

SoNo Comeback Task Force Meeting

March 9, 2016 – 1:00 PM

Attending: Former Mayor Bill Collins, Chairman; Elizabeth Stocker, Economic Development; Bruce Beinfeld, Architect; Chris Loynd, Maritime Aquarium; Mike Wrinn, Planning and Zoning; Julius Hayward, Norwalk Parking Authority; Kathryn Hebert, Public Works; Larry Pelligrini, Pelligrini Jewelers; Bruce Chimento, Public Works; Robert Burgess; Nancy Carroll, Norwalk Transit District

Mr. Collins convened the meeting at 1:00 PM and requested those in attendance to give updates since the last meeting in September of 2015.

Parking Authority

The Parking Authority engaged Desmond Associates as a parking consultant. A discussion on the disparity in parking rates between SoNo and uptown took place as well as when rates were last increased. It was noted which lots would be impacted by the change in rates. Also, K. Hebert reported that there is a 2 year wait list for parking at the SNRR, with capacity issues at both the South Norwalk and East Norwalk stations.

DPW

B. Chimento reported that sidewalk sweeping would resume during the next 6 months. The Washington Street repaving project will begin within the next month and it is anticipated that it will take 4 weeks to complete. One-way traffic patterns will be followed during that period. Also, all trees will be removed along Washington Street and will be replaced with planters. New trees will be planted in the fall.

Maritime Aquarium

C. Loynd reported that the Maritime Aquarium is moving forward with streetscape enhancements, including wayfinding flutter flags and streamers. He also reported that communications continue to be maintained regarding the Walk Bridge project and the impact, if any, on the Maritime exhibits.

Planning

Transit oriented development (TOD) projects continue with the scale of development being reviewed.

Transit

N. Carroll gave background on the transit services that are provided to and from South Norwalk. She also reported on the meetings with the developers along the West Avenue corridor and the “circulator” route that had been discussed.

Other

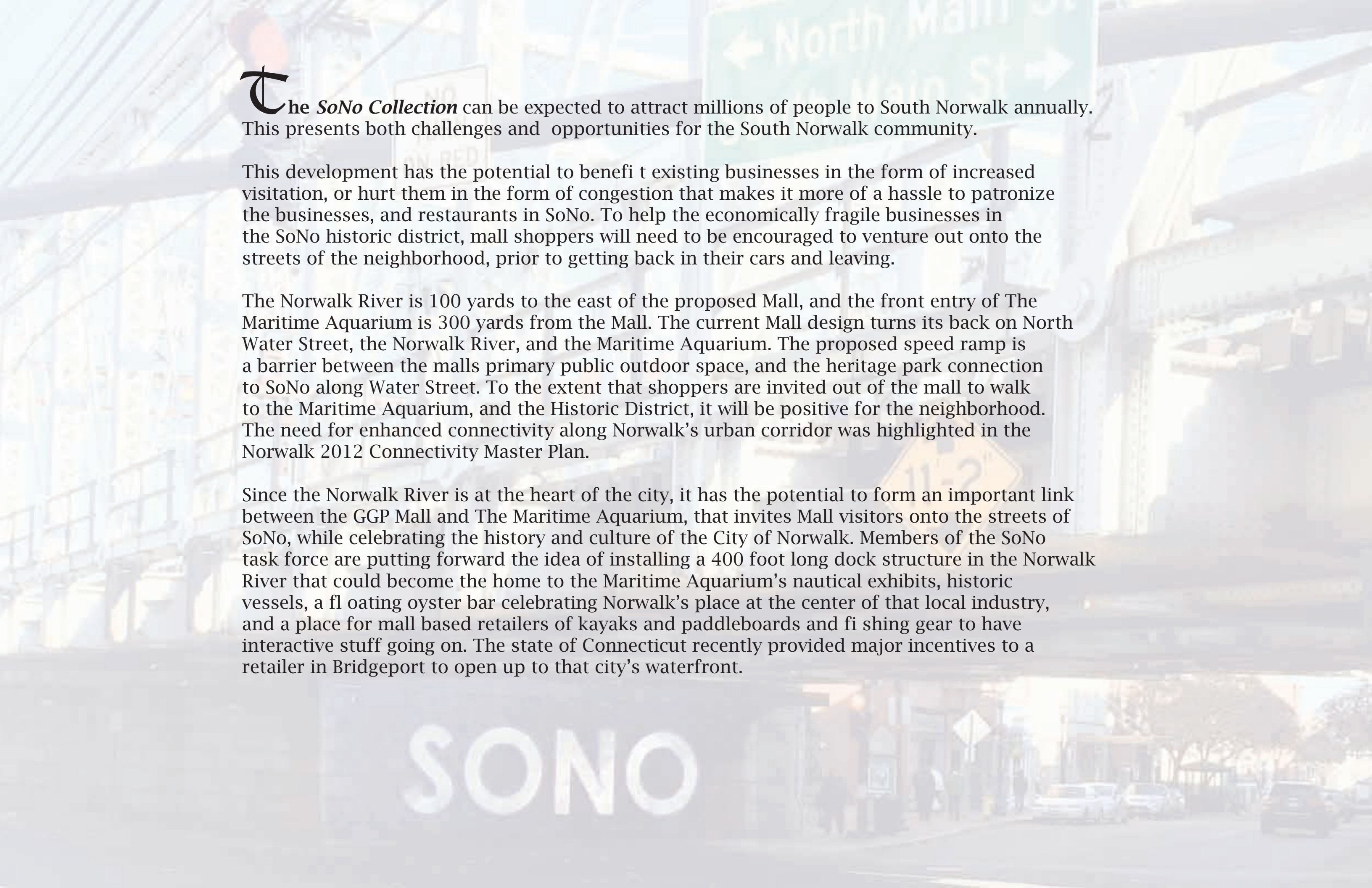
Wayfinding remains important. Incorporation of the City's branding initiative, which should be released the 1st week of April, will be part of the effort.

