

**CITY OF NORWALK  
AD HOC SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
MAY 14, 2025  
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDANCE: Mr. Lopez, Chair, Ms. Dunn, Ms. Shanahan, Ms. Niedzielski–Eichner, Josh Goldstein

STAFF: Jodi Trendler

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Lopez called the meeting to order at 5:12 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Lopez called the roll as reflected above.

**III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was none present to comment.

**IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

A. Regular Meeting: April 9, 2025

**\*\* MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Earth Day Recap

Ms. Trendler presented the Earth Day Recap. She noted the event was well-attended despite light rain. Ms. Trendler hosted a table collecting community suggestions on sustainability. Top themes included:

- Increased bike paths (especially to the beach)
- Reduced pesticide use
- Tree planting and prioritizing native species.

She noted forty-five individuals signed up for the sustainability newsletter, and an additional fifteen individuals expressed interest in a future sustainability task force.

Mr. Lopez appreciated the outreach and resonance with community interests. He noted strong engagement from local schools and families, especially with the “Trash & Show” initiative. He remarked that the children in attendance were little environmental bundles of cuteness.

Ms. Niedzielski–Eichner added that the signs from Silvermine Elementary were awesome.

### **B. Green Team Kick-off Review**

Ms. Trendler discussed her initiation of the Internal City “Green Team” launched to enhance collaboration, reduce redundancies, and coordinate sustainability efforts from the city’s operations side.

Ms. Trendler stated that the initial meeting covered:

- Project prioritization
- Defining sustainability
- Enhancing interdepartmental knowledge and communication

She indicated positive staff feedback was received. They discussed, and the next session will focus on collaboration tools and addressing issues brought up during the first meeting.

Mr. Lopez commended the presentation, noting that it effectively addressed a previously identified gap in coordination and shared understanding of sustainability across departments. It was observed that attendees were highly engaged, as reflected in their participation at various discussion tables. The presentation was described as a strong step toward fostering cross-departmental alignment with the City’s sustainability goals.

Mr. Goldstein emphasized the importance of internal alignment with previously identified

sustainability goals.

Ms. Niedzielski–Eichner suggested they use a live, shareable tracking spreadsheet (as in the Affordable Housing Committee) to monitor and adapt goals dynamically. Ms. Trendler stated that it was exactly what they were looking for.

### **C. New Office of Sustainability and Resilience Webpage**

Ms. Trendler announced the new sustainability web page added to the City’s website under the “Greenest City” button. She noted it includes a newsletter signup. She added several residents have already subscribed. She stated it includes a logo and branding approved for use across educational/event materials.

In response to Ms. Dunn’s question regarding integration with Planning and Zoning, Ms. Trendler clarified that the Office of Sustainability and Resilience is being established as an independent department under the Mayor’s Office. It is not part of the zoning application or permitting process.

Ms. Trendler explained the new office will encompass all current sustainability efforts and serve as a centralized hub for related initiatives. A dedicated webpage is being developed, and the office’s branding—approved by the Mayor and the Communications Director—will be featured on the site, and available for branding, educational materials, and event-related communications. The logo and other visual assets are expected to be visible on the city website shortly.

Ms. Trendler clarified that the Office of Sustainability & Resilience is an independent department under the Mayor’s Office. She added it’s not directly involved in zoning enforcement, but intersects through tools and evaluations.

In response to Mr. Lopez’ question about coordination with Planning and Zoning, Ms. Trendler noted that while direct interaction is currently limited, there will be peripheral alignment in the future. The internal Green Team is developing a decision matrix and prioritization tool to evaluate projects based on cost, feasibility, environmental and health impacts, and other co-benefits.

This tool will also allow the City to assess external development proposals using a standardized set of sustainability criteria. Ms. Trendler noted that several promising tools, like the creation of a digital twin, are currently under review to support this initiative.

