



## Introduction

# Norwalk in Twenty Years

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As the year 2004 progressed, community officials in Norwalk began discussing the need to update their now forty-year old comprehensive master plan. That plan had aged fairly well, and many of the recommendations laid out by its authors had come to fruition. Many other recommendations had carried over to the present, and were still on the drawing board.

Appropriate funding was garnered from the City's revolving loan fund and from its Formula Community Development Block Grant allocations for 2005 and 2006. A local consultant, employed by WSOS Community Action Commission, a local community-based nonprofit, was hired to oversee and author the plan. As the concept of a new master plan evolved into a more well defined planning process, the City's administration, headed by Mayor Sue Lesch, took a major role in its implementation. Major input throughout the process was also gathered from the newly formed Norwalk Economic Development Corporation.

It is hoped that the unusually large and substantive input of a diverse number of Norwalk community members is reflected within the pages of this plan. Norwalk's inclusive planning process involved a core oversight team, an active and vociferous steering and advisory committee, and a number of single-topic resource panels, as well as the input of over five hundred community members through community forums, correspondence, telephone calls, email, and focus groups.

The plan is divided into a series of topical chapters. After an introductory chapter that summarizes the planning process and key steps along the way, and a chapter that provides background information on demographics, each subsequent chapter follows a format where the goals derived by the steering committee that pertain to that topic are presented, followed by background information pertinent to the topic and a section that presents the recommendations developed by single-topic resource panels and reviewed by the steering and advisory committees. Those topics covered in individual chapters include:

- ✓ Community character
- ✓ Natural resources
- ✓ Community facilities
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Utilities and infrastructure
- ✓ Economic development

- ✓ Downtown Norwalk
- ✓ Housing
- ✓ Quality of life
- ✓ Community services

The next chapter is devoted to land use. The future development of the City is most affected by land use decisions and patterns of growth, and thus land use is the central theme of this plan’s longest chapter.

A final summary chapter presents a recommended plan for the continued evaluation of and amendment to this plan as needed to keep it current and relevant. A summary table is also included, containing all the recommendations reported in the foregoing chapters.

The plan is intended to accurately reflect the planning priorities of the City and its component institutions and organizations over the next twenty years, from the perspective of the City as it exists in 2006. Without a doubt, that perspective will change with time, and it will be appropriate to alter the plan as priorities and critical pathways change. The plan’s last chapter proposes a means by which to “keep the plan current”.

The City of Norwalk presents the anomaly of a City that reveres its past and cherishes its “small town atmosphere”, yet makes great strides in improving its public and institutional capital, its public services, and charitable organizations. One must merely drive along Shady Lane on Norwalk’s southern edge to witness the high degree of Norwalk’s civic investment and pride. Within thirty seconds’ time, one can view the new patient pavilion of Fisher-Titus Medical Center, a graceful memorial to Norwalk’s and Huron County’s war veterans, and the Norwalk School District’s flagship building, Norwalk High School, which incorporates the Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center and art gallery. Across the road, to the immediate south of the high school, is a cultivated field, a fitting representation of the City’s agrarian roots, but also its future and potential for growth. While the City has come a long way since the last comprehensive plan was written in 1964, its potential for future development is just as great. It is hoped that this plan will help guide the City its many component elements toward a desired, prosperous, and successful future.

**Mission Statement**

The Norwalk area is a community that is committed to preserving its rich heritage and fulfilling quality of life while fostering planned growth.

**Vision Statement**

Our community will create a safe, family friendly environment in which we will preserve our natural resources and our strong neighborhoods, while promoting business growth, intergenerational opportunities, and proactive responses to future challenges, both locally and in a global economy.

## Acknowledgements

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This comprehensive plan is the result of an unusually high level of community input, and as a result, there are many people to thank.

Norwalk City Council recognized a need to update their forty-year-old plan, and helped make the project possible. Credit is due past and present Council members Steve Euton, Tom Stoll, Bob Carlton, Shane Penrose, Chris Mushett, Skip Wilde, Tera Thornhill, Dwight Tkach, Lynn Szabo, and Sharon Harwood.