West Avenue Sculpture installation should be complete by the end of June.

B. Beinfeld shared a proposal for connecting the Mall (SoNo Collection) with the Maritime Aquarium with waterfront attractions. The SoNo River Esplanade, a 400-foot dock structure would run along the edge of the Norwalk River in the area of North water Street. (documentation to follow)

SoNo River Esplanade





The *SoNo Collection* can be expected to attract millions of people to South Norwalk annually. This presents both challenges and opportunities for the South Norwalk community.

This development has the potential to benefit existing businesses in the form of increased visitation, or hurt them in the form of congestion that makes it more of a hassle to patronize the businesses, and restaurants in SoNo. To help the economically fragile businesses in the SoNo historic district, mall shoppers will need to be encouraged to venture out onto the streets of the neighborhood, prior to getting back in their cars and leaving.

The Norwalk River is 100 yards to the east of the proposed Mall, and the front entry of The Maritime Aquarium is 300 yards from the Mall. The current Mall design turns its back on North Water Street, the Norwalk River, and the Maritime Aquarium. The proposed speed ramp is a barrier between the mall's primary public outdoor space, and the heritage park connection to SoNo along Water Street. To the extent that shoppers are invited out of the mall to walk to the Maritime Aquarium, and the Historic District, it will be positive for the neighborhood. The need for enhanced connectivity along Norwalk's urban corridor was highlighted in the Norwalk 2012 Connectivity Master Plan.

Since the Norwalk River is at the heart of the city, it has the potential to form an important link between the GGP Mall and The Maritime Aquarium, that invites Mall visitors onto the streets of SoNo, while celebrating the history and culture of the City of Norwalk. Members of the SoNo task force are putting forward the idea of installing a 400 foot long dock structure in the Norwalk River that could become the home to the Maritime Aquarium's nautical exhibits, historic vessels, a floating oyster bar celebrating Norwalk's place at the center of that local industry, and a place for mall based retailers of kayaks and paddleboards and fishing gear to have interactive stuff going on. The state of Connecticut recently provided major incentives to a retailer in Bridgeport to open up to that city's waterfront.

