

Courant Community / West Hartford

# West Hartford Residents Suggest Improvements For New Park Avenue Corridor



By **Kristin Stoller** · **Contact Reporter**

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**W**EST HARTFORD — The Elmwood section has the opportunity to be cool, a "little funky" and interesting as the result of a planning study being conducted of the area, resident Susan Wiley said Wednesday.

"I want to help [Elmwood] to develop more of a village center-type feel," said Wiley, a member of the Elmwood Business Association. "I think it's a lot of people's idea of the ideal way to live."

Wiley was one of a handful of residents who attended a town planning and design workshop on the New Park Avenue Transit Area corridor Wednesday. The town is researching potential roadway improvements and possible amendments to the zoning ordinance.

Drawing on maps, residents gave town officials their suggestions for improvements. The area is currently zoned industrial, and the zoning was amended a year ago to permit residential, or mixed-use, in the New Park Avenue corridor, Town Planner Todd Dumais said.

Matt Skelly, a transportation engineer at the consulting firm of Fuss & O'Neill in Manchester, said his group is helping the town with the study, and they are currently collecting information about the area, such as conducting traffic analyses. He said the company will hold another public workshop at the end of May and will have a final report and public presentation by the end of June.

"The big change that New Park Avenue has just experienced is two new [CTfastrak] transit stops along the corridor," Skelly said. "We have these two great new bus stops and there is not a lot of development yet out there that takes advantages of those two things."

The biggest challenge the consultants face is that New Park Avenue has historically been a very auto-centric corridor with high vehicle speeds and four-lane roads, said Mark Vertucci, transportation

department manager at Fuss and O'Neill. He said he hopes to shift the focus of the corridor to transportation modes other than cars.

This may include a "road diet," or a traffic-calming scheme that alters the lane configuration of a road, Skelly said. Some ideas that are being considered are fewer travel lanes, skinnier lanes and more bike lanes and pedestrian walkways, he said.

Elmwood resident Lewis Hosier said he would love to see the area become more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. A frequent bike rider, Hosier said he often has to ride on the sidewalks because New Park Avenue is usually too dangerous to ride on.

"People go really fast. They see it as a place where people can really accelerate their cars," Hosier said.

"People are afraid to cross the streets."

A second session was planned for Wednesday from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Elmwood Senior Center.

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