

# News

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# Future of west end discussed by advocates

By ELIO GUGLIOTTI  
STAFF WRITER

Elizabeth Grossman stood before a group of roughly two dozen advocates of a rebirth in the city's west end neighborhood and asked a simple question.

"What do you want (the west end) to become?" Grossman asked.

The question was simple, but the answer was looked upon as a vital step in creating a vision for the west end and shaping the future of the neighborhood.

Earlier in the year, the city began a study of the west end neighborhood in partnership with the New Haven-based consulting firm The Capstan Group to formulate a blueprint for the future growth of the neighborhood. On June 12, the fourth installment of a series of meetings in the study was held at the Imagine Nation Children's Museum.

Grossman, chief executive officer of The Capstan Group, said she received a mixed response following a May visionary workshop. The responses, she said, ranged from exciting to a waste of time, and she wondered aloud the reason for some of the apathy.

David Hamelin, a member of the west end neighborhood advisory committee, responded by saying until there's a vision and a plan some people will remain skeptical. "Until you have that, people are just

## Focus group meetings planned

The Capstan Group will be hosting business focus groups as part of the West End Neighborhood Study. Business owners from the west end neighborhood are invited to attend one of the two scheduled focus groups to talk about their concerns and ideas for the

neighborhood.

Both focus groups will cover the same ground and are scheduled for Monday, June 23 from 6 to 7 p.m. and Wednesday, June 25 from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. The groups will be held at the Imagine Nation Children's Museum on Pleasant Street.

kind of sitting on the side and waiting for something to happen," he said.

The vision and plan Hamelin spoke of returned back to Grossman's question of what people want the neighborhood to become. The answer would take the form of the committee's vision statement for the neighborhood, a long term concrete guideline for the west end.

"This is the flagship statement that really clarifies much of what's going to happen (in the west end)," said City Planner Alan Weiner.

Weiner said the vision for the west end must be a unique one. "Otherwise, it's just another neighborhood," he said.

The vision was discussed for roughly an hour, as constant themes emerged from the conversation. The vision that unfolded was one of a welcoming, supportive community with thriving businesses, where its resident are proud of the

neighborhood's unique aspect that make it a desirable destination. However, going from vision to reality takes planning, and with a vision in place the group shifted its focus to strategic priorities to turning the neighborhood around.

Grossman spoke of numerous plans that can be implemented as part of the study to help build the vision, from bike paths and inter-park trails to programs that facilitate homeownership in the neighborhood. The committee narrowed them down to the highest priorities in their eyes, with the Chic Miller property as the highest.

While the property, a former car dealership on West Street, was number one for the committee it's private property and Mayor Art Ward put to rest any rumors of the city buying it.

Ward said the city has informed the owner it's not interested in buying the property, especially with a slow economy right now. He

said the owner already has potential buyers for the property.

Following the Chic Miller property on the list of priorities were streetscape improvements, new parking for businesses, and several other private properties that have become eyesores around the neighborhood,

including the former IGA property.

Committee member Nicholas Piotrowski said the priorities reflect one of the biggest issues facing the neighborhood, blight. "It all comes down to your perception of the neighbor as blight," he said.

Grossman said there's

no magic potion to cure all of the blighted properties in the neighborhood. She said it starts by addressing one property at a time, and the perception will began to turn.

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