

Chapter 1



Introduction to The Planning Process

From its inception, the comprehensive planning process was designed to be exceptionally inclusive, providing opportunity for maximum participation by interested community members and persons who have expertise in specific planning themes. The process began from discussion with the City's Planning Commission, then between members of City Council and the administration of former Mayor Brooks Hartmann. Discussion centered on the time lapse since the previous plan was completed and approved, and the need for a more proactive approach to address and guide changes such as those brought about in the ensuing thirty years.

The election of a new Mayor, Sue Lesch, brought an intensified interest in the comprehensive planning process. Council and the new administration selected WSOS Community Action Commission, Inc, of Fremont, Ohio, and Ben Kenny, its Community Development Coordinator, a Norwalk resident, as the planning consultant.

During the summer of 2004, a 22-member Steering Committee was appointed to most closely guide the process. This committee included representation from City Council and administration, County and neighboring Township government, education, health care, commercial, service, financial, and industrial business, and social services, among other interests. The Steering Committee met monthly, every third Thursday morning at 7:00 a.m., and provided a means for reacting to planning concepts and recommendations. Early in the process, this Committee developed a mission and vision statement for the plan, as well as the set of goals that provides the framework for this plan.

Shortly after the first Steering Committee meeting in August 2004, an Advisory Committee was also selected to bring a deeper level of participation to the process. This 24-member committee met quarterly, immediately following a Steering Committee meeting, and to aid continuity, Steering Committee members were always invited to attend the Advisory Committee meeting as observers. Advisory Committee members provided guidance regarding research and information gathering for the comprehensive plan, and were asked to provide information they may have on hand regarding their area of expertise. Advisory Committee members represented such interests as industry, construction, real estate, finance,

local churches, community institutions, the Chamber of Commerce, and locally owned businesses. Two students from each of Norwalk’s two high schools also served on this committee.

Ensuring Public Input: Community Forums (October 2004)

To obtain public input into the comprehensive plan, five community forums were held throughout the City over a two-week time span between October 20 and 28, 2004. Varying times, days, and locations were selected to accommodate residents’ diverse schedules. Total attendance at all meetings was nearly 400 people, representing a broad and diverse group. Participants ranged from teenagers to octogenarians, and their tenure in Norwalk ranged from a few months to their whole lives. Current and former civic leaders, business leaders, students, and average citizens participated.



The format was structured for a comfortable, open sharing of ideas, with time for small group discussion at one’s table, presentations from each table to the whole group, and individual input on response forms at the close of each session. The agenda also included a brief history of the City and an overview of the goals and timetable for the Plan.

All responses were recorded and they have been used to guide much of the focus and many of the recommendations in this document.

Findings from the Community Forums:

Community Assets

In an initial exercise, participants at each forum were asked to mention those attributes of Norwalk that they considered to be important assets that they appreciated most. Many of the assets mentioned were tangible, physical items including the two school systems and their physical facilities, Fisher-Titus Medical Center, the Norwalk Library, the Park and Recreation system, Ernsthausen Community Center, the reservoir and its Memorial Lake Park, historic and architecturally significant buildings, and the City’s favorable location and access to major cities, amenities, and markets. Equally important and mentioned just as frequently were such intangibles as:

- ✓ The small-town, neighborly, friendly atmosphere;
- ✓ A feeling of safety and comfort;
- ✓ The community's heritage and historic areas such as Downtown and Main Street residences;
- ✓ The City's history of innovation and entrepreneurship;
- ✓ The City's locally generated institutions, churches, and businesses;
- ✓ The residents' sense of need for civic involvement, volunteerism, and teamwork;
- ✓ A cooperative local government and good City services; and
- ✓ A special regard and fondness for things uniquely "Norwalk", such as Hogan's Hill and the Starview Drive-In.

Community Vision

Each table was asked to brainstorm as a group and build a list of ideas and dreams for the future of the community, with no censorship. Participants were encouraged to "dream big" in describing what they would like to see in Norwalk twenty years hence. While hundreds of ideas were generated over the five meetings, there was also a commonality among many of the ideas that was repeated over the course of the meetings. These broad concepts, which gained the consensus of the participants, are very important in framing Norwalk's Comprehensive Plan for the coming two decades. They included the following:

- ✓ There is generalized community support for **managed and balanced growth** of the Norwalk community, but with growth must come a concerted effort to preserve what is good about Norwalk's small town atmosphere. This theme of measured growth encompasses such concerns as ample ready-to-build land, cooperation and partnership with township and County government, and a broad view of industrial growth to the east and housing to the south and northwest.
- ✓ Participants noted a desire for **new and expanding businesses**, with quality jobs that support families and attract, challenge, and retain the community's youth and young adults. Related themes include expansion of industrial parks and sites, diversifying the employment base, and preserving local and family-owned businesses.
- ✓ There should be a continued focus on **excellence in education** as needs and curriculum change. This interest extends beyond K-12 education to more accessible post-graduate education and lifelong learning.
- ✓ Participants advocated the continued development of a **full mix of quality housing options**, from affordable entry-level housing to executive homes. Special emphasis was placed on providing suitable housing for the elderly. Concerns were also voiced regarding the need to monitor and maintain rental properties.
- ✓ Need was expressed for **efficient and safe transportation**, including public transportation that responds to needs, efficient traffic flow, the completion of a

bypass to accommodate north-south traffic, and better use of the Huron County Airport as an economic development tool.

- ✓ Participants noted that future planning should not neglect the basic needs for **infrastructure and utilities**. Certain necessities for community well-being and growth should be ensured, including a perpetual source of raw water, quality health care, and community services and facilities that adequately accommodate a growing City.
- ✓ There was a consistent focus on a number of “**quality of life**” factors that resonated with large numbers of community members. These items included optimal use of parks and recreation activities, including the reservoir and green space, activities and facilities that respond to significant demand by young adults, youth, and other population segments, such as a soccer complex, skate park, teen center, and walking/bike trails, the introduction of new dining alternatives, and new cultural opportunities for participation or passive enjoyment.
- ✓ Great interest was expressed in the rejuvenation or **reinvention of the downtown area** to ensure that it remains a vital and attractive destination and activity center. Participants advocated more retail business and uniformity in operating hours.
- ✓ A number of **intangible or formative concepts** emerged during the forums, including a desire for more opportunities for intergenerational activities, interdenominational initiatives, and other projects and activities that involve new partnerships, leadership, opportunities for participation, and energy.
- ✓ Finally, there was a consensus among many that Norwalk is on the verge of **discovering a defining theme** for itself. This theme may be elusive now, but a continued inclusionary planning process may help uncover it. Several comments pertained to developing Norwalk as a destination, and not just as a spot on the road to somewhere else. There seemed to be a desire to identify the niche, or niches, that could be discovered to build on existing assets and set Norwalk apart from other communities.

The community forums generated hundreds of responses and suggestions, and many participants volunteered to serve as resource persons. While this section only reports on the more widely heard themes, many of the more specific recommendations and comments from the forums will be reflected in later sections of this plan.

Focus Groups

Following the community forums, it was determined that input was needed on certain themes from more targeted focus groups. Several areas of such need were recommended by the Steering Committee and pursued by Mayor Lesch, Norwalk Economic Development Corporation Director Bethany Dentler, and Planning Consultant Ben Kenny, who attended all planned focus group meetings. A brief report on the findings and implications for comprehensive planning from each specific group follows:

1. Norwalk Downtown Focus Group (January 6, 2005)

A group of twenty downtown stakeholders met in the Chamber of Commerce boardroom on January 6 to discuss planning issues regarding the City's central business district. Here are some of the salient points from the discussion:

With regard to **organization**, it was felt that the current structure of committees, involving property owners (including City and County government), business owners, and the several committees of Main Street Norwalk, appears to be effective. Main Street Norwalk has elected to follow the nationally recognized Main Street approach.

With regard to **design**, specific areas of interest and concern included the following:

- ✓ Norwalk's downtown is a compatible architectural transition from the historic homes along East and West Main Street. The sense of the boulevard and avenue should carry from West and East Main through the central business district.
- ✓ Regulations for design and zoning may be needed that are specific to the uniqueness of the downtown area. Consistency is needed in regulation and enforcement. The result should be elimination of clutter, some uniformity in signage and standards, and improved and simplified aesthetics.
- ✓ There is a need for consistency of belief and understanding among stakeholders. The Main Street Manager must help change culture, informing new tenants and owners of regulations, and communicating information about regulations, incentives, and other matters.
- ✓ More greenery and landscaping would improve aesthetics, including carrying the greenscaping along Whittlesey from City Hall north to League Street.
- ✓ The downtown's identity should be enhanced through the use of signage at the gateways to the district.
- ✓ Parking adequacy is often a function of perception. Improved signage delineating and identifying parking locations will help. Then stakeholders should make the walk from parking lots to destinations as enticing as possible.

