

REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Tuesday, January 30, 2018, 7:00 PM

Location: East Hartford Town Hall, 740 Main St, East Hartford, CT 06108

Subject: Silver Lane Corridor Study, Public Meeting #1

Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
<u>TOWN STAFF</u>		
Marcia Leclerc, Mayor	Town of East Hartford	mleclerc@easthartfordct.gov
Eileen Buckheit	Town of East Hartford	ebuckheit@easthartfordct.gov
Tim Bockus	Town of East Hartford	tbockus@easthartfordct.gov;
Michael Daniels	Town of East Hartford	mdaniels@easthartfordct.gov
<u>STUDY TEAM</u>		
Emily Hultquist	Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)	ehultquist@crcog.org
Jillian Massey	CRCOG	jmassey@crcog.org
Patrick Zapatka	Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)	patrick.zapatka@ct.gov
Casey Hardin	TranSystems	crhardin@transystems.com
Kimberly Rudy	TranSystems	karudy@transystems.com
Ben Hosley	TranSystems	behosley@transystems.com
Rory Fitzgerald	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)	rory.fitzgerald@fhiplan.com
Rebecca Augur	Milone and MacBroom	raugur@mminc.com
Patrick Gallagher	Milone and MacBroom	pgallagher@mminc.com

1. Introductions:

Marcia Leclerc, Mayor of East Hartford, welcomed everyone to the first public meeting for the Silver Lane Corridor Study. She outlined some of the preceding and ongoing studies within the past several years including the Brownfields Area Revitalization (BAR) Planning Grant the Willow Brook Flood Mitigation Study, and the Working Cities Challenge. The BAR Grant is working closely with the Silver Lane Corridor Study to evaluate underutilized parcels of land across the town which make up the majority of East Hartford's developable land. The Willow Brook Flood Mitigation Study resulted in a Conditional Letter of Map Revision (CLOMR) for the Willow Brook, reducing the flood zone area. . The Working Cities Challenge is an initiative to help communities improve economic outcomes by advancing proposals that tackle complex challenges facing lower income residents. After providing a background of the recent and ongoing studies performed, Mayor Leclerc then opened the floor to Eileen Buckheit, East Hartford's Director of Development, Emily Hultquist, CRCOG's Principal Planner, and Casey Hardin, TranSystems Project Manager, who each thanked the audience for attending the meeting prior to beginning the opening presentation.

2. Transportation Study and Land Use Presentation:

E. Hultquist started the presentation by explaining the nature of corridor studies and the need for them when developing a master transportation plan. She further elaborated that such a plan would be necessary in order to promote orderly growth, encourage efficient use of public infrastructure provide a guideline for roadway improvements that all included parties can refer to. The basis for the Silver Lane Corridor Study, Emily explained is to determine viable transportation improvements for the segment of Silver Lane running between Route 15 and Forbes Street. C. Hardin began a discussion of the existing transportation conditions in the Study Area. This segment of Silver Lane has an average daily traffic (ADT) of 11,400-17,600 vehicles

per day. Two intersections in the Study Area were highlighted for their levels of service (LOS), or delay expressed in seconds per vehicle. These were the intersection of Silver Lane with Roberts Street and Forbes Street which both carry operate at LOS C (20-35 seconds per vehicle) in the weekend midday period, and LOS D (35-55 seconds per vehicle) in the weekday afternoon period. Casey went on to highlight portions of the corridor that were impacted by an above average number of crashes, which included areas with commercial driveways and intersections with the highest travel volumes including the intersections at Roberts Street, Simmons Road, and Forbes Street. Casey highlighted the existing daily ridership for bus routes on Silver Lane, Route 83 and Route 121, which exceed 2,000 and 1,300, respectively. He noted that stakeholders have discussed with the Study Team the need for improved access and connections to destinations outside of Silver Lane. Casey noted the existing gaps in the multi-use trail and sidewalk networks along Silver Lane. Expansion of the multi-use trails and elimination of sidewalk gaps would provide the community with better and safer access to bicycle and pedestrian routes.

