

Plantsville: officials face tough choices to continue renaissance

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black lampposts, bollards, and benches for the area, along with trees and a concrete strip in front of each building to take up "irregular spaces." The engineers had used Photoshop to blend their proposed improvements with real photos of Plantsville, in order to give the officials a reliable prediction of what the area could look like.

"We've always had in the back our minds the very successful project that was done right downtown here," Bolinger said. "But we want it to have its own Plantsville look."

Councilor Art Secondo took exception to this, and said that the black fixtures would make downtown Plantsville look too dreary, and that the project should

adopt the green color scheme of downtown Southington.

He also said he was opposed to any of the project being paid through local tax dollars.

"I'm hopeful that between Tony [Tranquillo] and Louis [Perillo], we can get some federal and state money," Secondo said.

Public Works Director Anthony Tranquillo responded that there was potential for grants, but did not seem convinced that they could cover the entirety of the expense. He said the Renaissance project in downtown Southington had combined design and construction costs of \$1.75 million, with approximately \$750,000 paid for with state grants.

Another key part of the conversation was the ques-

tion of how to make Plantsville more "pedestrian friendly." The on-street parking on the already narrow streets in the area has been a consistent safety concern, and many officials and merchants have expressed a desire to eliminate it altogether.

"I've been a business owner for five years, and I can tell you that my customers are afraid to park on the street," said Lisa Sorbello of Village Mercantile. "It's very precarious down there."

Weston and Sampson's current design anticipates the elimination of the parking, with the sidewalks extending further into the street. Police Chief John Daly has said he will support removing on-street parking as long as other municipal parking is made available.

Town Attorney Mark

Sciota said there were a few projects in the works which have the potential for additional parking. The first is that the town is in negotiation with Dean Michanczyk, owner of Dean's Stove and Spa, to provide some municipal parking on his property. Another possible option was to add parking behind the Plantsville General Store, if the owners agree.

"I think Plantsville is poised for very good economic changes," said Councilor Edward Pocock, III. "In order for it work, there has to be an investment in parking."

The design also hopes to take advantage of the nearby Quinnipiac River, and suggests adding viewing platforms on both sides of the bridge on West Main Street, in addition to adding "decorative rails" to the

bridge itself, allowing for better visibility.

"There are precious little opportunities for public gathering in this corridor, but this is a perfect spot for that," Bolinger said. "The river is very much underappreciated."

The councilors seemed to like this idea, but were concerned that doing work near the river would require them to secure additional permits, which could bog down the whole process. The option is also fairly expensive, adding over \$50,000 to design costs and about \$160,000 to construction costs.

Tranquillo said that once the council made their decision on the designs, the project could move forward and would also be "shovel ready," putting it in a better position for grants.

"We've made some progress but admittedly not as much as we would like," he said. "There are thorny issues that need to be worked out."

Specifically, he said there were three decisions the council had to make. The first was whether to eliminate on-street parking. The second was whether or not to include the river platforms. The third was to decide on the color scheme.

Tranquillo's recommendation was that the council approve the plan with elimination of on-street parking in the near future, so the officials could seek out potential grants and stimulus funds. He said the actual implementation of the project, however, could wait until a definitive answer to the question of alternate parking was found.

Police: utilizing virtual training for the first time in history

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the progression of the simulation. Each scenario has multiple outcomes – sometimes a violent civilian will pull a knife, other times he may put up his hands and surrender.

"This is very unique for us," said Sergeant Lowell DePalma. "It's the first time we've done any-

thing like this. We're excited to do it and it's providing additional training."

The scenarios imagined by the programmers placed officers in intense situations. In one simulation, a fight between two gang members breaks out in a local school. In another, a report of a peeping tom escalates into a violent encounter when the

suspect takes a fellow officer hostage.

Though the scenarios often ended in officers firing the weapons, Grey Wolf CEO Bryan Williams said the intent of the technology was to test the decision-making capabilities of the officers.

"It's not as much about accuracy as it is about judgment," Williams

said. "Did I take the right course of action? Did I do something when I should have done something else?"

After each scenario played out, Wilson gave the officer feedback on the decisions he or she had decided to make during the simulation.

In addition to the simulation, the officers per-

formed several defensive training exercises within the police department's gym. DePalma said even seemingly simple tasks like handcuffing a suspect benefited from preparation.

Williams said the department could lease the technology for additional days, though DePalma said that would

depend on the budget situation in the future.

The officers who participated seemed to appreciate the additional training.

"It makes you think," said Sergeant Michael Baribault. "You can't let your guard down. It makes you think as if you're really in those situations. We should do more of this."

Development: West Street may help alleviate the tax burden

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that spot continues to expand, officials are also keeping an eye on safety concerns. The town negotiations with Northstar yielded millions of dollars worth of work on the I-84 exits to mitigate some safety concerns at no cost to the town. In addition, the nearby intersection with Hart Street underwent changes to make it friendlier to drivers.

Town Planner Mary Savage said nearby businesses tended to respond when the town works to

improve the environment. She cited the renovations at a gas station across from Hart Street, which were done shortly after the town's improvements to the area.

"There's a ripple effect as a result of what the town has invested," she said.

Other business owners have also noticed the changes.

"This is a busy street, and it has gotten busier over the years," said Jessica Kim, owner of Rand Cleaners, which is situated in a small plaza not far from Hart Street. "There

have been improvements too. They have fixed a lot of streets and intersections."

Business has been blooming at another part of West Street, the intersection with Curtiss Avenue. Cheryl Swartz is the owner of the Country Dog, a grooming center for pets which also provides day care and training. The plaza across the street from her has expanded rapidly with the advent of facilities like the Right Now Urgent Care Center and the Pumpkin Patch.

Swartz said the additions had made resulted in

some new customers for the Country Dog.

"It's still a little bit country on this road," she said of West Street. "I like that, but I have a feeling it will look like Queen Street soon. Business breeds business, that's the nice part of all this."

West Street also has the advantage of being in close proximity to Lake Compounce. The popular Hidden Valley miniature golf course, situated just shy of the Bristol border, has enjoyed prosperity in Southington for 28 years.

"It's been an especially

good location," said manager Geri Rossi. "ESPN is here right now doing a team-building exercise."

She noted, however, that their portion of West Street did not seem properly equipped to handle traffic from their big neighbors.

"The traffic can get terrible," she said. "Just ESPN employees getting out of work and heading for the highways clogs the whole road, and when Lake Compounce does a concert it can get crazy. We most definitely need more lanes."

The changes on West Street will likely continue for many years, and if the current pattern continues, the advent of more new businesses may bring with it additional improvements to the road itself.

Savage said while the area was not without some problems, the town sees many positives in the area and will proceed carefully.

"It's not all developed yet, and the [Planning & Zoning] Commission has the wisdom of what has already happened in Southington as we go forward," Savage said.

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