With regard to **promotion**,

- ✓ Opportunities abound for increased cultural events, such as an expanded presence of the Firelands Symphony and other musical organizations, community orchestra/band concerts, dinner theaters, art galleries, and other options.
- ✓ Special events and festivals should be customized to celebrate Norwalk's unique history and heritage. A festival's goal should be made clear before it is organized. Consensus in the group was that a festival should first serve local residents and businesses, and help build a sense of community. A "Maple City Fall Festival", for example, could combine Halloween activities, a 5K run, bike rally, pet competition, and provide ample opportunities for local performing and visual artists.

- ✓ Outside markets, including transient Turnpike traffic, should be captured through strategic advertising, brochures in nearby motels, and educating local businesses about the benefits of advertising in the Erie County Visitors Bureau guide.
- ✓ For long-term marketing, some felt it is time to revisit the concept of a County or City-wide “bed tax” to be used for promotion of local businesses and the establishment of a convention and visitor’s bureau.

With regard to **economic restructuring**,

- ✓ The potential of the central business district should be explored as a destination for businesses, tourists, and residents.
- ✓ The concept of a retail/service business incubator in the downtown (or elsewhere as appropriate) should be considered.
- ✓ It is important to capture transient traffic visiting Cedar Point, Norwalk Raceway Park, water parks, and related destinations during the summer season and throughout the year.
- ✓ More consideration should be given to the potential niches that could be successfully developed within Norwalk’s downtown. These may include antique stores, specialty shops, or some other cluster of businesses or markets yet to be identified.
- ✓ Buildings and properties with unique and significant potential for development should be identified, marketed, and developed. Suggested properties included the historic jail south of the courthouse, the property to the west of the old jail, the Midway Parts building, the Verizon building, the former ACC and Fisher Music building, the former Terry’s Carpeteria building, and the Towne and Country Theater property, which is a considerable cultural asset. Upper floors should likewise be considered for unique and varied development opportunities (an example is the banquet hall in the Gardiner-Hipp Building).
- ✓ When asked what niche businesses were currently missing downtown, focus group participants named antique stores, a card store, a hobby shop, a themed museum (hot rods, heritage), a bookstore, and a small grocery/notions/convenience store.

2. Senior Focus Group (January 12, 2005)

Because of their lack of mobility, many elderly citizens were not able to attend any of the October community forums. A special lunch meeting was set up at the Carriage House assisted living facility, attended by members of a monthly lunch programming group. The meeting largely followed the agenda of the community forums, and individuals identified community assets, while spokespersons from each table reported on the discussion of future community visions. Response sheets were also provided on which to make further comments and recommendations.

The following **assets** were mentioned: Downtown revitalization, Ernsthausen Center, school system and its music program, unusual architecture of housing, City services and administration, churches and their involvement, the hospital, Carriage House, the County’s Veterans Memorial, the Senior Center, the reused Main Street School (recently reopened as the system’s school for 5th and 6th graders), Firelands Museum and Historical Society, Library, park system, EMS service, and athletic programs for children. Other assets

mentioned included the feeling of safety, community spirit, friendly neighborhoods, convenience of many offices, and the lack of any specific “slum” areas, caring community.

Here are some of the responses, many of which were heard during the October forums, when participants were asked for their **vision for Norwalk’s future**:

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| Affordable senior housing | Improve the Norwalk Creek area |
| Ombudsman for senior assistance | Preservation of natural areas |
| An urgent care center | More independently owned shops |
| Grocery store on the south side of town | Planning for future transportation |
| Building codes to guarantee quality | Preservation of historic sites |
| Jobs to keep young people here | Upgrade the water supply |
| A nice sit-down restaurant | Rails to Trails |
| Better use of empty buildings downtown | Beautification projects at gateways and entry points |
| Better bus service to Sandusky and other areas | Promote activities for young people |

3. Realtor/Developer Focus Group (January 26, 2005)

Approximately fifteen Realtors (commercial and residential) and developer/builders participated in this afternoon session at the Chamber boardroom. A series of questions was posed to the group and their answers were recorded. The following are summaries from the questions and responses:

On Norwalk’s “small town atmosphere”: It is important to preserve that atmosphere and friendliness, maintaining the quality of life and those major institutions and assets that lend to that atmosphere. Norwalk’s leadership should thus maintain both school systems, health care and recreation facilities and programming, and opportunities for residents to “rub elbows”, while building on cultural opportunities. Further, green space contributes an important part of the small town feel; people look for it and expect it. However, it does drive up costs per usable acre in subdivisions. There should be some set ratio of open to developed land, with greater expectations in larger subdivisions.

What do you point out to business or residential prospects? Housing, condominiums, golf course, reservoir, industrial parks (Firelands, Laylin Road), the downtown.

Since infill opportunities are limited, where should land use be focused as Norwalk grows outward?

