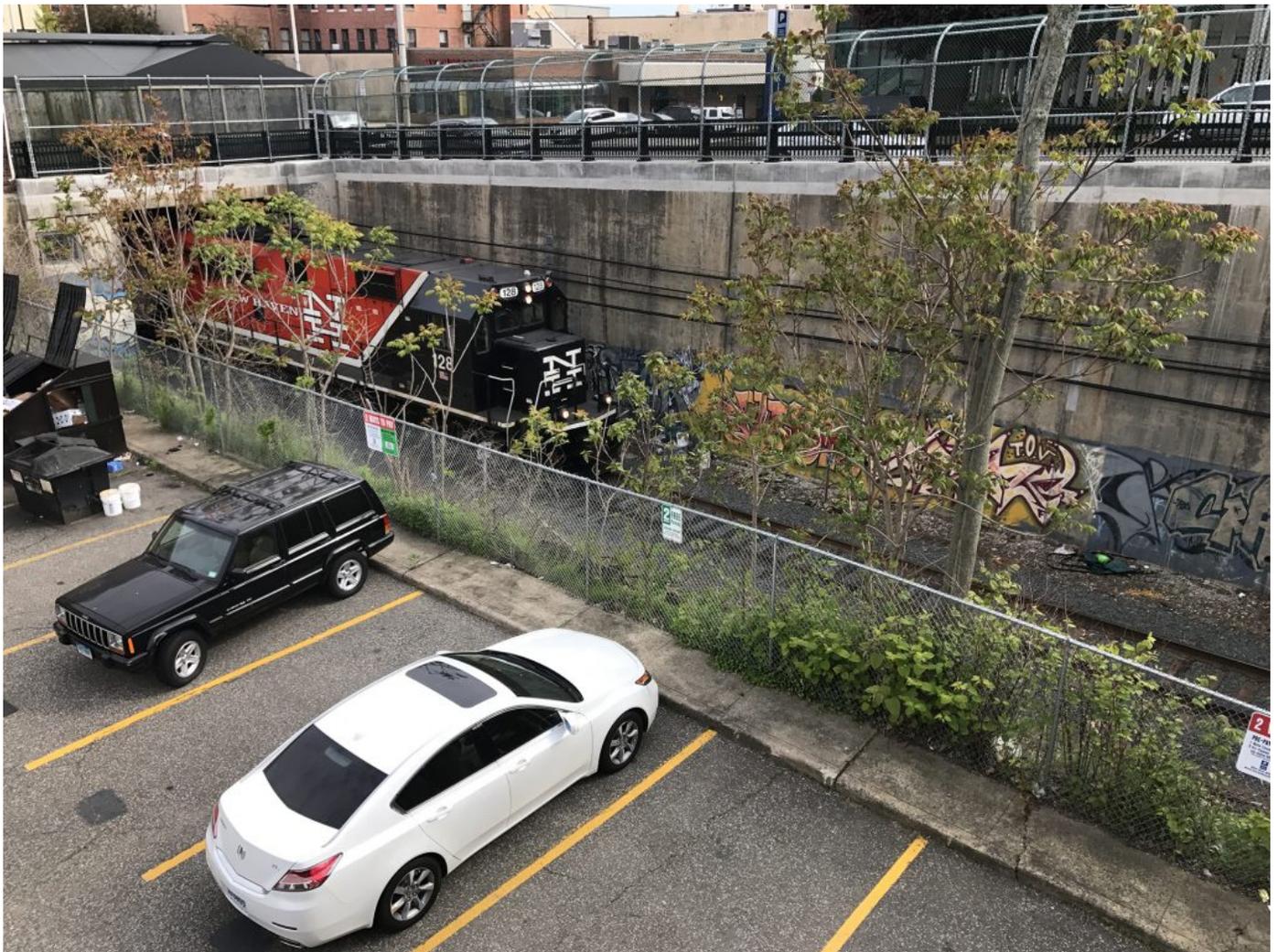


State Bond Commission approves two Norwalk Center projects, Washington Village funds, toll study

By Nancy Chapman 4 : 15 am EDT July 26 2018



The area where Mike McGuire has suggested a train station, along this Mechanic Street parking lot.

Updated, 7:11a.m.: Copy edits

NORWALK, Conn. —The State Bonding Commission on Wednesday approved funding to support three major Norwalk initiatives:

- \$1.5 million for an Innovation and Tech Education Center, said to be “on Wall Street”
- \$250,000 for a Wall Street train station feasibility study
- \$6 million for Washington Village Phase II



Soundview Landing, otherwise known as Washington Village phase one, on June 10.

Also approved by the Bond Commission was the \$10 million study on state-wide tolls announced by Gov. Dannel Malloy last week, to the consternation of local Republicans.

Innovation Center

The hoped-for Wall Street CPTV studio has not materialized, Norwalk Superintendent of Schools Steven Adamowski said in March, commenting that the Norwalk High School Media Pathway partnership with CPTV was still a go.