Mr. Lopez brought up the decision framework and asked whether Planning and Zoning would be encouraged to incorporate it into their work. Ms. Trendler said ideally it would incorporate in

what they already have using the Green Team. The idea being each department can include their perspective and address all factors that may come into play.

The group at Ms. Dunn's suggestion discussed the potential development of a certification standard that could overlay existing sustainability efforts, similar to LEED certifications (Silver, Gold, etc.). Ms. Trendler stated the idea is to create a city-specific standard based on a set of indicators, allowing each project to be evaluated and scored. Projects that meet higher thresholds could be prioritized for implementation, while those with lower scores may be modified or deprioritized.

Ms. Trendler noted that while LEED checklists are helpful, they do not encompass all desired criteria. A custom database is being developed, drawing from standards such as Sustainable CT, SolSmart, Tree City USA, Passive House, and others. This database will enable project assessments that reflect both existing frameworks and city-specific sustainability goals.

Ms. Dunn suggested that such a rating system could eventually be used to guide tax abatements for large development projects. Ms. Trendler agreed, saying this would be a valuable long-term application.

Ms. Niedzielski–Eichner raised her hand to comment and followed up on the earlier point. She emphasized the need for practicality and affordability in imposing sustainability requirements, especially for homeowners. She shared a personal experience regarding DPW's impermeable surface requirements for home renovations. Although she supported the initiative in theory, she encountered excessive costs and delays due to the limited availability of hydrologists in Fairfield County. The required studies cost thousands of dollars and often yielded generic solutions that were not tailored to individual situations.

Ms. Niedzielski–Eichner stressed that regulations should be accompanied by accessible, "out-of-the-box" solutions, particularly to ensure compliance among low-income residents. This is crucial in a city focused on maintaining affordable housing and protecting neighborhoods vulnerable to flooding. She urged the group to consider not just the ideal standards, but what is practical and implementable. She noted that many residents want to comply with environmentally beneficial practices but are deterred by cost and complexity. In her case, she avoided an extensive delay by removing impervious surfaces like an oversized driveway, which allowed her to comply without hiring a hydrologist.

Ms. Niedzielski–Eichner also expressed concern about recent changes to the demolition ordinance. She argued that the requirement to delay demolition of any structure over 50 years old—even when the structure lacks historical value—results in unnecessary delays and costs. She pointed out that homes from the 1970s are often poorly constructed and contain toxic materials. Extending the demolition process delays the opportunity to build safer, more energy-

**CITY OF NORWALK**

**AD HOC SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE COMMITTEE**

**SPECIAL MEETING**

**MAY 14, 2025**

efficient homes.

She concluded by urging the group to ensure that good intentions behind sustainability and preservation policies are not undermined by impractical regulations that hinder implementation and frustrate residents.

Ms. Dunn noted that with so many major developments underway, it would be valuable to see more integration of those efforts. She highlighted the importance of navigating the push and pull around new technologies and emphasized the need to remain flexible to accommodate future innovations.

Ms. Trendler was given the floor and confirmed readiness to move on to the sustainability task force proposal. She extended an open invitation to meet individually with members to gather additional insights, stating she would be reaching out, but encouraged anyone interested to contact her directly.

#### **D. Community Sustainability Task Force**

Ms. Trendler introduced the final agenda item: a potential proposal for a Community Sustainability Task Force. She explained that sustainability is a large, community-wide challenge that requires collaboration beyond internal city staff. While she continues working with the Green Team, she suggested the creation of a community-based task force, board, or commission to promote collective impact. She referenced the successful collective impact model currently used by the Health Department and Community Services, which she hopes to either join or replicate for sustainability efforts.

The task force would serve as a venue for inclusive community engagement and strategic discussion around sustainability. Ms. Trendler emphasized the need to bring together stakeholders such as Norwalk Public Schools, the Maritime Aquarium, developers, and businesses. She cited strong community interest, as seen during Earth Day events, and stressed that broader participation generally leads to stronger results. She indicated the task force would allow the city to maintain balance while responding to evolving sustainability needs.

