



**RECONNECTING
THE RIVERFRONT**
DOWNTOWN WESTPORT

Stakeholder Interview Questions

Explaining the Project and Process:

- As a part of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town identified a goal to improve the access, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport's public lots
 - Parker Harding
 - Jesup Green
 - Imperial Lot
 - We are using data analysis as well as direct contact with the community to learn about their experiences in Westport Downtown and to learn what is missing.
 - The lived experience is important to us. We are committed to building a built environment downtown and by the riverfront that works for everyone.
 - We want to know how to successfully communicate with your community and encourage participation in the process.
 - We don't share attributable quotes, but will anonymize and aggregate the information for the Town of Westport and our partners.
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You and Your Community

- Tell me more about yourself and your connection to Westport

Westport Downtown

- In what ways do you enjoy / appreciate Westport's Downtown and riverfront?
- What concerns do you have about Downtown Westport?
- What is the "draw" of Downtown Westport? Do you visit any particular sites when visiting? What is missing? (Ex: shopping, events, activities, green space.)
- How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?
- What would your ideal riverfront look like?

Greenspace and Transportation

- How do you usually get to Downtown Westport and the riverfront?

- How walkable do you consider Downtown Westport?
- How do these three areas serve different needs, and how do you think they tie together?
- How would you rate greenspace in Westport from 1-10? What is missing from greenspace in your communities and Downtown?
- What kind of activities are missing from Downtown, or do you enjoy it as is?
- How important is parking when visiting Downtown Westport? Do you drive when you visit, or would you rather take another form of transportation?
- What concerns do you hear about walking / biking as well as access to greenspace in Westport from your community members?

Sustainability

- This area is located on a floodplain. How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?
- What aspects of the riverfront could be educational for the public? What kind of educational programming would be helpful for you and your community?

Reaching your Community

- How do you usually reach people in the community?
- How effective do you find online outreach to be in your community? What are good ways to reach people offline?

Wrap Up

- Where would you like to see Downtown Westport in five years? Ten years?
- Are there any other insights that you'd like to share that we haven't discussed yet?
- Are there projects Downtown that have succeeded / or you see as a success that we should look at that can be scaled/ broadened for greater impact?
- Any resources or additional documents they would recommend for our team to review.



Town of Westport

Downtown Westport Landowners & Realtors Stakeholders

Via Zoom Call

September 8, 2022

Attendees:

- Rosanne Lubeck, Connect the Dots
- Lily Goodspeed, Connect the Dots
- Michael Gulino, Connect the Dots
- Achan Sookying, Langan
- Skip Lane
- David Waldman

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of its 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to improve the accessibility, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as part of the initial community outreach efforts of this project. This meeting gathered Downtown Westport landowners and realtors to create a preliminary dialogic setting for envisioning and brainstorming possible redesigns, reconstructions, and opportunities for several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

This meeting, held virtually, convened some prominent Downtown Westport stakeholders to discuss the community and built environments of the Downtown and Riverfront. During this interview, the participants shared their thoughts regarding the positive draws of the Downtown, potential ideas for improvement, the walkability and greenery of the areas, challenges of parking and transportation, concerns regarding sustainability and flood mitigation, and possibilities for enhancing Downtown's outdoor and community-oriented activities.

Participant Overview:

This stakeholder interview was the first group engaged during the initial stakeholder interview process.

The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM on September 8th, 2022. The two stakeholder interviewees lived and worked in Westport. Both interviewees were long-time residents of the town, having lived in Westport for multiple decades. Interviewees were involved and employed in Westport's realty market, yet maintained



connections to Downtown landlords, merchants, and government. The interview was conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by four facilitators and project team staff members, one from Langan and three from Connect the Dots. The interview was conducted entirely in English.

Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were briefed on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project, and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the project timeline and this interview's role within an extensive community engagement and participatory strategy. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular popular talking points and questions, the primary guiding discussions questions of this session included:

1. *What is the 'draw' of Downtown Westport? Do you visit any particular sites when visiting? What is missing?*
2. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
3. *How walkable do you consider Downtown Westport?*
4. *How do these three areas serve different needs, and how do you think they tie together?*
5. *How would you rate greenspace in Westport from 1-10? What is missing from greenspace in your communities and Downtown?*
6. *How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*
7. *Are there other insights you'd like to share that haven't been discussed yet?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots:

1. Draws of Downtown Westport

- Interviewees agreed that Downtown Westport excels in its sense of community and local, regional, and international retailers, entertainment, eateries, and tenants. They emphasized that Westport was an *"easy town to work, shop, and live in."*
 - Interviewees identified included the Westport Downtown Merchants Association's successful downtown events and "world-class" library as specific local draws



- The COVID-19 pandemic affected local demographics, leading to new families moving in, resulting in more bustling business, a growing Downtown, and new restaurants and retailers.

2. Needed Improvements

- Interviewees emphasized the importance of improving traffic flow and lights on Downtown's streets, citing busy traffic on main streets and bridges.
- Interviewees proposed installing metering or other paid parking methods to alleviate limited parking challenges. Metered parking could generate revenue to hire crossing guards, mitigate traffic, limit parking times, decongest Downtown, and promote alternative transit options.
- Suggestions included a boardwalk or promenade along the waterfront, perhaps through dredging the river or building patios off the parking lot and along the waterfront with tables, public amenities, or pop-up shops to increase foot traffic.

3. Greenspace and Community

- Interviewees offered suggestions in cultivating a "third place" downtown for people to stay and relax. Participants envisioned maximizing space similar to a European downtown, attracting people to the Downtown and incentivizing people to use underused spaces.
 - Suggestions included installing food trucks, pop-up shops and small commerce, benches and rest areas, art and sculpture, improved lighting, chess tables, and educational programming.
- Improved infrastructure for community gathering, family activities, entertainment, and youth was discussed. Suggestions included improving infrastructure for the farmers market, theater groups, installing playgrounds or outdoor gyms, and a seasonal skating and ice rink (Jesup Green) modeled after the Reston Town Center.

4. Transportation and Parking

- Interviewees identified parking as one of the Downtown's biggest challenges, noting that parking is strained and free parking is often used by retailers and employers who don't move, further limiting available spaces. Both participants suggested getting rid of parking is a "bad idea."
 - Suggestions included adding free sections of parking lots behind stores for employees, installing digital meters, and assigning paid parking in certain areas of lots.



- Interviewees dismissed alternative transportation options, noting people are scared of the potential for bike lanes and its impossibility because of street width, and that previous efforts like trolleys and “shopper schlepers” struggled to garner riders.
- Interviewees agreed that downtown was incredibly walkable, noting that sidewalks and connections are easily traversable and in good condition.

5. Sustainability

- Interviewees expressed particular concern around the possibility of flooding. Interviewees noted that flooding would “bury the downtown.”
- Participants noted that flood proofing simply redirects water, and noted that even if you ‘proof’ Parker Harding, water will come up from the ground or flood the west side or other parts of Westport. Interviewees suggested mitigation rather than prevention or proofing.
- Participants noted that landlords are often fronted with huge costs of flood mitigation.
- Interviewees pushed back against certain mitigation efforts, like porous pavement, because of the challenges of its use on the East Coast. Participants suggested efforts like moving things off the ground or superior water pumps



Town of Westport

Downtown Westport Nonprofits and Art Organization Stakeholders

Via Zoom Call

September 9, 2022

Attendees:

- Lily Goodspeed, Connect the Dots
- Sophia Peterson, Connect the Dots
- Lori Cochran-Dougal
- Doug Tirola
- Carleigh Welsh

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to augment the access, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as an initial community outreach strategy in this project. This meeting gathered members of Westport's nonprofit and arts community to create a preliminary dialogic space for envisioning and brainstorming possible reconceptualizations, redesigns, and reconstructions of several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

The meeting, held virtually, convened some prevalent Downtown Westport stakeholders to discuss the local and built environment of the Downtown and Riverfront, specifically the parking lots of Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot. During the interview, participants shared their thoughts regarding the benefits of the Imperial Lot as a space for outdoor and community experiences, areas of need in Imperial Lot, and potential ideas and pathways for improvement, specifically regarding sustainability and the greenery of the area, particularly in regards to flooding.

