



Route 7/15 NORWALK

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2020

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Be on the
lookout for
the release
of the draft
NEPA / CEPA
environmental
document this
spring/summer!



Comparing Improvement Options

A Primer on the Environmental Documentation Process

The Project Team is currently conducting a detailed review of two alternatives that passed through the Level 1 and 2 screening processes. The two alternatives, 21D and 26, are being evaluated as part of the National Environmental Policy Act / Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (NEPA / CEPA) environmental documentation process.

The intent of the NEPA / CEPA process is to ensure that potential impacts to resources are evaluated and considered alongside the potential project benefits. In addition to natural resources such as wetlands, critical habitats, and endangered plants and animals, NEPA / CEPA also assesses the built environment that humans have created. This includes (but is not limited to) neighborhoods, historic buildings, homes, and businesses. The process requires that any potential impact from an alternative be identified so that it can be avoided, minimized, or mitigated to a reasonable extent.

The project team will assess Alternatives 21D and 26 against the benchmark “no-build” alternative to measure impacts such as:

» **Traffic (vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle)**

How will each alternative change traffic flow for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists? Will there be safety improvements, changes in traffic patterns on local streets, or better regional connections?

» **Noise**

How will each alternative affect noise levels for residents, businesses, and community facilities? This analysis is very detailed, beginning with noise monitoring within the project area and followed by a computer modeling analysis.

– continued on p. 4



The Norwalk River, shown looking north from Glover Avenue bridge, is in the study area.

PAC Member Spotlight: Alan Kibbe

Alan Kibbe is a member of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and a resident of the Silvermine Neighborhood. He has lived in Norwalk for over 40 years.

Alan has been involved with the project since the 2000s, first as a concerned citizen and currently as a representative of the Norwalk Association of Silvermine Homeowners (NASH). Silvermine is a neighborhood that spans three towns: Norwalk, Wilton, and New Canaan. While there is a larger Silvermine Community Association that covers all three municipalities, NASH was formed to advocate for the neighborhood to Norwalk City Hall. NASH particularly

The mission of the **Norwalk Association of Silvermine Homeowners** is to provide a voice for Silvermine as a historic, cultural and natural resource. We support a vision of a rural neighborhood within whose boundaries change can continue to occur while the feeling of community and the “sense of place” remain strong, the important historic structures are preserved, and the existing biodiversity, in all its richness, is not compromised.
<http://www.nashct.org/>

wanted to ensure that the Silvermine neighborhood was considered during the planning of the Route 7/15 Norwalk Project.

Alan got involved in the early 2000s after reading an article in the Norwalk Hour about the project early in its design stage.

“I happened to look at the map and the layout of the interchange, and it came right through my neighborhood,” Kibbe said. “I alerted my neighbors and State Representative Larry Cafero, which led to public hearings and eventually a complete redesign of the project.”

The project stalled in 2008, but when the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) created the PAC in 2016, Kibbe was asked to participate on behalf of NASH. Kibbe views his role as liaising between the Committee, the Project Team, and NASH. “I’m on the PAC and I keep the neighborhood up-to-date on the activities,” he said. He provides regular updates to NASH board members and the neighborhood through emails and neighborhood gatherings.

Kibbe said the process fosters an environment where people are able to express different ideas and viewpoints. The PAC has integrated the surrounding neighborhoods into the project planning.

“The Project Team has done a great job listening to neighborhood concerns,” he said. “All the consultants that are involved have been really helpful in getting people to understand the issues. I’ve been very impressed with the group.”



“The parkway is ... *a museum piece* in a way, but it’s also a 2020 highway, so it has to be designed for 2020 vintage cars to drive on it safely. So there are mixed goals. It’s really interesting finding that *balance*.”

– Alan Kibbe

“It’s more about what’s right for the State, the City, and Silvermine,” Kibbe said.

Alan also serves on the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission. He is retired after spending his career in the entertainment lighting industry.

Landscape Subcommittee Update

In November 2019, the PAC Landscape Subcommittee met to discuss the methodology and criteria for landscape assessment of alternatives in the environmental document. They also discussed how to incorporate the criteria and methodology into the design of the preferred alternative.

The project area is within a section of the Merritt Parkway that is more developed, including office and retail buildings, than most other sections of the Merritt Parkway. The goal was to develop a criteria assessment that recognizes the uniqueness, limitations, and opportunities of this project area and that considers the Parkway as “an experience” to drivers, passengers, and residents of the surrounding area.

The Subcommittee discussed a variety of elements. Subcommittee members stressed a desire to preserve pastoral views and naturalistic plantings, while also making choices that allow for long-term maintenance.

The Subcommittee emphasized the need to preserve the historic character of the Merritt Parkway – its form, geometry, and appearance. They stated that any new infrastructure or vegetation should be consistent with the look, feel, and history of the corridor.

The Subcommittee also stressed the need to consider geometry and visibility as it relates to safety for travelers. They prefer a design that would reduce visual clutter and improve decision making rather than require excessive signage.

Finally, they expressed that the landscape design should continue to beautify the corridor, but the design team should be cognizant of appropriate tree types and potential for overgrowth. This includes such things as avoiding an excessive number of plantings or the wrong types.

The Landscape Subcommittee expects to meet again once the environmental documentation process is complete and the preferred alternative enters the design phase.

The full landscape evaluation criteria table is available on the project website (www.7-15norwalk.com). The table includes nine landscape categories which have numerous assessment criteria for each category.



The Subcommittee supports locations, such as this one on the Merritt Parkway, that have distinctive outcrop and vegetation.



The Subcommittee favors mature tree canopies, however, some locations, as in this photo, are in decline.

» **Cultural resources**

How will each alternative affect the many important cultural resources in the project area, including the Merritt Parkway, Silvermine Historic District, historic bridges, and archaeological sites? Additionally, this topic includes an evaluation of how the alternatives fit into and relate to the overall scenic and cultural landscape of the Merritt Parkway (see the page 3 article on the Landscape Subcommittee meeting for more information on this).

» **Construction impacts**

How will construction activities for each alternative impact traffic flow, local businesses, residents, and first responders and emergency services?

» **Air quality**

How will local and regional air quality be affected by each alternative? It could be affected by changes in vehicular travel patterns, new traffic signals, and / or changes in congestion.

» **Natural resources such as wetlands, endangered species, and critical habitats**

Will either alternative impact natural resources and how extensively? Mapping and cataloging the existing resources will allow the Project Team to assess each alternative's impact to that resource.

For each alternative, the Project Team will conduct an impact assessment for each resource category, and where necessary, identify measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts. Benefits and impacts will be compared for the alternatives and a preferred alternative will be recommended by CTDOT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

In addition to FHWA, the Project Team continues to coordinate closely with several other regulatory agencies, including the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) and the State Historical Preservation Office.

What will the process be moving forward? CTDOT will announce the release of a draft NEPA / CEPA environmental document, which will begin a 45-day minimum public comment period. The draft document is expected to be released in the spring/summer of 2020. A public hearing will occur during the public comment period, likely in the fall of 2020. The Project Team will consider all comments, and as needed, revise the document. FHWA and CTDOT will then select a preferred alternative. After the preferred alternative is selected, the design and permitting processes will begin.

For more information,
presentations and summaries from
the PAC meetings are posted to the
project website:
www.7-15norwalk.com



Attendees at the Fall 2019 Public Informational Meeting review project materials.