

On February 2, 2009, the Alliance for a Livable Newport hosted a conversation with Mayor Jeanne-Marie Napolitano. Mayor Napolitano stepped away from the podium to speak informally with those in attendance, sharing her vision for the next two years. She outlined a simple and practical agenda, her overarching theme being that people want to see results. She detailed her commitment to developing a strategic plan that would provide a roadmap for all to see. She then outlined four areas on which she hoped to focus attention and noted work that was occurring or scheduled to occur relative to these projects.

Roads: completing roadwork on Broadway; continuing with Phase II and III of Washington Square.

City website: continuing improvements to the City site and pursuing webcam coverage of city council meetings.

Water and sewer issues: involving other communities in addressing these serious problems.

Newport economy: the need to behave in a more fiscally responsible way and share the burden across all levels of the community.

Questions from the audience addressed topics such as the “road to nowhere,” which Mayor Napolitano reported was recently the subject of a meeting she had with RIDOT. At that meeting, the DOT agreed to take another look at the project.

A question was raised about the possibility of the City Council revisiting the expansion of the West Deck at Waites Wharf. Mayor Napolitano discussed the procedures that rendered the matter closed but insisted that city regulations requiring tables and chairs would be helpful in reducing occupancy.

On the subject of the results of the Historic District Zoning Ordinance Review Task Force and their recommendation to retain the position of Historic Preservation Planner, Mayor Napolitano noted the importance of preserving Newport’s architectural heritage and her support of preserving the position if funding could be secured.

Other question topics included Newport’s readiness to participate in the economic stimulus package, the suitability of the “Slots” sign at Newport Grand and problems with signs directing traffic to Newport, providing guidance to city staff in the area of Community Development Block Grants, the possibility of attracting new businesses to Newport, Newport’s disproportionate percentage of low income housing, and whether Newport receives federal funding as a consequence of having low-income families residing in the area.

The Mayor indicated that Newport had several shovel ready projects. She was sympathetic to concerns about the “Slots” sign but did not feel it could be changed; regarding traffic and congestion in Newport, she discussed a parking study which has yet

to be presented to the City. Regarding future commercial development, Mayor Napolitano said she thought the city was “retailed out,” and discussed factors such as lack of available land that make it difficult to attract new businesses. On the subject of low income housing, she provided background on the transition from Tonomy Hill to Newport Heights, citing the one-for-one replacement rule as the cause for Newport’s disproportionately high number of units. School Committee Chairwoman, Jo Eva Gaines responded to the question regarding federal funding and reported that Newport does receive federal funding and that over 51% of Newport’s school children are eligible for free or reduced cost lunches.

The Mayor’s remarks were followed by a presentation from the Building a Healthy Newport Environment Coalition. The Coalition looked at perceived and real threats in the Newport environment, a summary of which is part of this report. The presentation given by Ellen Tohn of Tohn Environmental Strategies, focused on air and water quality, outlining both identified problems and possible solutions. BHNEC is seeking input for future grant proposals and to that end invited comments throughout the presentation. An informal vote on whether it was more important and productive to pursue air or water quality issues resulted in a strong showing for addressing air quality first. This sentiment was dramatized by audience member Holly Mello, who spoke about air quality in the Connell Hwy. area. Her comments were the focus of newspaper coverage of the forum by the Newport Daily News.

<http://www.newportdailynews.com/articles/2009/02/04/newport/doc49886f3011e39221843507.txt>

A Summary of the findings of the Building A Healthy Newport Environment Coalition is available (BHNEC Summary) as are more detailed findings (BHNEC Community Presentation 1-30-09).