Participant Overview:

The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM on September 9th, 2022. It was the second group engaged in the stakeholder process. The three stakeholder interviewees lived and worked in Westport. All interviewees were involved in organizations that hosted major community events, particularly utilizing Imperial Lot and the Riverfront. The interview was conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by one facilitator and



one member of project team staff, all from Connect the Dots. The interview was conducted entirely in English.

Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were initially briefed on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the timeline and this interview's location at the beginning of extensive community engagement and participatory strategies. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular questions and popular talking points, the primary guiding discussion questions of this session included:

1. *In what ways do you enjoy / appreciate Westport's Downtown and riverfront?*
2. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
3. *What would your ideal riverfront look like?*
4. *How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots, particularly focusing on Imperial Lot:

1. Benefits of Imperial Lot

- Interviewees agreed that Imperial Lot serves as and should continue to serve as a very flexible space, used by community event organizers and the community.
 - The views of the river from Imperial Lot were seen as a major draw and benefit of the space being used for community events.
- Imperial Lot was also praised for the parking it provides, allowing for access Downtown and to community events, like the farmer's market or Levitt Pavilion.

2. Needed Improvements in Imperial Lot

- Interviewees agreed that Imperial Lot is missing vital infrastructure for ADA access, restrooms or electricity.
 - A general lack of access to safe pathways for an aging population or for parents with strollers was a concern, as was a lack of seating, and the general unkempt nature of the weeds and bushes along the edges of the lot.



3. Improvements for Imperial Lot

- Interviewees offered suggestions for improvements, ranging from decreasing weeds and doing more maintenance around the lot, to building a permanent shelter or semi-permanent covering, creating increased bike path access and more bike racks, building storage space for community events, permanent bathrooms, and building permanent access to electricity and outlets.
- Interviewees suggested converting parking downtown to be primarily handicap spots downtown, with parking lots farther away from downtown serving non-handicapped drivers as an accessibility solution, in addition to refurbishing the sidewalks and access to downtown from Imperial Lot to be accessible.

4. Sustainability of Imperial Lot

- Interviewees identified five areas that flood during water events and don't drain properly, leading to stagnant water. There was concern about this getting worse without intervention.
- Interviewees were also concerned about how rising sea levels would impact the river and community events and organizations that use the riverfront (like Levitt Pavilion)



Town of Westport

Downtown Westport Parks, Environmental, and Historic Stakeholders

Via Zoom Call

September 13, 2022

Attendees:

- Lily Goodspeed, Connect the Dots
- Sophia Peterson, Connect the Dots
- Achan Sookying, Langan
- Charlie McMilan
- Donna Douglass
- Jen Fava
- Alicia Mozian

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to augment the access, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as an initial community outreach strategy in this project. This meeting gathered members of Westport's parks and recreation, historical preservation and environmental advocacy community to create a preliminary dialogic space for envisioning and brainstorming possible reconceptualizations, redesigns, and reconstructions of several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

The meeting, held virtually, convened some prevalent Downtown Westport stakeholders to discuss the local and built environment of the Downtown and Riverfront, specifically the parking lots of Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot. During the interview, participants shared their thoughts regarding potential ideas and pathways for improvement, specifically about the sustainability and the greenery of the area, particularly in regards to flooding. Of major discussion was the impact of future development on maintenance of the spaces.

Participant Overview:

The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM on September 13th, 2022. This was the third stakeholder interview conducted. The three stakeholder interviewees lived and worked in Westport. All interviewees were involved in parks and recreation organizations, historical preservation, or environmental advocacy. The interview was



conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by three facilitators and project team staff, one from Langan and two from Connect the Dots. The interview was conducted entirely in English.

Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were initially briefed on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the timeline and this interview's location at the beginning of extensive community engagement and participatory strategies. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular questions and popular talking points, the primary guiding discussion questions of this session included:

1. *What concerns do you have about Downtown Westport?*
2. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
3. *What would your ideal riverfront look like?*
4. *What concerns do you hear about walking / biking as well as access to greenspace in Westport from your community members?*
5. *This area is located on a floodplain. How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots:

1. Concerns about Downtown

- Interviewees identified several concerns that they had about the downtown area, particularly a lack of access to downtown from the waterfront (and vice versa), a lack of access to water-based activities or the waterfront, and a lack of winter-time activities or winter-time draws to downtown.
- There were concerns about an increased maintenance burden on parks and recreation and lack of clarity over whose responsibility maintenance would be.
 - To make maintenance easier, keeping greenspace to grass, rather than trees or flower beds would be preferable, as well as having large trash cans that were trash only, rather than mixed trash and recycling.
 - Interviewees also wanted any new construction to implement floodproofing.



- Accessibility and access to quiet, shaded space was seen as a place for improvement that should be a major priority in any future development. Implementing tree lined streets or a tree lined shoreline would be inviting

2. Ideas for Improvement

- Turning lots into a draw for downtown and focusing on greenspace when redeveloping the parking lots was of high priority. As one interviewee put it “we should turn these parking lots from parking lots with greenspace into greenspaces with parking lots”
- Interviewees wanted more greenspace along the river and more community space, as opposed to parking, specifically, they mentioned turning Parker Harding into another community space with activities and community events.
- Interviewees floated the idea of creating double deckered parking over other parking lots farther from the waterfront to solve any traffic issues that might occur.
- Interviewees were very interested in planting native species, specifically native seagrasses, along the waterfront.
- Interviewees mentioned the 2015 plan and the changes it made to Jesup Green favorably. The idea of a playground and splashpad near Jesup Green to allow for library activities or activities involving children was very popular. The example of Old Town Square in Fairfax, VA was given – a park adjacent to the library that allows for outdoor library programming.

3. Transportation and Access

- There was concern about striking a balance of parking with creating more greenspace so that people aren't at risk of getting hit crossing the street.
 - Interviewees identified a need for parking and understood that getting rid of parking spots will contribute to traffic and parking issues.
- Interviewees wanted to support non-car access to downtown by creating safe sidewalks and connections from downtown to the waterfront that were accessible outside of a car.

4. Sustainability and the Environment

- Interviewees were very interested in converting Parker Harding and parts of Jesup Green into flood storage to reduce impact of flood events. Decreasing the amount of asphalt that comes into contact with floodwater was also mentioned as an environmental improvement that should occur in redevelopment of these spaces.
 - Other ideas to combat flooding included sidewalks on hinges that could be raised to become a floodwall or buying a sandbag machine to sandbag the river,



or planting native species or grasses that can help maintain the river banks and mitigate flooding.

- Several plans for changes to the city had been heard about by interviewees: interviewees were unanimously opposed to a proposed vehicular bridge over Dead Men's Bridge and a pedestrian bridge over the Saugatuck River for environmental reasons.



Town of Westport

Downtown Westport Town Managers and Selectwomen Stakeholders

Via Zoom Call

September 13, 2022

Attendees:

- Rosanne Lubeck, Connect the Dots
- Sophia Peterson, Connect the Dots
- Achan Sookying, Langan
- Terry Dunn
- Michael Kronick
- Nick Marsan
- Eileen Lavigne Flug
- Andrea Moore
- Candice Savin
- Jen Tooker
- Foti Koskinas
- Elaine Daignault
- Bill Harmer

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to augment the access, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as an initial community outreach strategy in this project. This meeting gathered members of Westport's nonprofit and arts community to create a preliminary dialogic space for envisioning and brainstorming possible reconceptualizations, redesigns, and reconstructions of several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

The meeting, held virtually, convened some prevalent Downtown Westport stakeholders to discuss the local and built environment of the Downtown and Riverfront, specifically the parking lots of Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot. During the interview, participants shared their thoughts regarding the benefits of the Downtown area and Riverfront as a space for outdoor and community experiences, areas of need, and potential ideas and pathways for improvement, specifically regarding sustainability, greenspace, transportation and increase community events and activities.



