NEWS

"Friday night I took you dancin'!"
A FINE DAY PAUL MCCARTNEY

East Shore locals air Lighthouse Point renovation concerns at meeting

BY ALIZA SHYOVITZ
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



ALIZA SHYOVITZ / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

At a Wednesday evening community meeting, residents of New Haven's East Shore neighborhood expressed frustration with the New Haven Parks Department and the Yale Urban Design Workshop's redevelopment plans for Lighthouse Point Park.

Over 60 East Shore residents packed the ranger station at Lighthouse Point Park on Wednesday to voice concerns about the future of the park.

The New Haven Parks Department hosted the 90-minute community meeting to present the early stages of a plan to redevelop the park, a joint project between the Department and the Yale Urban Design Workshop, or YUDW, at the School of Architecture. At the meeting, locals raised concerns about their involvement in the redevelopment project and expressed frustration about the park's current conditions.

"I think it was a little daunting at first because we didn't know what was going to be literally thrust upon us, in a way," Giulia Gambale, a resident who attended the meeting, said. "I think that people have very strong opinions because a lot of the neighborhood has lived here for a very long time."

New Haven Parks Director Max Webster ENV '17, YUDW Executive Director Andrei Harwell ARC '06, YUDW Assistant Director Matthew Rosen and YUDW Director of Advocacy and Planning Elihu Rubin '99 presented a slideshow about the history of the park and the goals of the renovation project. The project, Webster said, was intended to repair deteriorating infrastructure and address the fallout of an August storm which closed the park for about a month earlier this fall.

Moments after Webster began the presentation, residents interrupted to call out a variety of concerns, ranging from the location of the meeting in the ranger station — which many residents said did not accommodate the number of attendees — to high noise levels in the park. For the first hour of the meeting, residents frequently spoke over the presentation and often applauded other attendees' comments.

Many residents told the presenters they did not feel included in the park redevelopment process, and some said they felt the city did not sufficiently publicize the Wednesday meeting.

The presenters stressed that they had not yet finalized the details of the renovation project and that the meeting was intended to be a forum for community engagement. According to Webster, the planners had previously organized an engagement activity in July at the park's Lighthouse Beer Garden event, which Rubin said saw lower attendance due to poor weather that day.

Rubin said that the team also had initial plans for another community forum, but that the August storm disrupted the intended timeline for collecting feedback.

Rubin described the "five principles" of the redevelopment effort, including goals to "amplify existing assets of the park," "embrace natural ecology" and "clarify movement and wayfinding" in the park.

At one point in the meeting, Rosen displayed a mock-up of a lighted path through the park. Residents called out to say the lights would draw more activity to the park after dusk and disrupt bird migration. Several residents exclaimed "no lights!" as Rosen discussed the proposal.

"We'll kill the lights," Rosen said in response to the residents' concerns. "You guys have spoken. Noted. Got it."

Over the course of the meeting, the crowd grew quieter. Residents began to ask technical questions about the plan and its provisions, and the presenters repeatedly said that the presentation was intended to showcase general concepts and gather feedback, rather than lay out any official plans.

"You have a meeting that is contentious like this, it's not the worst thing in the world," Webster said in an interview after the meeting. "It's a little bit of a test — put some stuff on a map and see how people respond to it. Some of these ideas are challenging, and ultimately, I think that's a good thing to figure out what people actually feel, right?"

Rosen said the goal of the meeting was to "share very early ideas" about the redevelopment plan, and that the presenters were "happily overwhelmed by the turnout" and community members' investment in the park.

