



Regional Plan Association

Memorandum

To: Doug Hausladen, New Haven Parking Authority

CC: Garrett Eucalitto, CT DOT, and Michael Piscitelli, City of New Haven

From: Melissa Kaplan-Macey, Tiffany-Ann Taylor, Christina Kata, RPA

Subject: Synthesis of Stakeholder Interviews Regarding New Haven Union Station and Recommendations for Community Engagement

Date: August 18, 2022

This memo provides a synthesis of stakeholder interviews conducted by Regional Plan Association under our agreement with the New Haven Parking Authority for Outreach to Stakeholders for Potential Development of the East and West Lots at New Haven Union Station, NHPA Project 321-023 B.

Background & Previous Planning Efforts

New Haven Union Station, designed by Cass Gilbert and opened in 1920, is a landmark building listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It serves as both a regional and local asset connecting New Haven with Metro North New Haven Line service to Grand Central Terminal in New York City, Shoreline East service to New London, Hartford Line Service to Springfield, and Vermonter service to St. Albans, Vermont.

Over the past decade several peer learning exchanges and planning efforts have been undertaken to better understand best practices in station area planning and address the future growth and development of Union Station and its surrounding neighborhood.

Examples that have been set by peers relevant to this effort include re-designed train stations in Philadelphia, PA; Denver, CO; Los Angeles, CA; White Plains, NY; and Washington, D.C. Peer learning exchanges attended by New Haven stakeholders have included site visits and participation in webinars to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with these efforts, most recently-

- [This recording](#) of a Sept. 2021 event with Amtrak, LA Metro, and Denver Union Station Project Authority
- [This recording](#) of a Jan. 2022 event with Amtrak, LA Metro, and White Plains

Past plans that have set the stage for the current effort to advance potential development of the East and West Lots include the Union Station Transit Oriented Development Plan and the Hill-to-Downtown Community Plan in 2013, Union Station: 100 Years Forward in 2017, and the Urban Design League's Union Station Corridor Planning and Design Charette in 2019.

These plans address both the station and its surrounding area with a focus on transit oriented development and improvement of goods and services at the station. Specifically, they highlight the need to-

- Connect the station to downtown via pedestrian walkways and bike paths
- Increase bus service
- Come to consensus on how much parking is needed to serve the station
- Build more affordable and market rate housing
- Create more retail/office space
- Enliven the station and surrounding area with food carts, restaurants, cafes, outdoor seating, retail, more comfortable waiting areas to improve the transit experience, bring in revenue and better connect the station to the surrounding neighborhood

Stakeholder Interviews

Between April and June 2022, Regional Plan Association (RPA) conducted interviews with 22 individuals from 8 stakeholder groups regarding the New Haven Union Station project.

Stakeholders included:

- Alder Rodriguez, Board of Alders of New Haven
- ConnCORP
- CTDOT East-West Lots Subcommittee
- Jonathan Rose Companies
- LMXD
- Twining Properties
- New Haven Urban Design League
- Yale University

Interviewees were presented with 11 questions that were crafted in partnership by RPA, the New Haven Parking Authority, and the City of New Haven:

- What is attractive about New Haven in terms of investment opportunities? Are there any issues that you see as constraints to investment?
- What do you think would be the most desirable uses for land at and around New Haven Union Station?
- Based on location, as well as current and projected market conditions, what types of projects do you see as most feasible? At what scale? (square feet or residential units). Related, should this project be positioned from a regional perspective (between NY and Boston) or more locally building off growth at larger anchor institutions like Yale University, Yale New Haven Hospital, etc.?
- What are some of the basic ground conditions for feasibility of these different types of projects? And are there synergies that could boost feasibility?
- Is there anything that you are tracking in the City of New Haven or the transit system that would weigh heavily in your future investment decisions?
- The station planning effort goes beyond redesigning the station itself. How would you like to see the surrounding neighborhood be incorporated into the design?
- Recognizing that the partnership with the state may seem complicated to potential developers, how can the project team best position the project in order to provide a line

of sight to implementation? Related, what do you see as the primary benefits and risks of a public-private partnership in TOD development?

- How would you recommend the project team approach the project from an inclusive development perspective? And what are some of the best ways to engage the community to ensure that their voices are heard in the development process? Are you aware of projects or models that would build wealth in the Hill community through direct equity, community benefits, or other forms of partnership?
- What would you say is a reasonable time frame and phasing scenarios, from RFP to occupancy?
- What do you anticipate being the biggest challenge in the completion of redeveloping the station? Why?
- What is the one thing that you want the core project team to understand based on our conversation today?

As the interviewees represented different professional backgrounds and levels of expertise, interviewees were asked a subset of these 11 questions, depending upon the relevance of the questions to their backgrounds/areas of expertise.

