

City development visions coming into focus

By **ROBERT KOCH**

Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Representatives of Stanley M. Seligson Properties and 95/7 Ventures LLC outlined to the Norwalk Redevelopment Commission Wednesday night their respective plans to reshape West Avenue and the nearby Reed-Putnam area of South Norwalk.

Afterward, Mayor Richard A. Moccia expressed belief that the two areas will be brought closer together.

"It's sort of unique to have two developers talking the same thing, about the string of pearls connecting with each other," Moccia said. "To be able to go down a corridor like West Avenue, from (the) plan with 95/7, right through to Stanley's plan with West Avenue, and then around to Head-of-the-Harbor ... it's like saying Norwalk finally seems to feel like one town."

Although Interstate 95 will remain, both developers envision their respective projects binding Norwalk's urban spine, from SoNo up West Avenue and onto Wall Street.

"It's about being a piece of five key neighborhoods along West Avenue, which are and will continue to be your downtown," said Richard E. Heapes, a partner with Street-Works LLC, the White Plains-based design firm hired by Seligson Properties to develop the conceptual plan for West Avenue.

The plan, downsized after nearly a decade of input from elected officials, city staff and neighborhood organizations, cuts the West Avenue neighborhood into small walkable blocks that are home to new retail, residential and offices. A new street is cut north-south parallel to Academy Street and West Avenue, in between the two. Building heights range from roughly three stories on West Avenue to six stories along the new street, and down to two stories on Academy Street. Wide tree-lined sidewalks, small shops and restaurants would occupy street level; housing of all types would occupy upper levels except for townhouses along Academy Street. Offices and a health center round out the plan.

"I consider this project to be a legacy of our company and myself to the city of Norwalk," Seligson said. "This project will be perhaps the most outstanding project ever done in the state of Connecticut. That's my goal."

Also Wednesday night, Spinnaker Cos. Principal Kim Morque of 95/7 Ventures LLC outlined the conceptual master site plan for the last dozen acres of the Reed-Putnam project in South Norwalk. The project area lies immediately south of Interstate 95, between West Avenue and the Norwalk River.

"This concept plan wants to connect to South Norwalk, the fabric of this community, and to the central Norwalk neighborhood," said Morque, before pointing out connections to the Seligson project via West Avenue, the river and Crescent Street.

The 95/7 Ventures conceptual plan, prepared by Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners LLP of New York City, shows a 234-foot office building at the corner of West Avenue and Interstate 95 and connected to a six-level parking garage immediately to the east. Building heights would drop to five stories along West Avenue and lower moving southward, so as to permit views of the SoNo area.

Off Reed Street stands a hotel with two residential large residential buildings nearby. A network of one-way streets would feed into the central plaza area with smaller buildings. As with Seligson's plan, small retail and restaurants dominate the street level throughout the project area.