

The Wall Street area has long played an integral role in the economic and historic fabric of the City of Norwalk. Beginning during the colonial period and for much of Norwalk's history, Wall Street was the city's center for banking and commerce, politics and local governance, entertainment, and hospitality. It was also a major employment center, with factories, workshops, and trades throughout the district. Besides the large population that lived and/or worked there, it was a destination for Norwalk citizens, and indeed for the region, as the reach of its bustling commerce brought visitors from beyond Norwalk's borders to Greater Norwalk's downtown: Wall Street.

By the middle of the 20th Century, two factors led to Wall Street's decline in prominence. Like many downtown areas throughout Connecticut, shifts in the economy and the patterns of land use and transportation caused Wall Street to lose ground to the area's growing suburbs. Then in 1955, floodwaters from the Norwalk River caused catastrophic damage to Wall Street by destroying a river crossing, several local roads and buildings on each side of the river.

In the years following this disaster, the City of Norwalk has twice before undertaken initiatives to help the Wall Street area reclaim its former stature. In 1959, it became the subject of Connecticut's 8th Urban Renewal Plan entitled the Wall-Main Urban Renewal Project, which led to the reconfiguration and redevelopment of major infrastructure components in the area. In 1986 the Business District Management Plan resulted in infrastructure and streetscape improvements along Wall Street as well as his-

toric building restorations. Nevertheless, the Wall Street area (hereinafter defined in Map 1 and referred to as the "area") continued to decline, much to the dismay of Norwalk citizens and community leaders who could recall its former prominence, or perceive its enduring potential.

As in the past, today the Wall Street area stands at a crossroads and faces many questions: will it continue to decay and deteriorate indefinitely, whatever the consequences may be? Does the historical record of the Wall Street area over the last 50 years show that plans, designs, and municipal initiatives will fail to produce lasting results? Or, does the Wall Street area represent a unique community asset, worth preserving and restoring? Does it, in fact, represent a significant economic asset, worth marketing and investing in?

Norwalk citizens and city leaders have judged that it is the latter and have deemed the current conditions of Wall Street appropriate for intervention. In many ways, Wall Street continues to be the traditional 'center' of Norwalk, and city leaders have determined that, for Norwalk to be strong, it must be strong at its center. It must restore to prominence a strong and vital Wall Street.

For this reason, people have chosen to revisit the issues associated with lagging development in the area and develop a strategy for achieving its revitalization. This led to a planning process which recently generated The Norwalk Wall Street Area Planning Update, written by the Cecil Group, Inc, approved by the Common