A Media Pathway in partnership with CPTV is part of the Board of Education’s strategic operating plan. CPTV had been anticipating a \$3 million grant from the state, but it was cut to \$1.2 million, NPS Chief of Technology, Innovations and Partnerships Ralph Valenzisi said at the time, explaining that CPTV had a small loft studio in South Norwalk and was trying to figure out where it could place a full-fledged studio.

Well, the Bonding Commission on Wednesday authorized \$1.5 million for “Connecticut Public Broadcasting to assist with development of an Innovation and Tech Education Center on Wall Street in Norwalk,” according to a press release sent on behalf of State Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff (D-25).

Connecticut Public Broadcasting President and CEO Jerry Franklin is quoted

in the release as thanking the state for supporting state-wide educational initiatives and “truly grateful” to Duff “for championing our efforts in Norwalk, an area of growth for Connecticut Public Television and Radio.”

“We are striving to create another innovative learning center with the Norwalk Public Schools, which will train high school students and veterans in the field of journalism, digital media, project management and life skills. When we first approached Senator Duff two years ago, he immediately embraced this idea and has become our chief advocate,” Franklin is quoted as saying.

Norwalk Board of Education Chairman Mike Barbis said late Wednesday that he didn’t know if this \$1.5 million in state funding is in addition to the \$1.2 million mentioned by Valensizi or if this was the grant Valensizi was expecting.

“I’ll know more tomorrow,” Barbis said.

“Connecticut Public Broadcasting is working to create the state’s first digital-themed business incubation center for start-ups and digital entrepreneurs,” the press release said. “The space is expected serve 6 to 10 businesses per year that would benefit from the shared expertise of the Stamford Innovation Center and CPTV/WNPR in order to create stronger businesses and elevate the message that Connecticut is a friendly state for start-ups.”

Mayor Harry Rilling has spoken previously about CPTV on Wall Street, announcing in 2016 that CPTV was looking to take over the Fairfield County Bank building and use it as a film studio and public assembly place, later touting an expected connection to the Wall Street Theater.

Developer Jason Milligan has a purchase agreement for the bank buildings, contingent on getting Zoning regulations changed to reduce the requirements for parking and amenities in an apartment building.

Rilling did not respond to a Wednesday evening email asking if he knew where the “Innovation and Tech Education Center on Wall Street” would go.

Milligan late Wednesday confirmed his agreement with the bank and wrote, “I have not spoken to CPTV, but I will try to. Perhaps I can find them a building.”

“The Innovation and Technology Center is an exciting project that will serve as a creative hub where community organizations and businesses can share ideas and resources to grow their fledgling businesses,” Duff is quoted as saying in the release.

“Building upon the success of the Learning Lab in Hartford, Connecticut Public Broadcasting will replicate its Learning Lab model in communities across Connecticut,” the release said. “Connecticut Public Broadcasting has engaged the Norwalk Public Schools in a new partnership opportunity and will look to work with other urban schools systems. Connecticut Public Broadcasting plans to expand CPTV/WNPR’s Institute for Advance Media and Veterans Vocational Training Program to multiple locations across the state.”

Feasibility study for a Wall Street Train Station

In other big news for Wall Street, the Bond Commission approved spending \$250,000 to “study the feasibility of a train stop in the city-owned Mechanic Street parking lot off Wall Street, across the Norwalk River from Freese Park,” according to Duff’s release.

“Wow – that’s great news! Very encouraging,” wrote Wall Street businessman Michael McGuire in an email to NancyOnNorwalk. McGuire has campaigned for a train platform in that spot.

State Rep. Chris Perone (D-137) has been working for at least a year to get a study funded; a press release sent a year ago mistakenly announced that

Perone had been successful, and [a correction](#) was later posted.

“Doing a feasibility study is important first step in the long-term development of the Wall Street area,” Perone is quoted as saying in the release. “Increasing transportation options will encourage residential and retail growth in the area.”

Neither Duff nor Perone replied to a Wednesday evening email from NoN asking for more details. The State Bond Commission agenda states that the Bureau of Public Transportation requested the funds.

“Providing commuters with more options will benefit residents and local business and help revitalize a neighborhood where the state, city and business community have made significant investments,” Duff said in the release.

Rilling met with Connecticut Department of Transportation Commissioner James Redeker in March for a “serious conversation” about a train station on Wall Street, which once had a train stop. The meeting followed a letter to Redeker, in which Rilling noted demographic shifts in Norwalk’s urban environment and said, “the Danbury Line currently fails to accommodate the current growth happening in the Wall and West Avenue area of the city. That growth will continue to be sustained in the next decade creating further demand for improved rail connections.”

“With a train station Downtown Norwalk becomes a small-tech company’s dream location,” McGuire wrote in a [2016 letter to the editor](#). “Ample space, low rents, quality housing, cool historic neighborhood, access to NYC and attractive to the most important asset – skilled labor.”

“Thanks go out to Norwalk’s State representatives – Bob Duff, Chris Perone, Gail Lavielle, Fred Wilms and Terry Woods, as well as James Redeker and Mayor Rilling,” McGuire wrote Wednesday. “This bi-partisan effort is a real win for Norwalk.”

