

# NANCY ON NORWALK

Norwalk election notes: Investigating candidate's statements

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Here's some follow-up on comments made recently by candidates for elected office:

- Rilling responds to Riddle's charge that a temporary CO could be issued for Byron the Baker
- Riddle calls 'communist New York' comment 'tongue in cheek'
- Counting cars on Wilton Avenue
- Brinton said a sewer line went nowhere; Carr calls it a private line
- Business permits?

Rilling to Riddle: 'That's shameful'

Byron Sanchez, caught in the middle between the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency and real estate broker Jason Milligan, has become an election issue that's been touched upon in both the League of Women Voters Mayoral forum and the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce Mayoral debate.

Sanchez, also called "Byron the Baker," has invested nearly \$100,000 in a River Street storefront owned by Milligan but cannot get a certificate of occupancy to open his business due to a dispute over the building's façade. The Redevelopment Agency states that Milligan needs to go through the design review process, as have eight other property owners since the requirement was put into the zoning code after the Common Council approved the Wall Street/West Avenue redevelopment plan in 2019. Milligan maintains he's been treated unfairly, his civil rights violated by "a sudden new process" allegedly "invented" by the Redevelopment Agency.

At Tuesday morning's Chamber debate, Republican Mayoral candidate Jonathan Riddle said, "It's kind of ridiculous, they can give (Sanchez) a temporary certificate of occupancy to start operating immediately."

Moderator Kristin Okesson moved onto the next question and Democratic incumbent Mayor Harry Rilling didn't take any time to respond to the comment as the debate continued.

NancyOnNorwalk asked Rilling for a response. He wrote:

“It’s shameful that my opponent is playing politics with Mr. Sanchez’s business. That’s not how I operate, and I would encourage my opponent to learn the facts before trying to score political points.

“We’ve met with Mr. Sanchez, and I feel for him, but truly, this situation could be resolved quickly by Mr. Milligan filing for a ‘Third Party Design Review’. Mr. Milligan suggests this process is not binding and he has no obligation to follow it. Therein lies the problem. The RDA and Mr. Milligan are at odds on this issue.

“Design Review is not new news to anyone involved. Jason has known about the process since December 2020 and has been told repeatedly over many months that he needs to file one more permit. After he files that permit, which will cost about \$2,000, Mr. Sanchez can open his bakery.

“Also, a temporary CO is given when someone is seeking a little extra time when there is minor work left to be completed. That is not the case here. Everyone knows what needs to be done, but Mr. Milligan has repeatedly, said he will not follow the process. Others have gone through Third Party Review without any problems.

“It’s a truly unfortunate situation, and I have urged Jason to work with the RDA and file the permit to allow Mr. Sanchez to open his bakery. I’ve also suggested how Mr. Milligan could proceed in order to change or rescind any of the Zoning or RDA regulations he feels are outdated or unnecessary. “We would be more than willing to discuss those concerns with him. I will continue to work with Mr. Milligan until this is resolved. We are, however, trying to resolve this situation.

“No one wants to see Mr. Sanchez open his bakery more than me. I’ve heard some very positive reviews of his other bakeries and a bakery on River Street would be a perfect fit.”

Riddle: Norwalk welcomes those fleeing de Blasio’s policies

Also at Tuesday’s Chamber debate, Republican Mayoral candidate Jonathan Riddle said, “Property values have increased tremendously over this pandemic, as we took in New York refugees, who are fleeing the communist state of New York.”

What did he mean by that? Riddle wrote:

“As you may be aware, prior to COVID, the real estate market in Connecticut was on the decline and there was an abundance of houses on the market with people leaving the state.

“My comment is a tongue-in-cheek reference to New Yorkers fleeing from the communistic policies Bill De Blasio believes in and documented in [this Yahoo Article from July 2020](#) and this [NY Times article from 2013](#), amongst many others.

“We welcome anyone fleeing the policies De Blasio is implementing with open arms and as a result, Norwalk Homeowners are the ultimate beneficiary. Property Values during COVID

recovered significantly and there was a massive spike in home purchases in Norwalk creating a seller's market with property values increasing by 25% to 30%.

“A lot of these buyers were New Yorkers (NYC individuals) fleeing the high cost, high crime rates, and ideological policies implemented by Bill De Blasio. The comment was a thank you to New Yorkers for rescuing our struggling real estate market.”

He also sent a link to a 2017 article. “[This opinion piece by David Boaz](#), executive vice president of the Cato Institute and author of ‘The Libertarian Mind,’ sums up that point accurately with direct quotes from De Blasio himself,” Riddle wrote.

## Wilton Avenue

The City held a press conference three weeks ago to tout the [planting of 18 new trees on Wilton Avenue](#). The next day, at a Republican fundraising event, Republican Mayoral candidate Jonathan Riddle called Wilton Avenue “a road that’s less traveled and out of the way,” and said, “I’d be surprised if 15 cars drove that road a day.”

NancyOnNorwalk went to Wilton Avenue recently and counted cars, using a dashcam to document the activity and make sure the count was correct.

Six cars went by in the first minute, and those were just the vehicles that travelled the entire length of the street, not counting the ones that turned into driveways and onto side streets.

The next two minutes of dashcam video, shot at 4:34 p.m. Oct. 20, showed six vehicles going down the road’s entire length and one parking on the street. After a little glitch with the dashcam, documentation resumed, showing 19 vehicles going down the road in six minutes, beginning at 4:38 p.m.

Some of the vehicles were trucks used by landscapers or in construction.

## Old (private) sewer line dumps on neighborhood

At the recent League of Women Voters’ Common Council at Large forum, Independents for Norwalk candidate Lisa Brinton said, “I’m concerned about the infrastructure and our sewer system and our water system.”

She said, “Just in my neighborhood, we found out, in the terms of the sewer system, that there were there was a sewer line that was connected to nowhere. . . . We’re an old city, we’ve been a little bit sloppy or casual with some of the things that we’ve done. So adding all these people (in apartments) is going to put more strain on the infrastructure and in terms of our water quality.”

Brinton lives in Shorefront Park. NancyOnNorwalk asked Norwalk Chief of Operations and Public Works Anthony Robert Carr about the comment.

His answer refers to the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) and Suez Water Environmental Inc., which took over the Norwalk wastewater treatment plant operations in 2020. Carr wrote (bolding is his):

- On December 22, 2020, WPCA/SUEZ received an urgent request from several parcel owners in the Shorefront Park area regarding sewerage back-up in their homes.
- WPCA/SUEZ subsequently determined that the sewer issues resulted from a private “shared/common” sanitary sewer lateral connected to an existing (presumably decades old) septic system constructed by a private developer.
  - DPW/WPCA does not maintain records of private wastewater system on private property.
- WPCA/SUEZ diligently coordinated with the Shorefront Park property owners to install new sanitary sewer laterals (i.e. service lines) connected to the City sanitary sewer to abate and protect public safety and welfare (especially with the pending holidays).

400 businesses?

Finally, Democratic incumbent Mayor Harry Rilling has twice said that 400 new businesses began in Norwalk during the pandemic.

Norwalk Chief of Economic and Community Development Jessica Vonashek referred NancyOnNorwalk to the Mayor’s Dashboard for information on that.

“You can see in FY21, 332 businesses registered with the Town Clerk’s office and in FY22, 80 businesses registered with the office,” she wrote.

Fiscal Year 21 began July 1, 2021.