Figures 1 & 2: Wall Street before and after the 1955 Flood

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and
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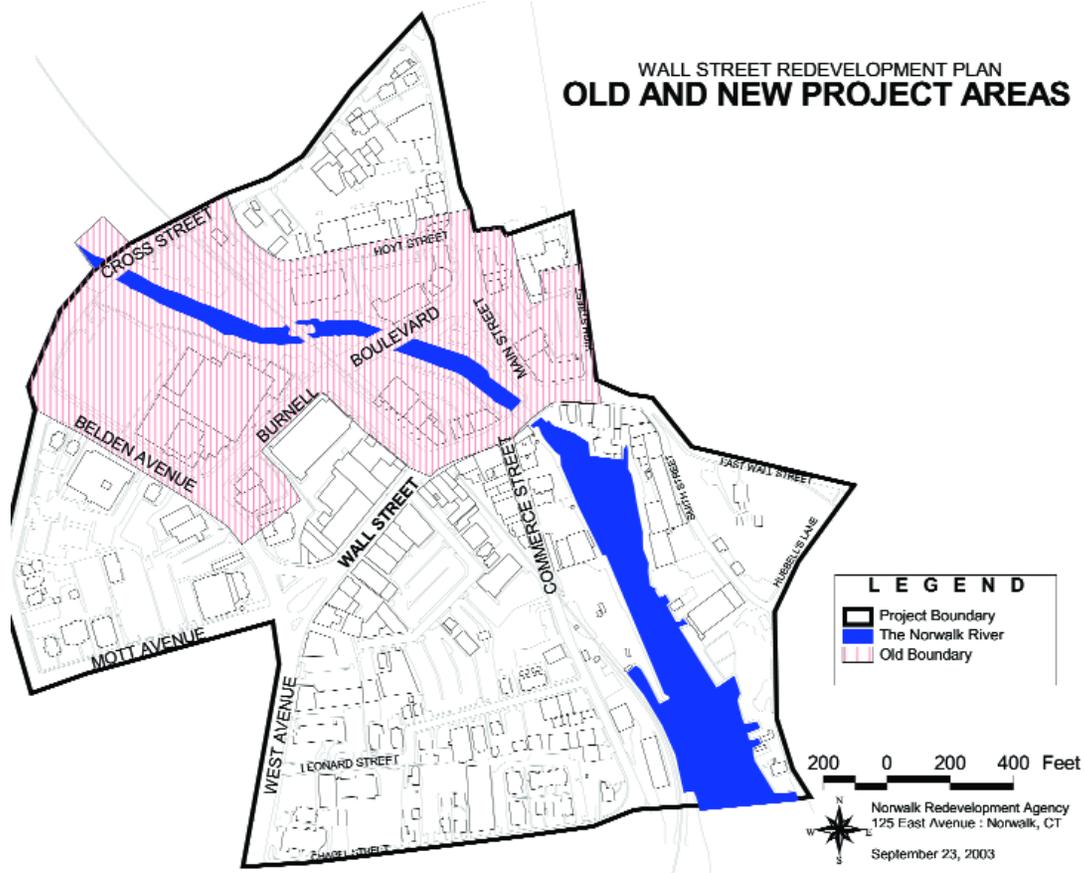


Figure 3: Boundary of the 1959 Urban Renewal Plan within the context of the new Wall Street Redevelopment area.

Council, and hereinafter referred to as the "Wall Street Update (2003)". In order to implement its strategy for the revitalization of the Wall Street area, the City has chosen to create a new redevelopment plan, separate and distinct from the 1959 Wall-Main Urban Renewal Project and the 1986 Business District Management Plan. The substantial passage of time and increase in the proposed project area, together with recent urban renewal case law, such as *Aposporous v. Urban Redevelopment Commission*, *Pequonock Yacht Club, Inc. v. Bridgeport* and *Maritime Ventures, LLC v.*

Norwalk suggest the necessity and appropriateness of an altogether new redevelopment plan reflective of the market forces and demographics currently shaping today's Wall Street area.

In the context of today's market and community values, the vision, goals and objectives of this Redevelopment Plan suggest it to be more feasible than the 1959 Wall-Main Urban Renewal Plan. When originally drafted, the 1959 Wall-Main Plan, in keeping with contemporary urban planning practice, emphasized low-density massing and the demolition of older, seemingly antiquated structures in order to assemble "open" urban land for development. Today, these efforts are viewed to have misunderstood the important historic and economic roles urban centers play within their regions, and to have ultimately driven traditional activities and residential land uses from America's cities. By contrast, this Plan draws on the lessons of this history, as well as on the successful revitalization of the South Norwalk neighborhood; it incorporates historic preservation as a central tenet in the redevelopment of the Wall Street area, capitalizing on market forces to restore a diversity of uses to an urban, residential neighborhood.

Therefore, this Wall Street Redevelopment Plan hereinafter referred to as the "Plan", will serve as the formal implementation document for future Wall Street initiatives. The vision, goals, objectives, and strategies of the Plan are outlined in the following section, followed by other sections addressing the statutory mandates. Unless extended by the Common Council, this Plan shall expire 20 years after approval.