- ✓ **South of US 20 Bypass:** Infrastructure would need to be run to the south, and topography and the bypass increase costs. However, growth to the south is important to provide new tax base for the Norwalk school district. Possible uses include residential, possible research and development, possibly a technical park linked to the hospital, executive housing, possibly a restaurant, and a store offering groceries to serve the growing south side.

- ✓ **North along the US 250 corridor:** Commercial and retail. If a northerly bypass ever intersects US 250 to the north, that area will be impacted and growth will ensue. The Ohio Turnpike to the north will exert a pull effect, drawing warehouse, distribution, and industrial businesses to the north. An industrial park could be assembled on northern farmland, and a rail spur may be a possibility to improve its attractiveness.
- ✓ **East along US 20 and SR 18:** Airport access remains important to the east. The attractiveness of Norwalk Raceway Park may be able to draw a cluster of entertainment, motor sports, and automotive related industry and commerce. As activities move onto what is now Township property, revenue sharing plans will be important in order to accomplish annexation.
- ✓ **West along US 20:** This area contains some of the County's best prime farmland, and will probably remain agricultural.

Other issues, items, and suggestions during the course of the focus group session:

- ✓ The commercial and service sector market is significant, reaching south to North Fairfield, Greenwich, Willard, and beyond, west to Monroeville, and east to Wakeman. "Huge" recent investments by retailers Wal-Mart and Tops Family Market in Norwalk were based on assessments of the market and their likely capture of significant revenues from that market.
- ✓ The boundaries of the Norwalk School District pose a problem when much of the City's future development will take place outside that District. Participants suggested seeking a win-win solution by holding dialogues with neighboring districts and stating that growth within their district will only be encouraged and assisted if there is an agreement to share tax revenues with the Norwalk City school district.
- ✓ Neighboring townships including Norwalk, Bronson, and Ridgefield are viewed as much more cooperative than in the past. Norwalk Township has been especially cooperative, using revenue sharing that extends for as many as twelve years.
- ✓ Gateways are important in presenting a first impression of the community. Participants suggested planting trees (possibly maples) along US 250 north from Milan. Also suggested: a visually pleasing, possibly brick "Welcome to Norwalk" sign with landscaping, along the entry points on US 250, US 20 exits, and State Routes 18 and 61.
- ✓ It is imperative that the City reach Lake Erie for a perpetual source of raw water, possibly distributing it south along the railroad right-of-way purchased by the City. Achieving this goal may require working cooperatively with Erie County.

4. High school Focus Groups (January 28, 2005)

On January 2005, the Mayor, Economic Development Director, and Planning Consultant met with four senior government classes at Norwalk High School and one government class at St. Paul High School. Responses to the prepared list of questions were remarkably similar among the classes. The opinions offered by the high school students were considered very important in order for the plan to effectively and honestly respond to the needs and desires of the high school population. The following is a summary of the responses received from the high school focus group.

Assets and favorite things about Norwalk: Norwalk's size (not too small or too large), recreation center, feeling of safety, reservoir, raceway, schools, parks, small enough to know everyone, coffee house, restaurants (especially fast food), new hospital addition, cleanliness, low crime, downtown still looks alive, tennis courts, theater (drive in), Vargo's, Hogan's Hill, golf courses. Note: Many of these items were mentioned multiple times.

Describing Norwalk: When asked to use one or two words, the high school participants said: peaceful, boring, too much traffic, need place for kids to go, no hangouts, pleasant, small, relaxed, friendly, old fashioned, historical, uneventful, not exciting, quiet, Burger Alley (250 north), family oriented (too much so!), wholesome, almost like Mayberry, not enough diversity, low key town.

Small town atmosphere: Students found it to be an important attribute. They were concerned that growth, which they supported, should be slow enough that the small town amenities and ambience are not lost. Local, Main Street businesses were viewed as important to preserve. Interestingly, although students clearly supported the construction of a new movie theater, they were somewhat concerned that the theater will draw people from out of town, and Norwalk's local autonomy will suffer. On the other hand, they realized that bringing in more people will help local business.

Staying in town: When asked how many students thought they would be living in Norwalk in five years, a total of twenty said they thought so (out of a classroom total of 105). When asked whether they would live in Norwalk ten years from now, another twelve or so thought they may relocate back to Norwalk eventually. Thus approximately thirty percent of the students thought there was some likelihood that they would return to live in the Norwalk area. Many more wanted to sample some other part of the world after graduation.

Is the loss of students and young adults a problem? Very few felt it should be regarded as such. Most felt that moving away was an inevitable part of growing up, and that many of those who initially relocate will "trickle back" later in life.