“I’m thrilled that the state is investing in Norwalk,” wrote Jackie Lightfield of Norwalk 2.0, a longtime Wall Street area activist, to NancyOnNorwalk.

Not everyone supports a train station. Melissa Kaplan-Macey, Connecticut Director of the non-profit Regional Plan Association, [told Common Council Planning Committee members on Feb. 1](#) that a Wall Street train station would be expensive and there are more practical ways to get people to the South Norwalk train station.

“It’s one thing to build a station. You know, you could build a station, it’s another thing to get trains to come to it and to get them to come to it frequently, and come to it frequently on a branch line,” Kaplan-Macey said.

Washington Village

South Norwalk’s Washington Village was also slated to receive \$6 Million in support of phase two of the Washington Village Transformation Plan, which includes a new 85-unit building on the south side of Raymond Street, between Day and Water streets, Duff’s press release said.

The press release was sent before the Bond Commission met; the state’s website confirms that all the proposed spending items were approved.

Washington Village is said to be the oldest public housing unit in the state, perhaps even the nation. “The Norwalk Housing Authority is rebuilding Washington Village under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Choice Neighborhoods Program,” the press release explained. “The goal of the program is to build high-quality, mixed-income housing, provide children and families with educational and other services, and to spur public and private investment. A \$30 million federal grant is helping fuel the plan.”

The funds were requested to provide loans, technically to “Trinity Washington Village Phase Two Four Limited Partnership and Trinity

Washington Village Phase Two Nine Limited Partnership, or other eligible applicants as such term is defined in Section 8-37pp of the Connecticut General Statutes,” the Bond Commission agenda states, explaining:

“This phase of the project consists of separate loans supporting 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits which will support construction of 42 units with 10 market rate units and 32 units for households up to 60% of area median income and 9% Low Income Housing Tax Credits which will support construction of 43 units with 10 market rate units and 33 units for households up to 60% of area median income.

“The loans will be provided at not less than 1% for a term not to exceed fifty-five years, with payments from available cash flow.

“Funds are requested as follows:

“Total Estimated Project Costs \$51,668,089

“Less: CHFA {Connecticut Housing Finance Authority} Financing
\$7,425,000

“Housing Authority Funds \$8,655,058

“Deferred Developer Fee \$1,414,169

“Brownfield Funding \$2,700,000

“4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits \$7,535,656

“9% Low Income Housing Tax Credits \$17,938,206

“Total, This Request \$6,000,000”

NHA Executive Director Adam Bovilsky did not respond to a Wednesday evening email from NancyOnNorwalk, asking about the project.

“The redevelopment of Washington Village is great news for the

neighborhood and the city,” Duff is quoted as saying in the release. “Quality affordable housing and the renovation of nearby Ryan Park are important efforts to benefit neighborhood residents.”

Lavielle seeks opposition to toll study

Malloy’s announcement last week that he was asking the Bond Commission to fund a \$10 million study on state-wide tolls drew [vociferous opposition](#) from Republicans, including Marc D’Amelio, Duff’s challenger, and Frank Page, who is running against Perone.

D’Amelio asked Duff to oppose it; Duff did not respond.

The Commission approved the study Wednesday, with Comptroller Kevin Lembo voting against it as he promised to do in a press release.

There’s an effort underway in the statehouse to reverse Malloy’s move, State Rep. Gail Lavielle (R-143) announced late Wednesday in a press release.

Lavielle “signed a legislators’ petition this week to request a special session for the purpose of prohibiting the expenditure of taxpayer funds to study and evaluate the establishment of tolls in Connecticut,” the release said.

The study would explore tolls on all major Connecticut highways, including Interstates 95, 91, and 84, along with the Merritt and Wilbur Cross parkways, the press release explained.

Rilling did not reply to an email asking if he supports tolls.

“The governor’s demand for \$10 million in bonding to study tolls this summer was surprising, particularly because the legislature just recently twice considered and failed to pass bills that included toll studies: HB 5391 in 2018, and an amendment to HB 6058 in 2017. The Executive Order therefore directly circumvents the clearly expressed will of the legislature,” Lavielle is quoted as saying. “For that reason, I am joining the members of my caucus in

submitting a petition to convene a special session so that the legislature can exercise its authority to direct how taxpayer money is spent and stop a project that we, as well as many of our constituents, feel to be inappropriate.”

Legislators have until noon Thursday to submit enough signatures to convene a special session of the General Assembly, the release explained, quoting Lavielle as saying, “I hope my colleagues from both parties will recognize their responsibility to defend taxpayers from this attempt to collect more revenue from them and to make them fund yet more borrowing, and sign the petition for a special session.”

\$6 million for Darien

One more thing – the Bond Commission also approved \$6 million for a Darien project.

Duff’s press release said:

“\$6 million is on the agenda for the Old Town Hall Houses – an affordable housing community for seniors – to assist the demolition and new construction of 55 affordable elderly rental units in Darien. The new, modern units will include handicap-accessible upgrades and elevators.

“Ensuring that seniors are able to remain in our communities once they retire is important to their health and the health of our communities. The new Old Town Hall Houses will ensure that its residents will spend their golden years in quality modern housing,’ said Senator Duff.”