VISION

The future of the Wall Street area is as a vibrant and energetic urban setting that serves as the traditional center of Norwalk's community life. As a neighborhood, it will draw residents from the City as well as the greater Norwalk area to reside, patronize its shops and restaurants, work, and enjoy the natural amenities of the Norwalk River and its surrounding green spaces.

GOALS, Objectives and Strategies of the Wall Street Redevelopment Plan

1. [GOAL] RESTORE THE WALL STREET AREA TO ITS POSITION AS THE TRADITIONAL CENTER OF NORWALK'S COMMUNITY LIFE.

a. [Objective] Establish the Norwalk River as a more prominent aesthetic community feature, encouraging both its stewardship and vitality among visitors and residents of the area.

[Strategy] (1) Work with city officials, developers, business-owners and environmental groups to plan an environmentally sustainable river-front access project that will maximize physical and/or visual access along the river throughout the area.

(2) Encourage the professional design and development of an interconnected urban greenway along the river.

(3) Create an active, working waterfront by supporting a diversity of uses along the Norwalk River, preserving and promoting water-dependent enterprises and structures.

(4) Supply capital budget funds and apply for grants and other funding sources to implement the plan and enhance the greenway.

b. Renew and animate other parks and public spaces throughout the area.

(1) Enhance Freese Park to complement the vision, goals, and objectives of the Plan.

(2) Encourage targeted streetscape improvements; that, improve streets, sidewalks, tree pruning, streetlights, trash receptacles, street planters, and street signs throughout the area.

(3) Adopt a new ordinance, as described more fully in Section V. Zoning, to allow and support sidewalk cafes and street vendors.

(4) Work with taxing district, library, parks and recreation, and the business community to program area parks and public space.

c. Improve the public perception of the area concerning the amount of parking and the level of safety.

(1) Foster joint city/area business-sponsored and advertised promotional events to elicit greater Norwalk residents' rediscovery of the Wall Street area.

(2) In order to improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation, establish a comprehensive signage system identifying the locations of prominent area features, especially including parking resources.

3) Counter negative public perception of the



Figure 4: Objective 1a - Library expansion



Figure 5: Norwalk River looking south

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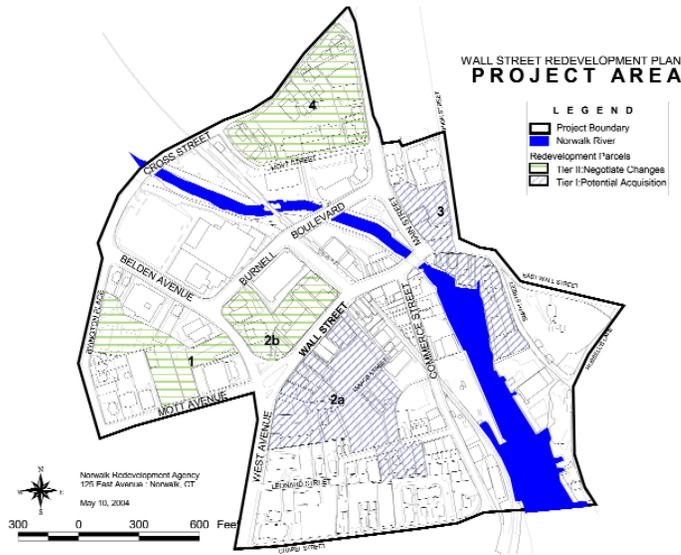


Figure 6: Objective 2a - Assist in assembling Redevelopment Parcels

area's safety by implementing community policing efforts that forge positive relationships with residents and business owners.

d. Expand the Norwalk Public Library and establish it as the Norwalk 'common.'

(1) Negotiate the acquisition or municipal use of adjacent parcel(s) and additional parking in the area identified later in this plan as "Redevelopment Parcel 1,"

for the library to undergo an expansion and renovation and increase its parking supply.