Participant Overview:

The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM on September 13th, 2022. It was the fourth group engaged in the stakeholder process. The ten stakeholder interviewees all lived and worked in Westport. All interviewees were involved in local government, ranging from city selectwomen to members of the police and fire department. The interview was conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by three facilitators and members of project team staff, two from Connect the Dots and one from Langan. The interview was conducted entirely in English.

Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were initially briefed on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the timeline and this interview's location at the beginning of extensive community engagement and participatory strategies. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular questions and popular talking points, the primary guiding discussion questions of this session included:

1. *In what ways do you enjoy / appreciate Westport's Downtown and riverfront?*
2. *What concerns do you have about Downtown Westport?*
3. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
4. *How do these three areas [Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot] serve different needs, and how do you think they tie together?*
5. *How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*
6. *Where would you like to see Downtown Westport in five years? Ten years?*
7. *Are there projects Downtown that have succeeded / or you see as a success that we should look at that can be scaled/ broadened for greater impact?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots:

1. Benefits of Downtown

- Interviewees agreed Downtown being accessible via Imperial Lot and the lovely walking space of the quiet, serene riverfront were a major draws of living in Westport.
 - Interviewees were opposed to a proposed vehicular bridge over Dead Men's Bridge.



- Interviewees thought that it was important to maintain the flexibility of spaces to serve as parking and as spaces for community events and community use. Jesup Green was given as an example.

2. Needed Improvements

- Interviewees identified a need for more greenspace and attractions, specifically for young families and people with children, a lack of accessibility on route to downtown (sidewalks and the walking bridge) and a lack of safety on the streets around downtown.
- Interviewees had heard about a plan to move the Jessup Green parking lot farther from the water to allow for greenspace near the water. There were concerns about the safety of children playing near the water and other fall risks, due to a lack of railing. Interviewees emphasized the importance of railings if greenspace is close to water.

3. Improvements for Downtown

- Improvements recommended more handicap-designated spots downtown, with parking lots farther away from downtown serving non-handicapped drivers.
- Interviewees stressed the importance of signage and wayfinding to educate people about the parking available in Imperial Lot and the ability to walk from Imperial Lot to downtown using pedestrian walkways.
- Interviewees wanted more people using the water – more activities on the water, more access points to the river and merchants renting out water activity equipment (kayaking, canoes ect.)
 - The idea was floated of a waterway connection between downtown and the river
- Interviewees stressed that it was important to maintain as much greenery as possible, especially at Jesup Green, which is well used by children.
- Baldwin Lot was discussed as an example of how Parker Green should be improved. Other examples were downtown Providence, RD (due to its river attractions)

4. Transportation

- Interviewees emphasized that the streets don't feel safe, due to their narrow width.
- Interviewees discussed putting some kind of pathway going behind the police station to improve accessibility. This was deemed frustrating for the police because it would increase foot traffic behind the station.
- Making Westport more pedestrian friendly was seen as a priority for interviewees.
 - Interviewees were supportive of the idea of connecting downtown and Imperial Lot in a walkable loop.



5. Sustainability and Greenspace

- Interviewees were supportive of adding flood control devices to any future development, increasing sidewalk size to allow for portable flood control devices to be deployed, and utilizing Parker Harding as a flood control space.



Town of Westport

Downtown Westport DPIC Committee Members

Via Zoom Call

September 14, 2022

Attendees:

- Lily Goodspeed, Connect the Dots
- Michael Gulino, Connect the Dots
- Ron Corwin
- Johanna Martel
- Gately Ross
- Josh Allen

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of its 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to improve the accessibility, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as part of the initial community outreach efforts of this project. This meeting gathered Downtown Westport landowners and realtors to create a preliminary dialogic setting for envisioning and brainstorming possible redesigns, reconstructions, and opportunities for several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

This meeting, held virtually, convened members from Downtown Westport's Downtown Plan Implementation Committee (DPIC) to discuss the community and built environments of the Downtown and Riverfront. During this interview, the participants shared their thoughts regarding the positive draws of the Downtown, potential ideas for improvement, the walkability and greenery of the areas, challenges of parking and transportation, concerns regarding sustainability and flood mitigation, and possibilities for enhancing Downtown's outdoor and community-oriented activities.

