

Manresa Island Reuse and Economic Impact Analysis Study
Workshop Summary
September 2017

The second public workshop for the Manresa Island Reuse Study was conducted at the Norwalk City Hall on the evening of Monday, September 25, 2017. Over seventy-five Norwalk residents and stakeholders attended the workshop. Advertisements in local news sources and press releases were posted prior to the workshop and notice was sent via an email distribution list.

The workshop began with introductions from Mayor Harry Rilling and Charlie Taney from the Manresa Association. Francisco Gomes, FHI's Project Manager, gave a detailed presentation about the site, remediation strategies, reuse options, and associated costs. This was provided as a follow-up to the first public workshop, which focused on existing site conditions, environmental features and concerns, and remediation strategies. Different reuse strategies were described, including; use as a passive recreation site, solar farm, marina, low density residential, medium density residential, and high density residential. These options were analyzed based on their tax generation implications, public opinion, environmental benefits, and remediation costs. Following the presentation, breakout sessions were conducted. Each table of attendees was tasked with identifying pros and cons associated with the following development types:

- Passive open space
- Solar Farm
- Marina
- Low density residential
- Medium density residential
- High density residential

Following the break-out sessions, a representative from each group reported their groups findings to the room.

Overall, most people were in favor of the property being converted into passive open space. Use as a solar farm or marina, or a combination of mixed uses was also favorable, but attendees were cautious about the constraints of building in a flood zone and on a site with contamination issues. Concerns for added traffic and noise were also discussed. Most groups reported that maintaining or gaining public access in this location is critical, and would be an asset to all in the community. Concerns for the environment and natural habitat in the area were also expressed. Residential uses were least favorable and many groups believe these uses are perceived as not practical due to high remediation costs and concerns about environmental quality. A full list of responses is provided on page 3.

Image 1



Workshop attendees during the presentation

Image 2



Breakout session group discussions

Passive Open Space

Pros:

- Less traffic (x2)
- Increase values of parcels that view the power plant, this will generate more tax dollars for the City (x2)
- No risk of pollutants in the water, air, etc.
- All South Norwalk would benefit, improvements to quality of life (x3)
- Structure would be torn down
- Wildlife conservation and habitat (x2)
- It would be a gorgeous attractive space, visually very appealing (x3)
- Open space is needed in Norwalk (x2)
- Properties like this don't become available that often, Norwalk should take advantage of this
- It would be a low-cost solution
- No flood concerns if converted to passive open space
- Mixed use scenario is also favorable, with passive open space and solar farm, or charter boat base
- Public access could be maintained (x2)
- Potential for state and federal funding
- Wetlands act as a buffer to protect shoreline and limit flooding
- Could passive space be combined with other uses such as solar or a restaurant?
- Could be used for educational purposes, partnerships with Maritime Association, research vessels, etc.

Cons:

- Loss of tax revenue up front, while waiting for tax evaluations to increase
- Negative tax implications (x3)
- Skeptical of positive tax revenues in the viewshed
- Limited appeal if pedestrian only
- Costs of maintaining the site
- Remediation is too costly to make ownership feasible
- Wouldn't be utilizing the existing deep-water dock
- In a remote part of Norwalk

Solar Farm

Pros:

- Revenue from electricity generation if owned by the city- free energy for municipal buildings possibly? This could compensate for tax losses
- Wouldn't have to look at power plant x4
- More aesthetically pleasing than other options presented

- Public Subsidies?
- Good, renewable energy (x2)
- Would contribute to regional air quality goals
- Would be great for the environment overall (x2)
- Very low traffic, would not generate added boat or car traffic (x2)
- Could have solar farm built over parking lots (some schools are doing this)
- Would energy savings be distributed to all residents, or just the 700 – 800 homes that it would produce enough power for?

Cons:

- Risk of pollutants release from construction and remediation
- Less land for wildlife/nature
- Would any fill to the land cause neighboring communities to flood?
- Tax exempt, so no tax revenues (x3)
- Not using the site to its full advantage
- No public access (x2)
- High upfront costs associated with cleanup
- Commodity fluctuates
- Potential for obsolescence
- Negative environmental impacts to existing species on site

Marina

Pros:

- Demand for larger vessels and the revenue it would generate
- Possibility of state subsidizing marina for larger vessels
- Boat slips are needed (x2)
- Aesthetic to look at, picturesque
- Consistent with original use as a Jesuit Retreat/recreational area
- Tax implications are neutral, City would not lose money
- Adds more public access to the water (depending on ownership and ROW's)
- Could be mixed used, with public and private use (x2)
- Low traffic
- Could have a high-speed ferry
- Could leverage Norwalk's seaport heritage
- Potential gas stop for boats
- Marinas provide jobs
- Could do additional dredging and use the fill to raise site above the flood plain
- Could be used for large boat dry storage
- Super yacht/ mega yacht marina