The next section of the presentation on land use concerns along the corridor was led by Patrick Gallagher, Planner at Milone and MacBroom. Patrick began by reviewing the existing zoning regulations in that have been guiding the Town's growth and development, with special attention to those that pertain to the Silver Lane Corridor. Patrick briefly outlined some of the most recent developments over the past decade that have contributed positively to East Hartford's commercial and economic growth including Aldi supermarket, Dunkin Donuts, CVS Pharmacy, and Dollar General. He then highlighted a number of vacant and underutilized parcels potentially available for development to further increase economic growth. Some of the vacant land highlighted include a 1.9 acre parcel between 249 and 257 Silver Lane, a 17 acre parcel between 675 and 711 Silver Lane, a 35.2 acre parcel on 825 Silver Lane and a 6.8 acre parcel adjacent to the existing Pratt & Whitney Gateway. Some of the underutilized properties mentioned include the vacant Showcase Cinemas site (65,847 SF), 15 units in Silver Lane Plaza (112,115 SF), 2 units in the Charter Oak Mall (26,078 SF), and 2 units in the plaza between 467 and 479 Silver Lane (14,857 SF). Some major constraints to development on Silver Lane are wetlands and FEMA 100-year flood zones.

Milone and MacBroom's key takeaways from their retail market study showed that the corridor contained and oversupply of retail space which included many vacancies in older "big box" type developments along the eastern end of the corridor. Some of the strategies proposed to meet these issues include the development of more unique and niche mixed use development to stimulate a more traditional commercial core near Forbes Street and Roberts Street where it is believed these developments would see the most traffic. Increased housing development would also provide the increase local spending power needed to support neighborhood retail along the corridor. Milone and MacBroom's housing market study suggests that regional growth for multi-family housing has been on the rise over the last decade, and Pratt & Whitney's hiring program would be expected to further bolster the housing demand in East Hartford. In order to meet this demand they've suggested that East Hartford aim to provide further market rate rental housing along the corridor which could potentially be found through vacant and underutilized commercial sites. At the end of the presentation attendees were given Silver Lane 2040 post cards and asked to write down ideas they had for their visions of Silver Lane in the future and what they'd like to see, which then segued into the three breakout sessions. Comments received on the post cards are included below in the break out station sections.

3. Break Out Station - Transportation:

The transportation break out session was led by Emily Hultquist of CRCOG and Casey Hardin of TranSystems. The Silver Lane Study Area was divided into three areas for detailed public feedback on the transportation existing conditions. In each of the three segments of the Silver Lane Study Area, traffic

operations, high crash locations, and sidewalk gaps were noted. Some of the public's comments and concerns for the transportation break out session are as follows:

- A 'park and ride' commuter lot could work well in unison with a casino or stadium development. The parking lot of Silver Lane Plaza was noted as a potential location.
- Improvements had already been made to the Forbes Street Intersection through the most recent renovations (approx. 2013)
- Traffic signal on the south side of the Roberts Street intersection requires maintenance
- Signs for I-84 approaching from East Hartford Boulevard of the Roberts Street intersection are misleading and unclear
- A town picnic area is proposed in the conservation area east of Rentschler Field with a trail connection heading south. It was suggested that a trail connection to Silver Lane would be beneficial.
- Flooding issues were prominent in the area north east of the Roberts Street intersection and further development could exacerbate the issue
- Robert Street intersection should be restriped so that eastbound lanes turning left are better defined
- Segment of the corridor between Roberts Street and Mercer Street is used by many pedestrians, and could use wider sidewalks and crossings to support the existing use
- Lots of deer have been spotted along Route 15 and deer crossing signs should be maintained
- Off ramp to Lawrence Street has been useful and should be kept
- A wider sidewalk or multi-use path all throughout the corridor would be useful to bicyclists and pedestrians
- Noted that roadways similar to Berlin Turnpike would not be an appropriate design for Silver Lane, east of Roberts Street
- Noted that on the south side of Silver Lane near the post office, the shoulder is in poor condition