What types of jobs and amenities would help retain and attract youth and young adults? Several mentioned health care professions, while others specified larger, international businesses with opportunity for travel, engineering jobs, and hospitality management opportunities. Amenities that would help attract younger adults would include dance clubs, later hours for businesses that do exist, "name" entertainment, a nice shopping center and better clothing store, theater events, night life, more upscale restaurants, music (CD) stores, a pool hall, and live music.

Are there enough recreational and cultural opportunities? Some said yes while others felt not. Many reiterated that additional facilities would be nice, including a dance club, musical acts, benefit concerts, a venue for local bands, more dances, a local theater group with a summer clinic for theater participants, more performing arts and live entertainment, music festivals, bike trails, an art museum or gallery, more diversity within the community, and a revived and active Towne and Country Theater. One class suggested the vacant building on 250 North that recently housed Olde Towne Windows as a place to develop a youth center large enough for live entertainment.

What businesses in town are important? Students generated a long list of stores that were most important to them. These included Wal Mart (mentioned in every class) and K-Mart, music stores, video rentals, auto parts stores, grocery stores, the coffee house, Fashion Bug, golf courses, and a number of restaurants.

When asked what types of stores are missing, students replied by naming, among others: affordable music (CD) store, bigger book store, antiques, sit down restaurant, activity center (arcade, food place, pool), sports bar and grill, clothing store, south side grocery store, outdoors/sports store, pet store, “hangout” spots, bigger bowling alley, skate shop, and enclosed ice rink and indoor skate park.

Does Norwalk need a community college or branch campus? Feelings were mixed, and many conceded that the Firelands Campus of Bowling Green State University was accessible. However, many agreed that a local continuing education facility, possibly housing courses provided by multiple colleges, would help people who work traditional hours, and it would bring more businesses, more people, and a greater choice of things to do. An adult education program may be successful, and some students suggested that their parents may avail themselves of the course offerings.

Are there satisfying jobs for people looking for work after high school? The students had mixed feelings on this question. Construction jobs were most commonly mentioned, and others noted that most available jobs were of the minimum wage level. One class noted that there was some choice in the manufacturing sector, mentioning Janesville Sackner and Norwalk Furniture as examples.

If you could make one change... Students were asked to offer one improvement they wished to see become reality in Norwalk. This question elicited the largest number of responses. Some of the responses are listed below. The depth and variety of thoughtful responses is a testament to the interest in their community expressed throughout the day.

- Get rid of drugs
- Complete the bypass
- Strengthen the police force
- Add a “town square”
- Larger recreation area
- Skating rink
- Add specialty stores (books)
- Bigger bowling alley/pool hall

- Game room with no alcohol
- Place for music performances
- Mini mall with CD, clothing stores
- Population spread out more
- Help Downtown get more business
- Need apartments for young people
- Downtown place for younger kids
- Fewer bars

Place to listen to live music	More hotels
Movie theater	More affordable apartments
Indoor tennis courts	Another Vargo's type place
Clothing store	Beach at reservoir
More nice restaurants	Artificial snow slope
Live entertainment	Better recycling program
Magicians, plays, etc.	Student activities
Place for teens to hang out alcohol-free	Large amphitheater
More smaller stores	Live music/concerts
Family owned gift shop	Circle racetrack
Bigger book selection in library	Bypass around town
No graffiti in playgrounds	Stop semi truck through traffic
More modern, younger, livened up	Better roads
Big music store and studio	Four-lane Main Street
Stadium for semi pro sports	Clubs, karaoke
New fire station	Fitness clubs
More diversity and less bias	NASCAR track
(indoor) skate park	Better off-street parking
Higher speed limits	Café open 24 hours a day
Grocery store on south end of town	Ski trails
Teen center: skating, couches, stage, arcade, pool, smoke free, darts, air hockey, foosball	Teen center for youth
Dinner theater	Major clothing chain (Old Navy)
'50's-'60's style café	More lively Main Street
New football field for NHS	Better parking downtown
Indoor soccer	More professional jobs
More places to shop	Refurbish Towne and Country for live acts
Outlet mall	Music and speakers
Pretty park with statue	TV station like Mansfield, covering high school games
More non smoking restaurants	Restaurant with live music
Good TV station/update cable public access station	

5. Hispanic focus group (February 3, 2005)

A focus group of Hispanic residents met on February 3, 2005, with planning officials, and discussed their experiences as Norwalk community members. The following is a list of some of the findings of that meeting.