(2) Consistent with the public nature of this institution, and the concept of a classical agora or 'common,' construct a modest plaza or landscaped open space at the library's entrance, mirroring the space planned for "Redevelopment Parcel 2b," discussed later in this document, and beautifying the civic hub.

(3) Create pedestrian linkages to offer a connection to the Post Office on Belden Avenue and the businesses on the western end of Wall Street (See Figures 4I and III. Land Use).

2. STIMULATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA TO ENHANCE PROPERTY VALUES, EXPAND THE TAX BASE, AND CREATE A POSITIVE ECONOMIC CLIMATE FOR INVESTMENT.

a. Assist in assembling disposition parcels to

leverage new, private sector development.

(1) In cooperation with designated developers, obtain property rights to those properties needed to facilitate the development of the two (2) Redevelopment Parcels, designated for acquisition and described hereinafter, relocating affected parties as described in Section IV. Relocation.

(2) Pursue Federal and State funding sources to help complete the environmental characterization and remediation of possible "brownfield" sites that may hinder the assembly of Redevelopment Parcels and impede redevelopment.

(3) Market and dispose of Redevelopment Parcels to prospective developers.

(4) Require conformance of new development to uses and design standards specified in Section II: Land Use and V: Zoning.

b. Expand the amount of capital and financial resources accessible to existing and start-up businesses for property development.

(1) Work with local depository institutions, federal and state agencies to utilize those federal tax incentives created to attract private investment in distressed communities.

(2) Formulate a Main Street Program and/or Special Services District to promote facade improvements, historic preservation efforts, and streetscape maintenance for its members.

(3) Establish working collaborations with area

businesses and lending institutions to oversee the creation of a business micro-loan program to serve both existing and start-up businesses within the Wall Street area.

c. Increase the resident population in the area, offering a greater range and quality of housing options in a desirable neighborhood.

(1) The City will assist in facilitating development on Redevelopment Parcels and/or their disposition to designated developers. Subsequent development must include substantial residential development consistent with this objective and Section II Land Use.

(2) Support present and future zoning initiatives to foster an array of housing opportunities reflecting Norwalk's full range of economic backgrounds and income ranges.

3) Implementation of zoning and design standard reviews (discussed in Section V. Zoning and Section II. Land Use, respectively) to promote a complementary mix of uses that are planned and designed to be compatible and contribute to an identity for the area as a desirable place to live, work and visit.

(4) Follow through with proposed residential redevelopment planned for the intersection of Belden Avenue and Cross Street.

(5) Expand and enhance the scope and mechanisms of current CBD zoning prevalent in the area. a) expand ground floor residential restrictions from sub-area A to sub-areas B and C; b) expand the Amenity Incentive Provisions section of the regulation; c) explore possible solutions to conflicts between proposed development and non-CDB zoning; d) modify the CBD restrictions



Figure 7: Proposed residential development at corner of Belden Avenue and Cross Street

on housing types; e) add live/work units to the zoning regulations list of defined uses, and as an allowed use in the CBD-C zone; and encourage sidewalk cafes.

(6) Utilize all appropriate review authority, including that of the Redevelopment Agency under the authority of this Redevelopment Plan and its Design Standards for the area, to ensure the development of uses and amenities in the area that lend themselves to a sociable, attractive and marketable downtown residential neighborhood.

3. CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE ARCHITECTURAL SETTING.

a. Establish and implement design standards for all rehabilitation, new construction, and signage in the area.

(1) Included in the approval of this Plan is the adoption of the Design Standards that appear under Section II. Land Use, and the authorization of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency (hereafter, the "Agency") in conjunction with other approval bodies, to review exteriors of all rehabilitation, new construction, or signage projects in the area for their consistency with the Design Standards, and to give (or withhold) approval to those projects based upon their compliance with the Design Standards and this Redevelopment Plan.