4. **Break Out Station - Long Term Land Use Vision:**

Milone and MacBroom's breakout presentation conducted by Rebecca Augur discussed two proposed changes to East Hartford's zoning map. She urged participants to highlight aspects of the maps that they liked and disliked most with red and green stickers, and to offer any comments and concerns that could help guide the conversation. Some of the public's comments and concerns for the long term land use vision breakout session are as follows:

- Concern that too much emphasis is being placed on creating new, amenity rich development, when there is an equally great need for existing housing to be improved and updated to offer these desired amenities to existing residents
- Safety concerns were expressed about the increased traffic that would be expected due to further commercial development along segments of the corridor that already feel unsafe and overcrowded

- Safety concerns were expressed about the lack of sidewalks and pedestrian friendly infrastructure along the school zones in the corridor
- Many attendees showed a positive reaction to the inclusion of a pedestrian friendly place making park or multi-use trail connecting residential neighborhoods to underutilized segments of the corridor
- Positive reactions received in regards to the inclusion of amenity rich housing developments along the existing cinema and Charter Oak Mall site
- Concern was expressed towards altering zoning regulations to favor commercial development in regions while buyers and developers for the property have yet to be determined
- Focus should be put on the redevelopment of land before developing any unused land
- Desire expressed for more bike lanes, bike racks and bike infrastructure such as an East Coast Greenway extension
- Age restricted housing adjacent to Phillips Farms was generally well received
- Further development on the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Club would need to be heavily buffered from neighboring residential district to prevent unmanageable traffic conditions for resident

5. Break Out Station - Focus Areas:

Some of the attendee's comments and concerns for the focus areas breakout session are as follows:

- A desire was expressed to tear down the underutilized shopping center and Showcase Cinemas
- Concern was expressed over the prominent focus on residential development over retail development such as restaurants and entertainment
- A desire was expressed for more personal services, goods stores, and popular chain restaurants, and coffee shops
- A concern was expressed about the impact of new commercial development on existing residential housing in close proximity and its impact and market value
- Support was shown for a CTfastrak connector station along the corridor
- Concern was expressed towards closing access to Lawrence Street from Route 15, which was viewed as an important local connection from the highway to the neighborhood
- Concern expressed removing travel lanes from Burnside Avenue to provide bike lanes (aka 'Road Diet')
- A suggestion was made to poll the town to find out what kinds of development would be most desirable and then to establish interested developers for those businesses prior to implementing zoning changes
- Increased access to skating, cycling, and jogging could make the town more of a destination spot for outdoor recreation
- Desire expressed for increased outdoor recreation for kids in the form of soccer, hockey, football, and baseball fields.

- Desire expressed for increased support of farm and agriculture centered green space.
- Showcase Cinemas lot could be converted to an industrial and/or business use destination with included restaurants
- Showcase Cinemas lot could be converted to an entertainment center including performance theater

6. Summary and Concluding Statements:

Transportation:

Casey Hardin of TranSystems briefly summarized the results of his session stating that access management was one of the biggest issues expressed by the public and would require further investigation. Much of the public expressed an interest in finding a way to establish a connection for the Charter Oak Greenway throughout the Town. Lastly, the most prominent concern expressed by the public was in regards to existing and increased danger to the public due to excess traffic.

Land Use and Zoning:

Rebecca Augur of Milone and MacBroom briefly summarized the results of her session stating that the attendees provided mostly positive support for an increased residential development and the improvement of existing residential development. There was also a very positive response to the inclusion of a community park and outdoors recreation areas in the zoning plan. The most concerning element of the plan appeared to be the increase in traffic that was likely to happen as a result of further commercial development.