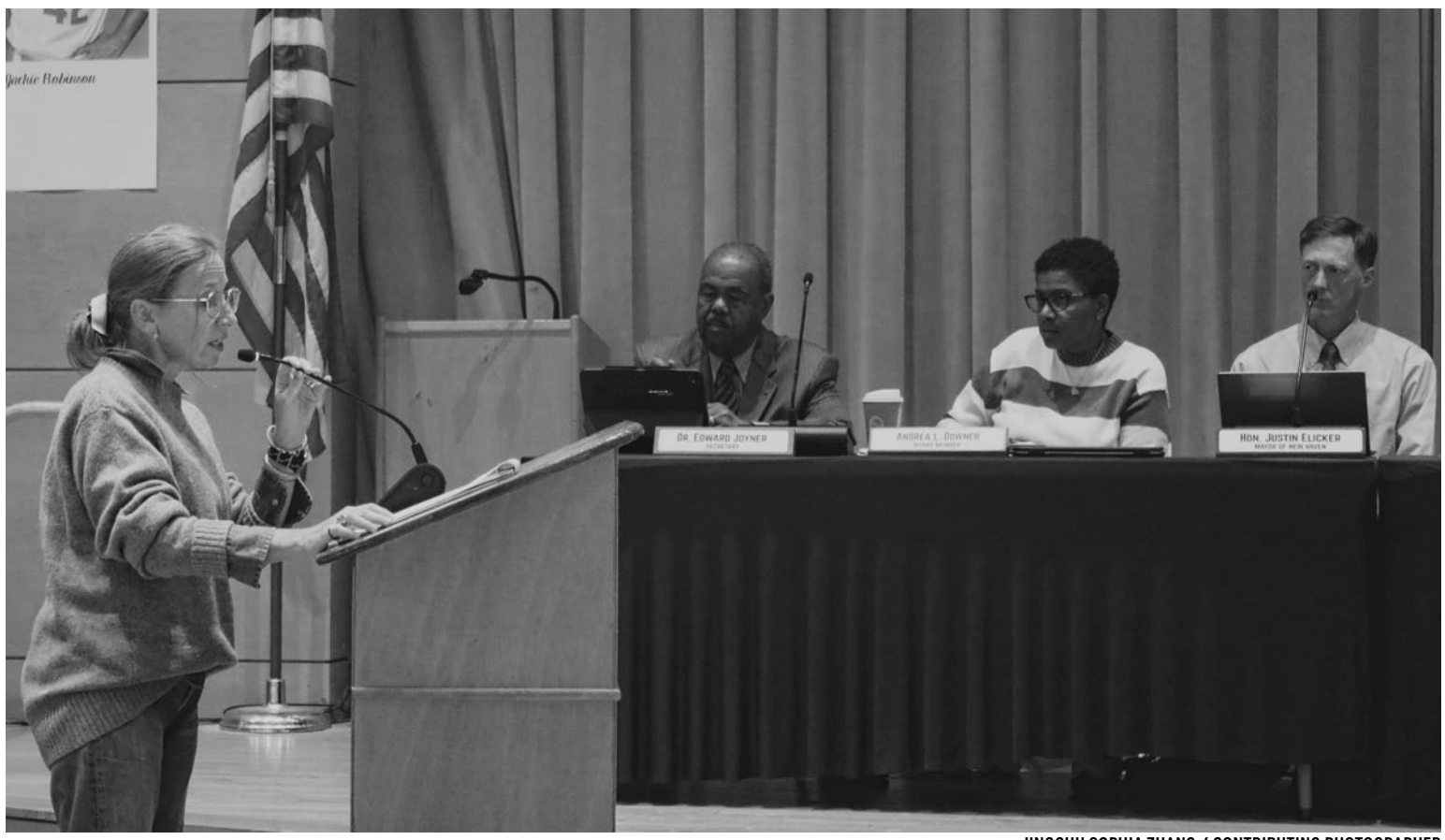
"I think that people kind of calmed down after they saw what things were going to look like," Gambale, one of the attendees, said. "But we do still have some concerns."

Lighthouse Point Park opened in 1925.