- ✓ The respondents are very happy to live in Norwalk, citing it as a safe and quiet place to raise a family.
- ✓ Respondents work in a variety of places, many of them out of town, including a wholesale plant grower in the Oberlin area and an industrial plant in Shelby.

- ✓ Respondents like the selection at local retailers, and can find ethnic foods at local grocery stores.
- ✓ Respondents are happy to report that they have witnessed no ethnic or racial harassment, and that the language barrier has not posed a problem for their children, who have acclimated well in local schools. The older family members have a harder time with English as a second language, and many still converse in Spanish.
- ✓ With regard to recreation, many wish that soccer fields were available to the public. A number of Hispanic men from the area, some traveling 20 miles or more, gather to play soccer on an informal basis, and would appreciate an available field. Another item that would be welcomed warmly is a cultural “house” that could include among its programming traditional dancing.
- ✓ An important issue, which has several ramifications, is the large number of non-citizen Hispanics in the community. Without evidence of citizenship or a Social Security number, many in the community face a barrier to employment, in obtaining a driver's license, and in purchasing a house. This is why many Hispanics in the area will own and live in mobile homes – because they can pay cash for them rather than apply for a mortgage. One focus group member noted how a child could not be entered in the local Head Start program, because of the lack of citizenship.

Locally Guided Planning: The Steering and Advisory Committees

The Norwalk Comprehensive Planning Process has been designed to be inclusive, bringing a large number of Norwalk residents, stakeholders, representatives of various elements of the community, and other local voices into the creative and decision-making elements of the process. A 24-member Steering Committee was appointed early in the process to help guide the overall process and react to planning elements as they were developed. This committee includes representation from City government, the adjacent township, County government, and local institutions, organizations, manufacturers, and retail and service businesses. The committee has met monthly since the beginning of the process in August 2004.

Serving as an adjunct to the Steering Committee is a 24-member Advisory Committee, which has met quarterly throughout the process, offering the unique and collective perspectives and expertise offered by these community leaders. This committee includes business leaders, representatives from local institutions such as Fisher Titus Medical Center and a local church, and students from both of Norwalk's high schools. While the Steering Committee serves as a springboard for many of the ideas and issues, the Advisory Committee provides a forum to review and react to ideas generated within the Steering Committee.

A Mission and a Vision

It was deemed important early in the process to develop an overarching mission and vision statement for the community, under which all planning activity would take place. The statements were developed by the Steering Committee during the fall of 2004, then discussed

and approved by the Advisory Committee. They appear on page 2 of the Introduction to this document.

Goals

It was also considered important to develop a series of goals, categorized by planning topic, which would reflect those items or concepts considered most important to achieve over the coming twenty years. The exhaustive list of goals was developed, through a process that included individual goal writing and identification of key words, by the Steering Committee, then discussed and modified by the Advisory Committee at the December, 2004 meeting of both committees. The completed list of goals, covering fourteen distinct topics, is presented below.

A. Citizen Involvement

1. Request public opinions and ideas on core goals, and involve citizens from Norwalk and its environs in an atmosphere that welcomes fresh ideas and leads to community consensus.
2. Seek diverse but informed opinions; involve citizens broadly and give them a forum and a voice in comprehensive planning and making changes.
3. Encourage new and established leadership to develop a broad and active base of concerned citizens.
4. Establish and maintain avenues for open communication, citizen awareness, and effective and timely responsiveness.
5. Publicize, coordinate, and cultivate collaborative involvement in the City's many events, activities, and opportunities for involvement.
6. Provide and implement a method for periodic evaluation of this comprehensive master plan, with methods for reviewing progress and amending the plan when appropriate.

B. Community Character

1. Preserve the rich and progressive history, cultural heritage, and traditional values and morals of the community.
2. Maintain the character of a stable, family-oriented, warm, and welcoming community in which to live, work, and retire.
3. Create an atmosphere of openness to appropriate and positive change that may blend the old and new.
4. Continue to be a supportive community, addressing the unique needs of such groups as seniors, youth, the unemployed, and the disabled.
5. Be open to honest self-evaluation.
6. Continue to value well-maintained, attractive structures, properties, neighborhoods, and public places.

C. Community Facilities

1. Build on the strong facilities we have, including our health care, recreational, and educational systems, to draw people and business to the community, and to provide ample social, cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities and an active

community life to all.

2. Strive for community facilities to be clean and well maintained, accessible to all, diverse, affordable, and responsive to the differing needs, trends, and desires of all age groups.
3. Require recreational areas to be expanded in proportion to new development, housing, and population.
4. Ensure that facility development is conducted in response to well thought out plans that support the needs of the community.

