

# Norwalk DPW adds Washington Village roadwork to its to do list

By Nancy Chapman • 3 : 47 am EST February 10 2017



The Day Street side of Washington Village. (File photo)

NORWALK, Conn. – As if the Norwalk Department of Public Works didn't have **enough to do**, it is now in charge of raising the intersection of Day and Raymond Streets up six feet to provide that long-talked about “dry egress” for the new Washington Village.

“We shuffled our resources in the department,” DPW Principal Engineer Lisa Burns said Tuesday to the Common Council Public Works Committee. “You know, we weren't ready to do this project. We admit that. So now we're doing a lot of work because reviewing plans is a lot different than being a project

manager of plans, and we are catching up on that.”

Burns and DPW Director Bruce Chimento said Trinity Financial, the developer working with the Norwalk Housing Authority to rebuild Washington Village, was estimating the project’s cost as more than the \$9.5 million authorized by the Council. So, they took it over.

“The problem we were having with Trinity in November was they put an astronomically high number on the cost to do the infrastructure work. The Department of Public Works did not recommend that level of funding to the Common Council,” Burns said. “...They wanted to \$10.5 million to do the project and a very high engineering estimate, with all-in costs. We recommended \$9.5 million, that number had a lot of contingency built in. So, \$10.5 million wasn’t acceptable.”

The raising of Day and Raymond has been a bone of contention with some Norwalk residents for some time, as a battle was waged to keep Washington Village from being built in a 100-year flood plain. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) issued a waiver to flood management rules for the development but required that the intersection be raised so resident would be able to walk out of the development in a flood.

Washington Village suffered much damage during Superstorm Sandy. Council member Faye Bowman (D-District B) mentioned in the course of Tuesday’s discussion that the middle section of Washington Village has a rat problem because of flooding.

The Council in November authorized a special capital appropriation of \$3.95 million to fund infrastructure improvements at Day and Raymond, with \$500,000 expected in reimbursement from Trinity. The city already had \$1.55 million in the bank for the project.

Burns said Tuesday that Norwalk has \$3 million in Community Block Grant

Development (CDBG) funds; the Council in November authorized Mayor Harry Rilling to execute an agreement for \$4 million in CDBG funds.

So, there's no more money expected to be spent on the project. It's just that DPW is taking it on.

"Trinity had a lot of concern about the schedule. It was always contemplated, since I have been the engineering part of Public Works, that the developer was going to construct the roadway improvements to meet the scheduled of their development coming up on," Burns said, before she and Chimento revealed the dispute over costs.

"We didn't really like the numbers they were coming up with. We rejected their first offer," Chimento said.

The Committee voted unanimously to authorize hiring CDM Smith to provide construction inspection services for the road raising and for the road improvements associated with the building of The SoNo Collection on West Avenue. The latter will be paid for by GGP, the mall's developer.

Those two were linked because they are so closely aligned that it will save money to have one firm over see them both, Burns said.

DPW has a request for qualifications (RFQ) out for a construction manager for the road raising, and hopes to have that selection ready for the next month's Committee meeting, she said.

Another complication: because Trinity was going to do the work, the money is in a Redevelopment Agency account, Burns said. DPW needs input from Tighe and Bond, an engineering firm, but Tighe and Bond is responsible to Redevelopment.

"We are working on getting documents finalized by Tighe and Bond but because they work for Redevelopment we don't have the direct control to tell them how to do that. The Redevelopment staff has been very receptive,"

Burns said.



Norwalk Department of Public Works DPW  
Principal Engineer Lisa Burns.

Burns said she thinks the money should be in a city account, and Corporation Counsel's office is looking into it.

“Did I read that you have to pave at one time and then dig it up again?” Land Use and Building Management Committee Chairman Thomas Livingston (D-District E) asked.

“I have a lot of questions about how this is going to get accomplished,” Burns said. “... It's like building a ramp onto a highway, almost. You don't build a ramp and then dig it up and put utilities in it. I think that's how it's been thought, like they were just going to raise the road, put a bunch of fill and compact it and then dig it up. I'm like, it doesn't sound like a good idea. So, we're waiting to hear from the engineer. And then we'll sit down with a construction manager.”

DPW also took over sidewalk work that Spinnaker Real Estate Partners was expected to do for Maritime Village, an apartment complex at 19 Day Street.

“We could have as many as three or four different contractors working in the same roads, doing basically the same things,” Chimento said. “... Everything from that curb back to that property they would construct while we are building the road. What's that about? How do you control that?”

The city isn't funding the work, just overseeing it, they said.

The CDBG funding will go to moving the utilities in the area, Burns said, calling that “a really complicated project to execute.”

Bowman asked about the timing of the construction.

“The roadway reconstruction will not be done when residents are moving into (the new) Washington Village,” Burns said.

Even so, DPW will get the road work done faster than Trinity would have, Chimento said.

“They don’t have the experience,” he said.

DPW has been reviewing plans but didn’t expect to do the construction, Burns said. If it had, “Our review would have included tying in the building,” she said. “... That was missing when we got the documents.”

Council member Rich Bonenfant (R-At Large) asked if the city would get any nasty surprises, if the project could require more money than what’s been appropriated.

“We can’t answer your question. What is it that is unforeseen?” Chimento said, but added, “We’re comfortable with the number we have there and I’m comfortable with what it’s going to be.”

*This story was done from a recording.*

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