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Students protest handling of administrator's sexual assault allegations

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In May, days after a report alleged that then-James Hillhouse High School assistant principal Daniel Bonet sexually assaulted a student, he returned to the school. At a Monday Board of Education meeting, community members asked for an explanation.

Community leaders and students called on the New Haven Board of Education in a Monday board meeting to investigate how the district handled May allegations of sexual assault against a former assistant principal at James Hillhouse High School.

On May 22, the New Haven Police Department received a report that a student had accused former Hillhouse assistant principal Daniel Bonet of sexually assaulting her, according to a September NHPD statement. Four days later, on May 26, Bonet arrived at Hillhouse to fill in for the school's principal, Antoine Billy, who was absent at the start of the day, according to reporting by the New Haven Independent. As New Haven Public Schools spokesperson Justin Harmon said in a statement to the Independent, the district placed Bonet on leave that day.

On Sept. 14, the NHPD issued a warrant for Bonet's arrest on two counts of second-degree sexual assault and two counts of fourth-degree sexual assault, according to the NHPD statement. Bonet turned himself in later that night.

Community members and students spoke at the Monday Board of Education meeting at King Robinson Interdistrict Magnet School to demand accountability from the Board of Education and push for an investigation into Bonet's May 26 appearance at Hillhouse.

"On May 26, the administrative chain of command, the principal, assistant superintendent and the superintendent failed to ensure that Hillhouse was an environment safe from sexual, physical and emotional abuse," Ashley Stockton, a teacher at the Truman School, said in a public comment at the meeting, calling the Bonet's appearance that day "either negligence or deliberate indifference."

In a September statement to the New Haven Independent, Harmon said only the district's Human Resources department has the authority to place employees on administrative leave. He added that the school district's "standard protocol" for complaints filed with the state Department of Children and Families, or DCF, is to "step back from the investigative process until DCF determines whether to accept or decline the case." The NHPD received its May 22 report through the DCF. Once DCF accepts a case, the district "aligns its actions" with that agency and the NHPD, Harmon said.

Harmon added that the district only conducts "joint internal inquiries" about complaints filed with the DCF and NHPD "only when deemed appropriate and in full coordination with investigating agencies."

Gabrielle Ayres and Narges Mirzaye, two Hillhouse students, also demanded an explanation for Bonet's appearance at the school on May 26.

Ayres, a 10th grade student, said at the meeting that Bonet's return to school that day made "a lot of girls" feel "uncomfortable and unheard."

"We should not have to feel intimidated by people who are supposed to protect and support us," Ayres said in a public comment at the meeting. "Students deserve transparency. We deserve to be listened to, to feel comfortable reporting concerns without feeling the fear of judgment or the fear of being ignored."

NHPS Superintendent Madeline Negrón said in an interview that she is "currently looking at being able to determine what actually happened" between the filing of the police report on May 22 and Bonet's appearance at Hillhouse on May 26.

Negrón said she agrees with students' claims that Bonet's May 26 appearance "should have never happened" and added that "we're all extremely devastated by the allegations."

"I'm interested in ensuring that wherever the system failed, that that is corrected immediately so that it doesn't happen again," she said.

In mid-October, NHPS and Yale students co-organized a walkout against sexual violence in solidarity with a former Cornell student who in September filed a lawsuit alleging that she had been drugged and gang-raped at a fraternity house in 2024. Students in attendance at the walkout cited Hillhouse's handling of the Bonet case among the reasons for their walkout.

Dani McTiernan Huge, a student representative on the Board of Education, said in Monday's meeting that Bonet's return was an "egregious failure" of the board, and requested that the board devise a clear action plan to respond to future reports of alleged assault, provide recurring consent education and create a student-led task force on sexual assault, consent and trauma education initiatives, among other demands.

"We need to know that our safety matters, that our voices matter and that New Haven Public Schools will protect us," McTiernan Huge said, "especially with a societal issue this upsetting and damaging."

Online court records show that Bonet's next court date is set for Nov. 17.

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