Participant Overview:

This stakeholder interview was the fifth group engaged during the initial stakeholder interview process.



The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM on September 14th, 2022. The interview was attended by four interviewees, all who lived and worked in Westport. All participants were members of the Downtown Plan Implementation Committee (DPIC) which serves as a selected committee responsible for supervising the implementation of the Master Plan. The interview was conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by two facilitators and project team staff members, both from Connect the Dots. The interview was conducted entirely in English.

Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were updated on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project, its connection to the Master Plan, and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the project timeline and this interview's role within an extensive community engagement and participatory strategy. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular popular talking points and questions, the primary guiding discussions questions of this session included:

1. *In what ways do you enjoy / appreciate Westport's Downtown and riverfront?*
2. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
3. *What would your ideal riverfront look like?*
4. *How important is parking when visiting Downtown Westport? Do you drive when you visit, or would you rather take another form of transportation?*
5. *What concerns do you hear about walking/biking as well as access to greenspace in Westport from your community members?*
6. *This area is a floodplain. How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*
7. *What aspects of the riverfront could be educational for the public? What kind of educational programming would be helpful for you and your community?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots.

1. Draws of Downtown Westport

- Interviewees praised valuable downtown institutions, like the farmers market, theater, and library emphasizing them family-friendly and community-building assets.



- Interviewees highlighted the potential of the Riverfront for community connection and outdoor activities, highlighting recent increased use of pathways, and the potential for improved walkability and bikes downtown.

2. Needed Improvements

- Downtown could benefit from a more integrated Riverfront. Suggestions include making the river more visible from Downtown and making the lots more accessible for events and people by providing running water, electricity, and washrooms.
- Interviewees suggested improving the Riverfront's connectivity, from Imperial up through the town, and making the space more visually appealing, by "making it look less like a concrete jungle" and removing invasive species.
 - Other suggestions included incorporating more opportunities for families and the community along the Riverfront to improve foot traffic, retail, and activities downtown.

3. Greenspace and Community

- Interviewees hoped to transform downtown into an active space, with activities that draw people Downtown, allow for recreation, and foster a vibrant sense of community. Suggestions included food or coffee trucks, a seasonal skating rink, outdoor fitness and tai chi areas, a book club space, and a playground.
- Given increased housing across/along the river, and a number of retail offerings downtown, participants suggested including more places to sit, chat, eat, and relax. Participants wanted to make it a space where people would want to spend time, relax, and connect with the Westport community.
- Youth and young adults were a particular group of focus. Participants emphasized the criticality of including productive and creative activities and opportunities that draw teenagers and youth to hangout and stay downtown.

4. Transportation and Parking

- Interviewees proposed different futures for the three lots, noting that Parking Harding and Imperial needed car access and parking for events, activities, and retail, but that Jesup Green had more flexibility for redesign, softening, and green space.
 - Participants still encouraged improved designs for Parker Harding and Imperial, suggesting promenades, softer parking lots, and more aesthetically pleasing visuals.
- Participants saw parking as a secondary issue, noting the town should focus more on making Downtown inviting, and that residents will find ways Downtown regardless, assuming it is appealing.



- Participants suggested pushing for more alternative transportation like ride-share, bike-share, and walkways.
- Some participants hoped to see Main Street closed off for cars, despite potential criticism. Interviewees wanted to see a more integrated, walkable, European Downtown.

5. Sustainability

- Interviewees highlighted flooding as a huge problem downtown that is a massive concern for downtown merchants and residents, especially given climate change. Flooding abatement-type work was labeled as quintessential.
 - Participants suggested looking to Amsterdam and designs they've incorporated to move water as inspiration for Westport's Downtown.
- Some participants hoped the Riverfront could incorporate educational opportunities around climate change and sustainability. Suggestions included an educational 'walk' to educate visitors and residents and use recycled-glass cement to emphasize the town's net-zero resolution.