Major themes from interviews:

1. Opportunity for growth and economic development

- a. Interviewees agreed that New Haven is a vibrant small city that is strategically located between two major markets, Boston and New York City. It is an important node within the larger Northeast Corridor rail line, and there is growing interest by both businesses and residents to stay in or move to New Haven.
 - i. One interviewee characterized it as, "[A] great city that is large enough to be interesting but small enough to be friendly."
- b. Additional draws to New Haven are its universities, medical center, vibrant food scene, investment in the environment and sustainability efforts, and growing arts and culture activities. New Haven's anchor institutions, such as Yale University and Yale-New Haven Hospital, have an outsized influence on the city's growth and cultural offerings.

2. Challenges with the station and surrounding area

- a. Impediments to New Haven are the fact that the city remains racially and economically segregated. Some interviewees noted that New Haven lacked a clear plan to address persistent poverty.
- b. Interviewees were not very complimentary about New Haven Union Station and its lack of connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood. It was noted that

pedestrian access is difficult, and that there is a desire for New Haven Union Station to better connect with Church Street South and Long Wharf.

- c. One interviewee recalled that there appear to be vacant lots between the train station and the New Haven Green that make the area feel like, "a no man's land."

3. Displacement and Community Engagement Concerns

- a. Several interviewees brought up that hundreds of Section 8 affordable housing units that once existed across the street from New Haven Union Station but were demolished, and that rising rents within New Haven broadly are displacing long-term residents.
- b. The Hill is a historically disinvested community and from the perspective of equitable development, there was a desire from some interviewees to provide deeply affordable housing opportunities in order to encourage previously displaced residents to return to the neighborhood and so that the neighborhood could retain current residents.
- c. It was remarked that while the City of New Haven has met its 10% affordable housing goal and the City recently passed an inclusionary zoning ordinance, continued and intentional development of affordable housing must continue because the need from residents still has not been met.
- d. Several interviewees highlighted the importance of early, genuine community engagement, such as working with the local Alder to host meetings, identifying key principles and goals for the project, providing feedback on the RFP, discussing community benefits, and carving out additional opportunities for proactive engagement. It was noted that there are active community organizations in the area that have helped coordinate engagement on other projects within New Haven and that previous plans for this area have been discussed with community groups.
- e. It was also noted that community engagement efforts should be broadened to include residents from other neighborhoods of New Haven, and not just the adjacent blocks.
- f. Some interviewees noted that larger developers would likely look to partner with local developers and non-profits to help ensure that community residents are engaged throughout the planning process.
 - i. New Haven also has an abundance of architecture firms that could be called upon to collaborate on elements of the project.

4. Incorporate Existing Plans and Ideas

- a. As mentioned in the beginning, previous plans and ideas for reimagining Union Station exist, and there is a lot to be learned from them. We strongly advise

stakeholders to review previous plans in more depth and look at how and where elements of these efforts can be included. This was echoed by several interviewees, including the Urban Design League and Alder Carmen Rodriguez.

5. Redevelopment Opportunities and Strategies

- a. Interviewees agreed that a mix of uses around New Haven Union Station would have the greatest return on investment, balancing transportation needs with private development.
 - i. Having a train station that is well maintained with frequent service is critical.
 - ii. Several interviewees held up Washington, D.C.'s Union Station and Providence, RI as examples of successful redevelopment projects that made the historic stations and surrounding area more of a destination.
- b. Having a clear and landscaped walking path from New Haven Union Station to downtown with better lighting and more greenery was articulated as a priority by several interviewees, as well as more signage and clarity on when to embark and disembark at New Haven Union Station versus New Haven State Street Station.
- c. There was high interest in transit-oriented development, with emphasis by some interviewees on units for low- to moderate-income residents who were previously displaced from the area surrounding New Haven Union Station, as well as units to attract new residents.
 - i. It was noted that it will be difficult for New Haven to build a diverse, healthy community given escalating rent prices.
 - ii. However, some interviewees flagged that constraints on the development side, such as supply chain issues, labor pricing, and high interest rates, would make it difficult to construct significant amounts of residential units without additional subsidies from the State of Connecticut or supplemental funding from the City of New Haven.
- d. Commercial space for financial tech, data sciences, and the life sciences industry was recommended by some interviewees. The life sciences industry in particular is growing in New Haven thanks to the presence of Yale University as a natural incubator, and multiple existing subsidies can make commercial space for the life sciences industry more economically feasible for developers to create.
 - i. It was flagged by interviewers that life sciences companies can "grow in fits and starts" depending on funding and that having commercial spaces with a range of sizes that can accommodate start-ups to more established companies is key for New Haven to retain and attract this industry.