D. Economic and Business Development

1. Build upon the successful work of existing City and County level economic and business development organizations and coordinate planning with any new such entities, and support their planning and programming to address long-term needs and provide a sound, solid base for economic and business development that emphasizes and utilizes our strengths.
2. Promote an environment to nurture, retain, and expand current businesses and the central business district.
3. Ensure that adequate information and resources are available to promote a prospective or expanding business's understanding of City incentives, assistance, review and approval processes, and other requirements for development.
4. Provide a pro-development, cooperative atmosphere within the public sector that will accommodate and not hinder suitable and desired development.
5. Ensure that incentives are balanced and do not burden the taxpayer.
6. Approach job creation, retention, and enhancement efforts with a focus on the future, long-term health of the community, and on diversifying the employment and tax base.
7. Balance job growth among jobs meeting the needs of the workforce and the tax base of the City.
8. Provide an environment that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, through venture capital, guidance and counseling as needed, and referrals to other community services.
9. Develop a proactive tourist outreach program, with local customer service providers trained to welcome visitors.
10. Ensure that adequate building sites are available for a variety of industries through a network of development-ready business parks, complemented with a plan for the revitalization of existing suitable buildings and in-town sites, with an eye on the impact on the local school district and its tax base.
11. Focus on developing businesses and services that capture local and external revenues, such as full-service restaurants, with hours, products, and services that meet the needs of the local market.
12. To compete globally, offer and support state of the art business practices and support systems.

E. Education

1. Attract a branch of a college or university, a center for higher education, or other means to bring college level educational opportunities to the community.
2. Maintain and build upon consistent high standards and quality of the public and parochial school systems within the community, providing the highest level of curricular,

educational, and training opportunities for learners of all ages to prepare them for success in career and life.

3. Continue to support the progressive core education system with attractive and modern technology, buildings, and extracurricular activities that attract students and their parents to area schools, and that prepare students for success in technical, workforce, and post-graduate endeavors.
4. Advocate the alignment of school district boundaries more closely with municipal boundaries, for a more sensible distribution of resources.
5. Work in partnership with students, parents, businesses, and the community at large to raise expectations and the level of achievement.
6. Engage in lifelong educational programs promoting life skills specific to adults, young parents, and the elderly, among others.

F. Government

1. Maximize ease of access to local government and its ability to provide timely assistance to the public.
2. Ensure that the municipal government is upholding its established laws and charters, cooperating and enhancing communication with citizens and other government entities (Federal, State, and local) to serve the good of the community as a whole.
3. Build into government a system for the participation of new leadership, and for obtaining public input.
4. Focus on responsiveness to the needs of the citizenry and business.
5. Ensure that services are provided in a cost-effective, efficient manner that earns the respect and support of the community.
6. Undertake action planning to accomplish the broad goals of accessibility, service, responsiveness, and efficiency of operation.

G. Housing

1. Ensure that safe, comfortable, affordable housing is available for the diverse and changing citizenry, with a mix of low, middle, and upper income houses, both for renters and owners.
2. Work with contiguous areas to ensure a consistent plan for the growth of residential land uses.
3. Preserve the historic housing stock in the central City and nearby neighborhoods, and support infill and centralized development for ease of access to the downtown area and other destinations.
4. Preserve the quality of the housing stock by raising and codifying standards for rental housing upkeep and maintenance.
5. Work with developers in decision-making about housing development, and allow for development of new housing types that accommodate changing population groups (condos and accessible floor plans).
6. Ensure that suitable housing is available for special needs populations, including the elderly and disabled.
7. Support the development of housing options for families in transition (entry to mid-level, older families to senior status).
8. Support the twin goals of quality and affordability.

H. Land Use

1. Pursue balance between emerging residential areas, industrial parks, commercial districts, and land reserved for recreation and open space, and examine land use potentials to promote the most valued use, conforming to the recommendations of this plan, for each parcel.
2. Account for long-term industrial development needs and long-range job and facility development that enhances City and local school district tax bases.
3. Consider the long-term needs of the City's institutions, such as the eventual need for new school facilities, and police and fire facilities. Such planning often requires proactive acquisition of land to reserve it for public use.
4. Require adequate open areas and green space to enhance the balance of development and common areas, including reserving and mapping such reserved areas.
5. Strictly enforce zoning and related laws that define compatible uses and protect property values.
6. Ensure that this land use plan continues to guide practical land use and development decisions, through a system of plan and project review and modification, and that the plan considers orderly expansion into surrounding townships.