Town of Westport
Downtown Westport Organizations
Via Zoom Call
September 14, 2022

Attendees:

- Rosanne Lubeck, Connect the Dots
- Michael Gulino, Connect the Dots
- Brian McGunagle, Pride and DPIC

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to augment the access, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as an initial community outreach strategy in this project. This meeting attempted to convene members of Downtown Westport's organizations and retailers to create a space for envisioning and brainstorming possible reconceptualizations, redesigns, and reconstructions of several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

The meeting, held virtually, convened some prevalent Downtown Westport stakeholders and organizations to discuss the local and built environment of the Downtown and Riverfront, specifically the public lots of Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot. During the interview, participants shared their thoughts regarding Downtown's negative attributes and potential ideas and pathways for improvement

Participant Overview:

This stakeholder interview was the sixth group engaged during the initial stakeholder interview process.

The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM on September 14th, 2022. Only one interviewee attended. The interviewee lived and worked in Westport. The interviewee was involved in the LGBTQ+ scene in Westport, working for the local LGBTQ+ center and the DPIC. The interview was conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by two facilitators and project team staff members, both from Connect the Dots, although one staff member left early in the meeting. The interview was conducted entirely in English.



Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were briefed on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project, and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the project timeline and this interview's role within an extensive community engagement and participatory strategy. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular popular talking points and questions, the primary guiding discussions questions of this session included:

1. *In what ways do you enjoy / appreciate Westport's Downtown and riverfront?*
2. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
3. *What would your ideal riverfront look like?*
4. *How walkable do you consider Downtown Westport?*
5. *The area is located on a floodplain. How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*
6. *Are there other insights that you'd like to share?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots:

1. Draws of Downtown Westport

- The participant offered a more critical view of Downtown, noting there weren't many draws for a family with a small child.
 - Important challenges Downtown included the high prevalence of vacant stores or stores under construction, the difficulty of parking, a sense of uncleanness and lack of safety, a buildup of cars, garbage compactors, and parking lots, no family-friendly options, and dangerous traffic.

2. Needed Improvements

- The interviewee hoped to see Downtown more active. They suggested prioritizing a diversity of vendors, retailers, and restaurants and both locally-owned and national/international brands, hopefully to make it more lively in the evenings.
 - Comparisons included downtown Greenwich, but less high-end because of high activity, as well as Fairfield's downtown which is more family-friendly, active, and bike/pedestrian accessible.
 - The interviewee hoped to see Westport's Downtown as *"more of a destination with a purpose to it than just retail."*



- The interviewee emphasized the need to make Downtown more family-friendly by incorporating more kid-friendly space, connecting the library to Downtown, and building a playground.

3. Greenspace and Community

- The participant highlighted the Jesup Green as a potential space for central gathering and community groups, like a traditional New England town green.
 - They suggested efforts to make it more of a communal space, integrating it more with the Downtown and decreasing the prominence of the empty parking lot.
- Kid- and youth-oriented activities are neglected Downtown, according to the interviewee. More efforts should be made to boost family-friendly and youth-focused opportunities, like an ice cream truck or playground, for example.

4. Transportation and Parking

- The participant suggested improving the connectivity of the different sections of Downtown. They noted that Bedford Square, Church Street, Main Street, and Parker Harding all feel like separate areas, and need a more cohesive feel across the three different shopping areas.

5. Sustainability

- The interviewee didn't comment much on sustainability, but rather spoke to the overshadowing of the effort by other projects ongoing in Westport, noting it feels more like a "*slow grind.*"



Town of Westport
Downtown Westport Stakeholders
Via Zoom Call
September 16, 2022

Attendees:

- Lily Goodspeed, Connect the Dots
- Sophia Peterson, Connect the Dots
- Kristin Schneeman
- Sal Liccione
- Jonathan Steinberg

Meeting Overview:

In pursuit of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Town of Westport's Reconnecting the Riverfront Project aims to augment the access, usability, safety, and aesthetics of Downtown Westport. This virtual interview was organized as an initial community outreach strategy in this project. This meeting gathered members of Westport's community to create a preliminary dialogic space for envisioning and brainstorming possible reconceptualizations, redesigns, and reconstructions of several downtown areas of Westport, close to the riverfront, currently operating as parking lots.