- e. It was flagged by several interviewees that the economics of New Haven do not support major high-rises, and that members of the life sciences industry have expressed a preference for buildings that are smaller in height.
- f. Several interviewees commented on the need for more retail and dining options for travelers and residents around New Haven Union Station.
- g. An alternative redevelopment strategy raised by some interviewees was a hotel on the site to capitalize on travelers with an updated conference space, but it was noted that New Haven already has several hotels downtown near its anchor institutions, and that hotel construction does not always have a strong return on investment.
- h. Ensuring multimodal travel, with easy access to ground transportation like buses and well-maintained cycling paths, was stressed by several interviewees. Several interviewees warned against engineering the site so that it works best for cars rather than residents.
- i. There were mixed responses about the need for parking around New Haven Union Station, with several interviewees commenting about the need to right-size parking. Some interviewees noted that the need for parking will decrease over time, with younger residents often eschewing cars, and that the team should think about how to creatively build sufficient parking for the station that can then be repurposed for alternate uses in the future. It was also noted that stations like Grand Central Terminal in New York City do not have vast parking facilities because the surrounding land was deemed too valuable to just serve as parking.
- j. Some interviewees highlighted that there is an opportunity to use New Haven Union Station as a vehicle to celebrate the many cultures present within the city through art, retail, and food, and to honor the history of the Hill Community and the Section 8 housing that previously existed nearby.
 - i. Giving residents the opportunity to see themselves reflected within the Station design is critical.
- k. The Church Street South site will be crucial to the success of the New Haven Union Station project, and some interviewees warned that losing sight of that would be detrimental, and that if they're not developed with each other in mind, it could detract from value that Union Station provides.

6. Transparency with City, State, Park New Haven, and other Entities

- a. A fair and transparent process is critical to project success. It was recommended by some interviewees that the New Haven Parking Authority, the City of New Haven, and the State of Connecticut clearly outline from the start a detailed package of what can be built onsite, a timeline, and the types of programs and subsidies available to potential developers.

- i. It was noted by some interviewees that opaqueness from government officials, particularly the State of Connecticut, create difficulties for project partners, particularly when those partners have invested considerable time and resources in responding to RFPs. To improve project efficiency, it was recommended that a clear timeline be published alongside next steps so that respondents are aware of the success or failure of their proposal and how the project is advancing.
- ii. Several interviewees cautioned that lack of clear communication between various levels of government could also stymie the project.
- iii. It was flagged by one interviewee that there is a perceived reluctance by the City of New Haven to provide tax abatements for affordable units, compared with other municipalities on the East Coast, which may prove challenging when penciling out the creation of low- to moderate-income housing.

Development Framework Recommendations

- The project team should balance the regional and local identities of New Haven Union Station in the redevelopment concept.
 - Coordinate rail, bus, pedestrian, bike, and vehicular access and circulation, prioritizing people and transit.
 - Provide adequate parking for station use, but do not over park.
 - Prioritize multimodal connectivity and connections between the station and adjacent neighborhoods.
 - Easy access to ground transportation like buses and well-maintained cycling paths should also be prioritized as part of the station redesign.
 - Connect the station area to the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods through thoughtful design and intentional wayfinding.
- The project team should consider the following recommendations by interviewees for a mix of uses and components on the site, balancing transportation needs with private development:
 - Residential units, including low-to-moderate income housing.
 - Mid-rise commercial space for financial-tech, data sciences, and the life sciences industries.
 - A clear and landscaped walking path from New Haven Union Station to downtown with better lighting and more greenery.
 - Incorporate celebration of the many cultures present within the city in the redevelopment plan through art, retail, and food, and honor the history of the Hill Community.

Recommendations for Community Engagement

RPA did not coordinate a community engagement effort around the New Haven Union Station project, as that was outside the scope of work. It is RPA's strong recommendation that the New Haven Parking Authority and the City of New Haven build on past efforts and lead on robust

community engagement around redevelopment of the East and West Lots, and look into how this redevelopment will link to and fit in within the broader context of the surrounding neighborhood and connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods.

The importance of a robust and thoughtful community engagement effort was articulated by several interviewees who highlighted the importance of early, genuine community engagement with comments and suggestions that included -

- working with the local Alder and community groups to host events
- meeting with residents in the surrounding neighborhoods to identify key principles and goals for the project
- broadening the scope of community engagement efforts to include residents from other neighborhoods of New Haven, not just those immediately adjacent to the site
- giving residents and stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback on the RFP
- discussing community benefits
- setting intentional goals for local hiring, workforce development, and training opportunities
- carving out additional opportunities for proactive engagement
- and articulating a clear timeline and next steps for all participants.

It was noted by members of the East-West Lot Subcommittee that there are active community organizations in the area that have helped coordinate resident engagement on other projects within New Haven that should be consulted during this effort. It was also noted that Yale University has launched the [Center for Inclusive Growth](#), which could potentially participate in these efforts.

Next Steps

With the input gathered through the stakeholder interview process described in this memo, the New Haven Union Station Partnership intends to embark on a competitive selection process to identify a public/private development partner for New Haven Union Station. That process will elicit responses from potential partners that address the following-

- **Land use concepts** for the East and West Lots and their relationship to Union Station and the surrounding neighborhood
- **Design concepts** for development on the East and West Lots and repurposes of space within New Haven Union Station that address needs relevant to historic preservation of the station and also offer creative and thoughtful ways to better connect and integrate New Haven Union Station into the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Level of investment**
- **Schedule**