Mayor Sue Lesch became intimately involved in the unfolding of the plan and the process that guided it. She ensured that her goal of maximum public participation and input was achieved, and many key members of her administration were extremely helpful in offering their insight and knowledge of the City. The Norwalk City Planning Commission was helpful in contributing to the plan's content and direction.

A core team met frequently throughout the nearly two-year planning process, and guided the overall direction of the process. Team members included Mayor Lesch, Ralph Fegley (who became a Huron County Commissioner several months into the process), Bethany Dentler (Director of the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation), and Virginia Poling (who kindly agreed to chair the Steering Committee), as well as consultant and Norwalk resident Ben Kenny.

A Steering Committee and Advisory Committee woke up early on a monthly basis to attend individual and joint meetings and offer a wealth of insight, expertise, and diverse opinion as the plan took shape, topic by topic. We are indebted to those committee members:

Members of the Steering Committee include Chair Virginia Poling, Mayor Lesch, Ben Kenny, Sharon Harwood, Dave Weisenberger, Mike Adelman, Bethany Dentler, Kirk Pavelich, Patrick Martin, Steve Trosley, Carole Babcanec, Frank Van Dresser, Sr., Karen Prelipp, Jeff Hipp, Chip Battles, Linda Bersche, Marge Harper, Jim Seitz, Jr., Ralph Fegley, John Riley, and Ken Bailey.

Members of the Advisory Committee include Bob Andrews, Jim Gerken, Phil Oglesby, Melissa James, Valerie French, Bill Kalfs, Chuck Furey, Skip Wilde, Bill Bader, Jr., Harlon Jennings, Dave Schild, Lisa Nestor, Gene Denney, Henry Timman, Rev. Fred Wiechers, Tom Bleile, Ken Schaffer, Joyce Meinke, Deborah Daugherty, and high school students Elizabeth Reichert, Dan Niedzwecki, Matt Hire, and Laura Kniffin.

While these committees brought together a diverse set of individuals who provided a variety of perspectives to the review and creation of overall goals, objectives, and direction, it was determined that the plan would be more substantive if specific topics were visited by single-issue resource panels, who could define the general topics, explore the general goals that had been set out for those topics, and develop a more tangible set of recommendations that would lead the City of Norwalk in achieving those long-range goals. Resource panels met independently, some as many as six times, to develop and submit their recommendations.

Panel members were selected for their expertise in a given subject, or for their unique perspective surrounding that topic, and a multitude of ideas were exchanged during the course of the resource panels’ meetings.

Resource panel topics and panel members were as follows:

**Economic and Business Development**

Bethany Dentler, Chair  
 Kip Miller  
 Bill Dauch  
 Bill Klaus  
 Jim Wiedenheft  
 Chip Battles  
 Derek Newell  
 John Soisson  
 Joel Hipp  
 Deb Reed  
 Melissa James  
 Denise Waaland  
 George Elmer  
 Harlon Jennings  
 Michelle Asbury  
 Matt Harris

**Transportation**

Sue Lesch, Chair  
 Tim Riley  
 Larry Waaland  
 Martha Huffman  
 Dave Light  
 Ralph Seward  
 Dave Russell  
 Mike Adelman  
 Cal Shullick  
 Deb Lake-Wagner  
 Don Ballah

**Utilities and Infrastructure**

Virginia Poling, Chair  
 Rick Brown  
 Peg Baird  
 Larry McGlinchy

Louis Frey  
 Richard Moore  
 Steve Euton  
 Gary Mortus  
 John Riley  
 Darryl Young  
 Pat Schwan  
 John Rock  
 Ralph Seward

**Land Use and Growth Management**

Frank van Dresser, Chair  
 Tom Bleile  
 Jeff Hipp  
 Jim Seitz Jr.  
 Gordon Schaechterle  
 James Orth  
 Ken Schafer  
 Sue Lesch  
 Phil Oglesby  
 Ben Kenny  
 Alan Furey  
 Ralph Fegley  
 Jon Cross  
 Linda Hebert  
 Lynn Chapin