I. Natural Environment and Resources

1. Create and enforce regulations and codes that protect and maintain natural resources and reflect a responsible community that is a good steward of its environment, such as tree ordinances and use of an arborist, soil runoff provisions, wetlands provisions, and others.
2. Promote and support public access to and enjoyment of natural resources.
3. Develop sufficient natural and passive parks and recreation facilities for the size of the community, including trails for biking and running.
4. Promote and implement voluntary efforts to clean up blighted, littered, or polluted areas, and solicit outside assistance including grants to help in costly clean-up efforts.
5. Provide a perpetual supply of sufficient water to support the future population and business base.

J. Population, Growth, and Demographics

1. Develop and employ strategies to recruit and retain the community's "best and brightest" young students back to the area, through education and employment opportunities, as well as emphasis on nearby and accessible cultural opportunities and metropolitan areas.
2. Retain the feel and character of the small town community regardless of the level of growth.
3. Monitor and anticipate demographic changes and be responsive to resulting and emerging needs; the City budget and capital improvements plan should include consideration of these changes and needs.
4. Grow the City in a carefully planned manner regarding population, municipal boundaries, services, equality, and opportunities.
5. Maintain a balance of young and old, diverse backgrounds, and professionals and a solid core of blue-collar workers; if all feel welcome, balanced growth will follow.

K. Quality of Life

1. Use existing assets and resources to foster a high quality of life that is accessible for all.
2. Preserve Norwalk's exemplary small town quality of life through controlled growth, yet the benefit of access to "big City" cultural amenities should be maximized and promoted.
3. Support a broad plan that looks at all contributors, including a well run government, schools, social and nonprofit services, safety forces, health care, arts organizations, and recreation providers, all of which contribute to a well-rounded family life and retain families and businesses.
4. Provide opportunities for all members of the community to contribute to an improved quality of life, including retired individuals who can perform services in their areas of expertise.
5. Support diversity of retail and service businesses to broaden consumer choices, minimizing the need to travel elsewhere.
6. Make sure the future quality of life in the community is tied to its rich history, values, work ethic, and rural background.

L. Services

1. Encourage public, social, and nonprofit services as the backbone of a caring community, and encourage coordination and non-duplication of services, volunteerism, and support.
2. Design services to accommodate the full range of community interests, needs, age groups, and economic and social backgrounds.
3. Build on the planning for the Fisher Titus Medical Center campus and facilitate the continuing development of the community's expanding medical services.
4. Plan for adequate and effective, strategically located safety force facilities, including firefighting facilities.
5. Ensure that planned services are cost-effective and able to be provided without interruption.
6. Consider outsourcing of services when it is cost effective to do so and the level and quality of service, as well as the equality to citizens with which it is provided, is not compromised.

M. Transportation

1. Strive to provide smooth and efficient transportation flow within the City, to nearby destinations, and to nearby connecting highways, by continuation of active transportation plan improvements when fiscally possible.
2. Enforce standard traffic rules and regulations systematically to ease congestion on local streets.
3. Include expectations for future thoroughfares and projected new traffic generators and destinations within transportation planning, and hold to that plan to accommodate future growth.
4. Ensure that roadway planning accounts for vehicular and pedestrian safety, with well-maintained and marked roadways.
5. Maintain a means of public transportation for those who rely on it for transport to work,

- medical appointments, shopping, and other needs, including the disabled and elderly.
- 6. Address the needs of through traffic (especially north-south), and truck traffic both through and within the City.
- 7. Maintain and facilitate improvements to the railroad system serving the City and its businesses. Develop the Huron County Airport as an asset to the community and region, and the business base.

N. Utilities and Infrastructure

- 1. Plan infrastructure improvements carefully to guide and entice progressive, desired growth and development to planned growth areas, but plan with enough flexibility to accommodate change as new opportunities arise.
- 2. Plan and implement improvements only if they are affordable, both in their construction and their ongoing operation and maintenance, and if they can be supported with affordable and competitive user rates.
- 3. Monitor and evaluate the needs of residents, businesses, and institutions to ensure that those needs are being met, and to plan for prioritized improvements when they are not.
- 4. Continuously develop and follow a progressive schedule of maintenance and replacement for water and sewer systems, streets, sidewalks, and other elements of infrastructure.
- 5. Monitor utility services to ensure that all areas and sectors of the community are provided with needed technology, power, and water, and pressure energy providers to increase capacity to meet needs.
- 6. Strive to provide technology systems and networks that are “state of the art” in accessibility, capacity, and speed. Explore the feasibility of achieving a totally wireless community.

Given the framework of these generalized goals, resource panels were then created to discuss specific topics and develop more specific recommendations that will help the City achieve these goals. The work of the resource panels is reflected throughout the remaining chapters of this comprehensive plan.