Cons:

- Less land for wildlife/nature
- Risk of pollutants release from remediation/construction
- Would any fill to the land cause neighboring communities to flood?
- Noise pollutant (x2)
- Seems like there are already too many marinas
- Increase in traffic to the site x4
- Limits swimming and kayaking, etc.
- Pavement (increased impervious surfaces) and runoff is bad for water quality
- Increase in boating activity and traffic (x3)
- If private, this would eliminate access (x2)
- Environmental impacts of more boats
- Visual impacts associated with a Marina/boat yard (cranes, winter storage, etc.)
- High exposure to hurricanes and weather in that location, not very sheltered or protected

Low Density Residential

Pros:

- Might be a desirable place to live if the smokestacks and plant were demolished
- Mixed use scenarios- low density housing and solar farm (x2)
- Would be least offensive of the residential scenarios
- Could elevate site to above flood levels

Cons:

- Less land for wildlife/nature
- Risk of pollutants release from remediation/construction
- Would any fill to the land cause neighboring communities to flood?
- High cleanup costs (x2)
- Stigma of contamination may prevent lots/ and homes from selling, site probably won't appeal to luxury buyers (x2)
- Houses would have to be very expensive
- Not very practical (x3)
- Building on existing flood plain doesn't make sense
- No public access (x2)
- Creates exclusivity- not sure we need more of that

Medium Density Residential

Pros:

- Like Harborview, people like that neighborhood
- Would "spread" the cost of cleanup over more lots and generate more revenues
- Mixed use scenarios– medium density and solar farm

- Could improve “safety” at Woodward
- Tax revenue increases

Cons:

- Less land for wildlife/nature
- Risk of pollutants release from remediation/construction
- Would any fill to the land cause neighboring communities to flood?
- Increased traffic, too many cars (x2)
- Would need a sewer and utilities, increased infrastructure costs to the city (x2)
- Emergency access would be challenging
- It would be an added burden to the school system (x2)
- No public access to the water
- Costs are high

High Density Residential

Pros:

- Could be low income housing
- More tax revenue for the City
- Mixed use scenarios - high density and solar farm

Cons:

- Cost of added utilities and services, infrastructure costs to the City (x5)
- Less land for wildlife/nature
- Risk of pollutants release from remediation/construction
- Would any fill to the land cause neighboring communities to flood?
- Visual impacts, could be as much of an eyesore as the power plant
- Added traffic (x3)
- Burden on the school system (x3)
- Impacts to the birds and environment in the area
- Flooding risks (x3)
- No public access to the water
- Would be moving in the wrong direction
- Potential risk that remediation won't work and Norwalk will end up with lawsuits

Ideas:

- A mix of uses was popular and discussed many times; a mix of residential, solar farm, parking etc.
- Passive open space is very favorable
- Everyone loves the idea and prefers passive open space, but a combination of uses would generate money
- Idea of large scale marina, condo, dockage space for mega yachts large vessels, and a club house facility that would have limited seasonal use
- Norwalk harbor access would be great- it would be an asset to the city to acquire public access to the waterfront

- Return it back to an industrial use again- it's already a dirty site. (x2) An idea came up to move Divine Brothers to Manresa, and free up space in another location (at the current Divine Brothers property)
- Should highlight Norwalk's history as a seaport town
- Idea for a Maritime Museum, SONO Seaport
- Educational use
- Open space would be great, but there are doubts that property values (and taxes generated from this) would increase enough to combat the loss of tax dollars paid from NRG

Cons:

- And development would leave less land for wildlife and nature
- Negative aspect of development would be an added load on schools, town infrastructure and maintenance crews (plowing, etc.) emergency services. Costs for sewer, water, roads would be a big impact on the City
- Residential doesn't seem feasible with the costs of remediation required for residential use as well as the stigma associated with the power plant site
- Low density residential seems ridiculous and unfeasible
- Currently, with super storms and sea level rise, it is irresponsible to build things in a floodplain location such as this
- There are 8 species of concern, including the bald eagle on the site, any development would have to be sensitive to the area, as it has become an incredible natural asset
- A large marina would be an issue for the residential neighborhoods adjacent to Manresa (noise levels, traffic, etc.)

Questions following discussion of break-out session findings:

- What if we just leave it alone? How long would it take to "self-clean"?
- Are there flood impacts associated with development (on surrounding neighborhoods) with the displacement of water
- Does capping of the site slow down natural attenuation?

*(x2) = number of times a comment was documented