The meeting, held virtually, convened some prevalent Downtown Westport stakeholders to discuss the local and built environment of the Downtown and Riverfront, specifically the parking lots of Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot. During the interview, participants shared their thoughts regarding the benefits and draws of Downtown and the Riverfront, areas of need in these spaces, particularly with regards to traffic safety and increasing community event space. Interviewees shared potential ideas and pathways for improvement.

Participant Overview:

The stakeholder interview was hosted over Zoom from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM on September 9th, 2022. It was the final group engaged in the stakeholder process. The three stakeholder interviewees were longtime residents who worked in Westport.. The interview was conducted entirely in English. The interviewees were joined by three facilitators and project team staff, all from Connect the Dots. The interview was conducted entirely in English.



Key Takeaways:

Interviewees were initially briefed on the intent and purpose of the Reconnecting the Riverfront project and the three primary target public lots. Interviewees were also made aware of the timeline and this interview's location at the beginning of extensive community engagement and participatory strategies. While the conversation was fluid and fluctuated around particular questions and popular talking points, the primary guiding discussion questions of this session included:

1. *In what ways do you enjoy / appreciate Westport's Downtown and riverfront?*
2. *What concerns do you have about Downtown Westport?*
3. *How could Westport's downtown and riverfront improve?*
4. *What would your ideal riverfront look like?*
5. *How walkable do you consider Downtown Westport?*
6. *What kind of activities are missing from Downtown, or do you enjoy it as is?*
7. *How important do you consider sustainability and resiliency planning to the future of the riverfront?*
8. *How effective do you find online outreach to be in your community? What are good ways to reach people offline?*

Each question was followed by an open space for conversation and discussion. Interviewees responded verbally, without using the chat, and offered a plethora of thoughts, questions, and feedback concerning possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions regarding sustainability, activities, and opportunities for the riverfront and available, adjacent public lots:

1. Draws of Downtown

- Interviewees appreciated the feeling of downtown – “the public hustle and bustle” – and the access to amenities like the library and shopping. River views were seen as a big benefit of living in Westport.

2. Needed Improvements

- Interviewees noted that “cars have the best view of the river” and were very supportive of attempts to increase human access to river views. There was a strong want for more community events and activities to take place near downtown and to encourage downtown to be community oriented.
- Interviewees were supportive of ideas from a previous downtown plan, particularly from implementing a European style promenade around the river, allowing for pleasure boats to be sold on the river edge, a water connection to the Saugatuck River, and lining parks with a walking trail.



- Interviewees wanted more greenery along the river and more community activity in Parker Harding. The idea of making the back of Parker Harding storefronts more inviting to encourage more usage was floated.
- Interviewees were very supportive of a playground at Jesup Green, but were emphatic about the need for fencing.
- Interviewees emphasized that it was important to maintain the flexibility of spaces that were used for community events, like Imperial Lot.
 - Interviewees identified a need for bathrooms around Imperial Lot and increased greenery or maintenance to reduce weeds.

3. Transportation and Walkability

- Interviewees were supportive of implementing paid parking in these lots to free up parking spaces for more usage.
- The idea of increasing connectivity between Parker Harding, Jesup Green, and Imperial Lot, especially to the Senior Center was floated by interviewees
 - There was also support for having Baron's South become part of downtown by increasing connectivity between that park and other areas.
- To increase walkability and decrease car usage downtown, interviewees liked the idea of using signage to increase awareness of nearby parking lots so that people had more options to choose from.
- There were concerns about the safety of walking downtown, interviewees identified a need for traffic calming and better traffic law enforcement. Interviewees identified this as a major impediment for people to feel comfortable biking or walking downtown.
- Interviewees identified a need for more events and spaces for children and teens but noted that a lack of traffic safety meant that people would not want their children biking downtown.

4. Sustainability

- Baldwin Lot was criticized for not feeling resilient in terms of future floodproofing and was not held up as an example for what future development should look like.
- Interviewees requested less asphalt, smaller trashcans and more recycling efforts by the city, like split recycling-trash trash cans.