**Downtown Development**

Skip Wilde, Chair  
 Cheri Gersak  
 Karen Prelipp  
 Steve Trosley  
 Chris Stang  
 Debra Daugherty  
 Linda Sheppard  
 Jerry Eggebrecht  
 Sheri Thomas  
 Shirley Berry

Doug Berry  
 Christopher Pawlicki  
 Bill Taylor  
 Sharon Rood  
 Steve Zigo  
 Roland Tkach

**Housing**

Carole Babcanec, Chair  
 Thom Shaffoe  
 Jay Ewell  
 Norma Schaechterle  
 Robin Fouschee  
 Tony Barman  
 Dale Barman  
 Jim Schoenegge  
 Don Leto  
 Mike Myers  
 Jim Davis

**Natural Resources and Environment**

Sharon Harwood, Chair  
 Bethany Dentler  
 Kathy Kuhlman  
 Ken Leber  
 Bill Kalfs  
 Bill Miller  
 Robert Hill  
 Joyce Hill  
 Don Hohler  
 Gary Bauer

**Community Character**

Martha Shample, Chair  
 Lorna Strayer  
 Gene Denney  
 Marge Harper

**Community Character  
(continued)**

Julie Cashen  
Dave Weisenberger  
Joe Mak  
Pat Mak  
Scott Tester  
Ben Kenny  
Marty Timman  
Martin Haffey  
Fred Downey  
Henry Timman  
Carol Wheeler  
Joyce Meinke  
John Flickinger  
Jim Stark  
Roger Endsley

Lisa Nestor  
Clint Stocker  
Chuck Stibil  
Shawn Stoll  
Amy Krichbaum  
Amanda Harwood  
Ruth Euton  
Darin Carlson  
Jon Ditz  
Tom Olak  
Kathy Olak  
Renee Dellisanti  
Tom Stoll  
Tamara Kagy  
Kelsey Gray  
Nicki Schwab

Stan Hire  
Jennifer Williams  
Virginia Poling  
Tim Freriks  
Barb Hargreaves  
Joe Centers  
Bob Duncan  
Wayne Mushett  
Steve Schumm  
Gary Balduff  
Bob Bores

**Community Facilities**

**Quality of Life**

Tera Thornhill, Chair  
Gordon Oney  
Leah Schaffer

John Lendrum  
Wayne Babcanec  
Kirk Pavelich  
Ken Leber  
Cindy Penza

**Community Services**

Kevin Cashen, Chair  
Erich Dumbeck  
Lucinda Smith  
Linda Bersche  
Pat Martin  
Ken Bailey  
Philomena Fisher  
Mike Meinke

Planning for a local jurisdiction cannot occur in a vacuum, and during the course of the planning process, Mayor Lesch and core team members visited a number of Township Trustees. We are indebted to the Norwalk, Milan, Ridgefield, and Bronson Township Trustees, who took time from their agendas to discuss the growth of Norwalk and its neighbors. The participation of all three Huron County Commissioners in this plan should also be acknowledged. Ralph Fegley served on the core team and attended Steering Committee meetings, and offered advice on GIS mapping. Mike Adelman served on the Steering Committee as well. Gary Bauer was a member of the natural resources panel.

Finally, this plan would have lost much of its validity, credibility, and a wonderful reality check if the process had not included the input of some five hundred citizens during five community forums at the outset, two forums to present the draft plan, and a series of focus groups that addressed a number of critical issues. Forum hosts included the Norwalk Main Street School, Middle School, and the High School’s Ernsthausen Center, St. Mary’s School, and the Norwalk Recreation Department’s Ernsthausen Recreation Center. Thanks are also due the participants, sponsors, and organizers of the focus groups, including the Chamber of Commerce and NEDC for hosting a Realtors’ and developers’ group and a downtown revitalization group, Norwalk and St. Paul’s High Schools (and teachers Mr. Cloud and Mr. Bersche for offering their classes and classrooms) to gain the important input of a sample of the City’s youth, and the Carriage House for a meeting of a cross section of senior citizens.