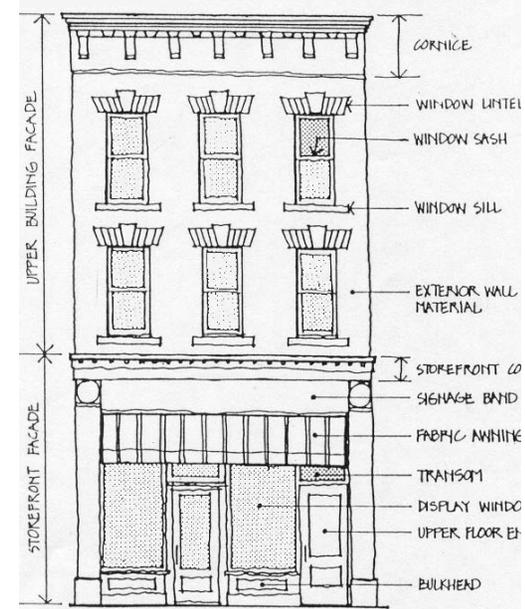


Figure 8: Design Standards

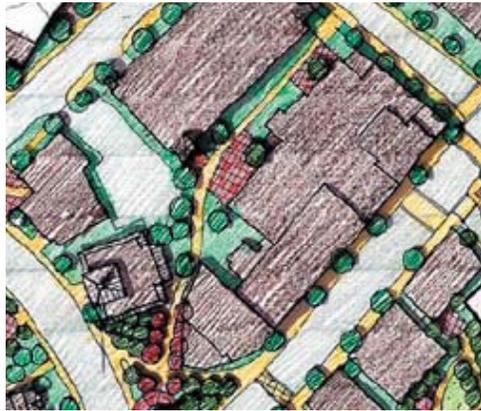


Figure 9: Pedestrian Walkway

(2) Work with area developers, landowners, businesses, and other municipal reviewing authorities to ensure thorough, consistent, and expeditious review by the Agency of all rehabilitation, new construction, and signage projects in the area.

b. Implement and assist with utility upgrades to enhance the aesthetics of and access to the area's infrastructure.

(1) In addition to the strategies listed under 1c, above, work with Norwalk's utility providers in the area to ensure sufficient water, sewer, electric, storm drainage and telephone/fiber to accommodate future development.

(2) Require present and future owners of Redevelopment Parcel 2b to work with public agencies to establish a public right of way and construct a pedestrian path as shown in Figure 9, connecting River

Street to Belden Avenue along the rear of buildings fronting on Wall Street in that Redevelopment Parcel.

(3) Implement an interdepartmental 'model neighborhood' initiative, led by the Mayor's Office, which would focus code enforcement and municipal services on the Wall Street area. The initiative would culminate in a brief, written report from each department director summarizing any unique issues and challenges the department encountered in the area with recommendations for how to make the area a "model neighborhood" from the perspective of health, traffic, building code, etc.

c. Implement an effective historic preservation program.

(1) Make available in print and online a convenient brochure for land- and business-owners in the area describing local and state regulations and incentive programs related to historic preservation listed in Section II. Land Use.

(2) Train Agency staff in national and state historic tax credits and other tax incentive programs related to historic preservation.

(3) Offer free, preliminary in-house consultation at the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency to developers and property owners working with historic properties in the area.

(4) Coordinate area preservation initiatives with the Norwalk Preservation Trust, including the establishment of a national register historic district in the area.

(5) Expand, actively market, and implement the City of Norwalk's Phased Increase Assessment Program in order to encourage the rehabilitation of historic properties (shown in Figure 30) by deferring the increase to property assessments resulting from the rehabilitation.

d. Implement the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency's Facade Improvement Program.

(1) Make available in print and online a convenient brochure for land-owners in the area that describes the facade improvement program listed in Section II. Land Use.

(2) Allocate public and private resources to fund the Facade Improvement Program listed in Section II. Land Use.

(3) Proactively seek out and recruit eligible property owners and private citizens to participate in the Facade Improvement Program.