



Committee: Conservation & Development Subcommittee  
Public Hearing | Tuesday, February 11, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative DiMassa, Representative Horn, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I would like to thank the committee for their past support and ask them to continue to fund the Westville Village Renaissance Alliance, a small but mighty organization central to the economic vitality and cultural identity of Westville Village.

As you may know, Westville Village is a historic commercial district in the heart of a New Haven neighborhood, Westville, a place that people of all ages, incomes and ethnicities are proud to call home. Westville is known and loved for its vibrant arts scene and its strong community spirit. And these things make it a wonderful place to live, and the kind of place where people want to live. It is a true success story of creative place-making.

WVRA plays many critical roles in keeping Westville vibrant - through business recruitment, advocacy and support; through streetscape maintenance and investment; through marketing efforts to define our identity as a creative, diverse and family friendly community; through public art commissions, and through a formidable slate of community events – including the annual ArtWalk, the Hi-Fi Pie Fest summer concert series and pie-baking competition, and more recently the Citywide Open Studios Westville Weekend - that draw thousands of visitors annually.

WVRA has a strong arts focus - in our events, in our marketing efforts for Westville, in our commitment to public art, and in our support and amplification of the artists and arts-related businesses that are the beating heart of our community. We recognize the important role the arts play not only in the Village's identity, but in its economic vitality. Westville's artists and strong arts identification have been the primary driver of the revitalization we have seen in

recent years. Businesses like Lotta Studio/West River Arts, a photo studio that provides co-working for creatives and houses 13 individual artist studios and Mew Haven, Connecticut's first cat café are creating new community spaces. Even our newer more 'traditional' retail outlets, like Vintanthromodern vintage and the record shop Elm City Sounds are hybrid businesses that do a significant percentage of their sales online. These businesses are increasing Westville's foot traffic while not entirely being dependent on it. They are on the front lines of making modern main streets work, and they have brought a young, vibrant energy to Westville.

In the year since we last testified to this body, Westville has continued to grow. In 2018, WVRA successfully worked with local legislators to update our zoning code to incentivize mixed use development. This year, the two largest lots in Westville sold. The properties are mostly surface lots in a flood zone. Proposed for these long-problematic properties are a collective 330 apartments. Both developments sit along a hidden stretch of the undervalued West River, and both propose highlighting this natural resource, and further developing our Riverwalk.

Another long quiet, key property on Whalley Avenue, the former Lesley Roy Studio, was purchased by the Children's Community Programs of CT. Their gut renovation of this property is underway, and they expect to have 50 + employees moved in this fall. A new restaurant from Franco Camacho, of New Haven favorites Shell + Bones and Geronimo, is set to open this Spring on Fountain Street. And some of the team from our beloved Delaney's Tap have leased a space in the heart of the Village.

Westville faces the same challenges many other main streets face, stubborn empty storefronts, problematic property owners, the questionable future of retail. There is still a lot of work to do. We will continue to recruit, support, amplify and advocate for Westville while providing our vibrant community with a year's worth of opportunities to come together and celebrate. And I hope you will continue to provide us with this critical support. We promise to use it well.

*Elizabeth Donius*

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