Maritime Garage



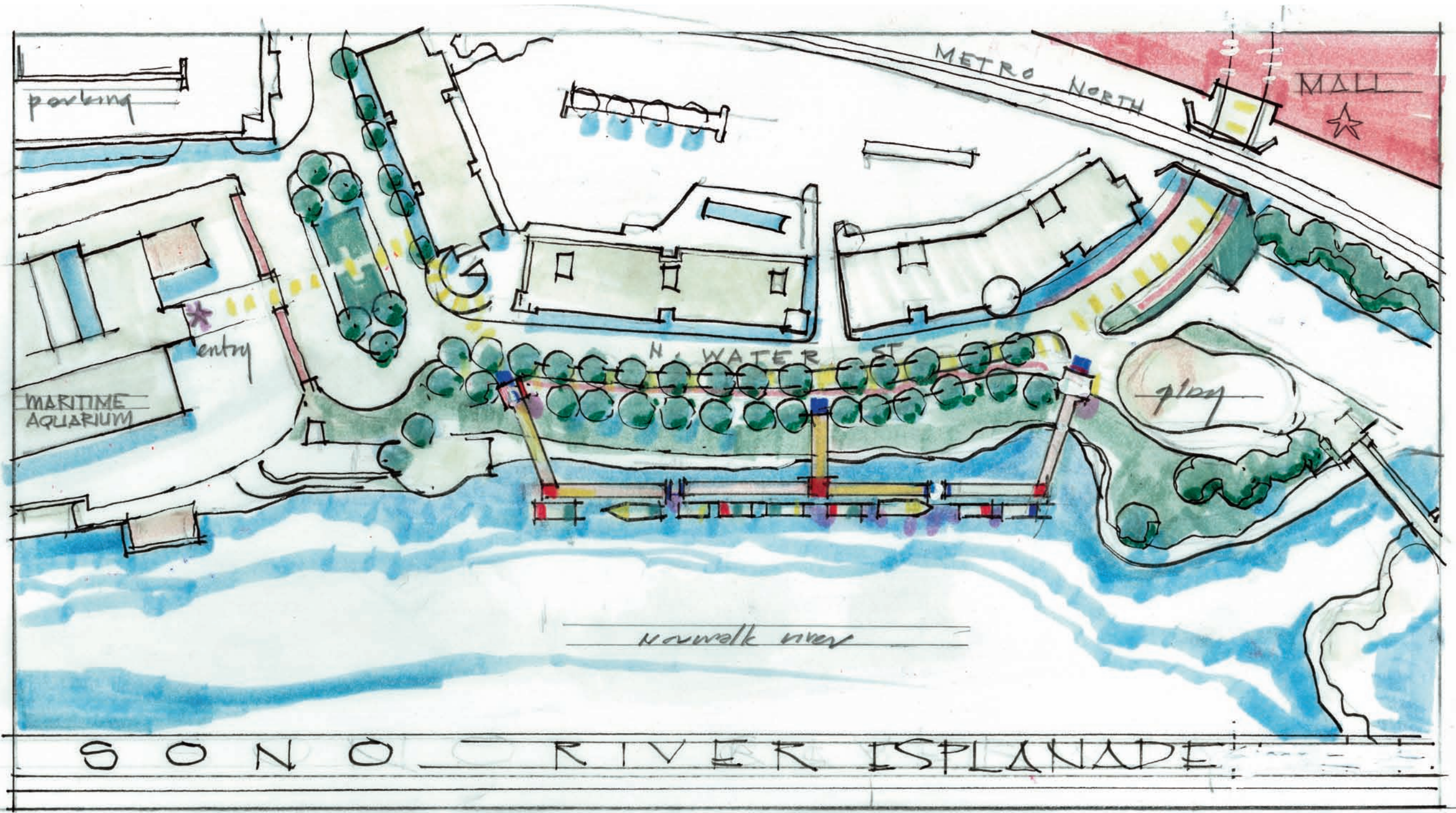
Norwalk River



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Beinfield Architecture
Eric Rains Landscape Architecture