An attachment with a proposed framework and broad membership structure had been included in the meeting agenda packet. Ms. Trendler referenced a conversation with Michelle DeLuca from Emergency Management, who mentioned leveraging the Health Department's network for emergency communications. Ms. Trendler suggested the proposed task force could similarly extend the city's communication and outreach efforts.

Ms. Trendler confirmed she would serve as the primary coordinator for the task force, regardless

of its final structure.

Mr. Lopez raised a question about whether the task force would be empowered to propose activities or initiatives. Ms. Trendler confirmed that it would, with any proposals routed through the committee for further discussion.

Mr. Lopez had another question about including progress monitoring in the responsibilities section, specifically whether the group should be encouraged to develop a theory of change or results framework to track key performance indicators (KPIs), inputs, and expected outcomes. It was suggested that a basic foundational framework be drafted and shared with the group, which they could then refine as needed. This would support more systematic tracking and organization of progress.

Ms. Dunn added that there may be relevant overlap with a previous initiative, the "Healthy for Life" state grant administered through the Health Department. That initiative included a broad group of stakeholders from social services and helped launch programs such as Norwalk Acts. She noted that Teresa (?) led that effort and suggested reaching out to her. Ms. Dunn also mentioned that the Point of Distribution (POD) simulations referenced earlier were part of that same work. A significant amount of data was collected through that program, including community access to recreational spaces. She pointed out that South Norwalk had been identified as having the least access to open recreation areas. It also identified Norwalk as having the lowest tree canopy coverage of any city in Connecticut. A previous coalition helped identify such "hot zones" and could provide valuable starting data. Ms. Trendler recommended meeting with a contact who can provide detailed datasets, including those revealing food deserts. Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) conducted extensive data mapping, which should also be integrated.

Ms. Trendler emphasized that sustainability encompasses three pillars: environmental, human, and economic. While environmental concerns such as tree canopy are critical, equally important are human factors—access to food, health services, and protection from heat—and economic resilience. Integrating these pillars ensures a more comprehensive approach to building a sustainable community.

Ms. Shanahan reiterated the importance of the data mapping efforts and mentioned she originally became involved through the H2H conservation map for Norwalk. This was the first urban conservation mapping of its kind and includes the original WestCOG tree canopy study, which has since been updated. She offered to share the map and noted the recent tree canopy study reflects both loss and subsequent slow recovery starting in 2019–2020, largely thanks to Sarah Cruz's efforts.

Ms. Dunn asked whether recent data reflect an improvement in canopy coverage. The response confirmed that while tree planting has resumed, canopy coverage initially declined and only

recently began to stabilize. The tree gain has not yet outpaced prior loss, but data is available to support this trend.

Ms. Shanahan then inquired about the proposed task force size and structure, specifically, what is manageable and effective. Would 20 or 50 people be too many? Ms. Trendler explained that in the prior coalition, more than 50 individuals participated. Given the committee-based structure, not all members work on the same projects. Volunteer redundancy is necessary to ensure continuity. Different committees will focus on areas such as waste, energy, transportation, and natural resources.

Ms. Trendler welcomed suggestions for representatives or organizations for each category. Ms. Shanahan and others agreed to help identify potential members and suggested that Ms. Trendler provide an initial list of categories to guide recommendations. Members offered to review and refine this list once circulated.

Mr. Lopez had a question regarding the prerequisites for the task force chair. Ms. Trendler responded that successful task forces tend to have leaders with strong project management skills, familiarity with the city's workings, and the ability to coordinate rather than serve as technical experts. She recommended developing a set of leadership guidelines or qualifications to support effective leadership.

As the discussion wrapped up, members were encouraged to email Ms. Trendler with additional suggestions or questions. The group agreed to continue the conversation and plan for formal agenda inclusion at the next meeting.

## **VI. ADJOURNMENT**

- \*\* MS. DUNN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted  
China Mayhew  
Telesco Secretarial Services

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