



'Restarting Our Engines'
Innovation Forum
City of Norwalk, Ohio

June 2010
Summary Report

*Never doubt that a small group of
thoughtful committed citizens can
change the world; indeed, it's the only
thing that ever has.*

~Margaret Mead



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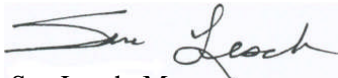
Introduction

“In the long run, we only hit what we aim at.”
---Thoreau

Restarting Our Engines was an Innovation Forum based on the premise that although the Norwalk area faces difficult economic challenges, we need to take action to create a strategic plan or ‘target’ in order to achieve long-term sustainability. Talented, innovative and committed stakeholders were willing to give their time and ingenuity to begin this course of action with the intention of creating a new and brighter future for the entire community.

Starting in February 2010 and finishing four meetings later in May 2010, seventy-six of our business and community leaders were actively engaged and helped initiate this process. Hundreds of volunteer hours were invested in this process. These resourceful individuals provided their wisdom and vision to identify ways to retain jobs, build stronger businesses and fully utilize and promote the wonderful quality of life we are so fortunate to enjoy in Norwalk.

In the end we have produced the beginnings of a targeted path for our future and a formula to restart the economic engine of our community! Our thanks to the many people listed below who contributed to this endeavor as it would not have been possible without them.



Sue Lesch, Mayor
City of Norwalk



Ellen Heinz, Director
Norwalk Economic Development Corporation

List of Participants

Bill Bader, Sr.	John Hipp	Denao Ruttino
Peg Baird	Jeff Huber	Ken Schafer
Trina Bediako	Melissa James	John Schwartz
Paul Bennett	Donna Jenkins	Tom Secor
Alex Beres	Viki Kaszonyi	Andy Skinn
Doug Berry	Ben Kenny	Janice Smith
Linda Bersche	Doug Klein	Tony Smith
Jeff Bleile	Tom Kueterman	Aaron Smith
Dave Bleile	Tom Lendrum	Norb Smith
Tim Brown	John Lendrum	Josh Snyder
Traci Caldwell	Sue Lesch	Lorna Strayer
Denny Camp	Debbie Ludwig	Ernie Stroud
Darin Carlson	Rob Ludwig	Tom Szilagy
Bill Dauch	Pat Martin	Dave Taylor
Jon Ditz	Sharon Mastroianni	Al Tegel
Joyce Ditz	Rick Mingus	Dwight Tkach
Denny Doughty	Tina Murray	Frank VanDresser, Jr
George Elmer	Lisa Nestor	John Wasiniak
Diane Eschen	Tom Olak	Kristie Wert
Ralph Fegley	Tim Parcher	Dan White
John Flickinger	John Payne	Skip Wilde
Marcus French	Virginia Poling	Patti Wilde
Chuck Furey	Mike Porter	Melissa Williams
Matt Gross	Andy Prutsok	Steve Zigo
Ellen Heinz	Jim Ramsey	
Kevin Hipp	Dave Reed	

Executive Summary

“Community Capitalism approaches community growth as both a philanthropic and capitalist process that centers on investing a community’s resources in a manner that ensures long-term economic success and relevancy.” So says Ron Kitchens in his book *Community Capitalism: Lessons from Kalamazoo and Beyond*, identifying five key areas which must be addressed. They are Capital, Infrastructure, Talent, Education, and Place.

The Restarting Our Engines forum was based on the concepts of the book *Community Capitalism* and involved seventy-six Norwalk area business and community leaders. Community leaders discussed and reviewed the key areas, developing three to four important and viable goals in each area. Participants prioritized the goals by urgency and greatest potential impact.

The summary report is organized into chapters that focus on those five key areas, listing the assets we currently have in Norwalk, followed by specific goals. The factors to consider are specific comments made by the participants. The following are the five goals with the highest priority.

Entrepreneurship - *Build on our long tradition of entrepreneurship to inspire innovation, new business growth, and creativity in our youth.*

Utilities - *Strengthen our competitive advantage by providing strong and affordable utility infrastructure with adequate utilities for future growth. City water and sewer utilities are plentiful and affordable. City must seek out new partnerships and options for electric, natural gas and new technologies.*

Teach to Grade 14 - *Make education in English, Math and Technology to a Grade 14 level (Associates Degree) affordable and accessible for all interested employees, employers and the unemployed.*

Resource Network - *Strengthen our area resource network. Reach more businesses by more widely promoting services offered such as assistance with business plans, grants, succession planning, organizational restructuring and funding sources at the local, state and federal levels. Offer new, enhanced programs such as mentoring by business professionals and also the development of a ‘Crisis Response Team’ which would be made up of a network of professionals such as accountants, attorneys, and bankers. Identify the guidelines of ‘case management’ structure which would better track businesses needing and receiving assistance as well as ensuring they have access to all of the available resources.*

Transportation - *Build on our good location and highway systems to expand our transportation options to attract a more diverse business base. Research options for area rail spurs and a community rail yard, NASA Plum Brook runway, and north/south corridor.*

Participants stressed four crucial elements throughout this process. There was a strong consensus that the following elements must be emphasized in each goal and throughout the five key areas to ensure success.

- Businesses must be regularly informed of the economic development resources that are available. We have a strong economic development team in place, with a knowledgeable staff, funding opportunities, and a great relationship with the State of Ohio. However, the vast resources available are not necessarily known throughout the community. We must make a more concerted effort to promote the utilization of the assets we have.

- Retention must always be the primary focus of our efforts. Most economic growth will come from established businesses. We must pursue and create incentive programs that apply to current companies and jobs. When offering incentives for new business, we must also consider the effects on current businesses.
- Incentives developed to support economic sustainability and growth must have two key components, whether offered to existing or new businesses: Accountability and tangible benefits to the community. It is imperative to the success of any such program that there is a strong, long term partnership between the city and the business, and guidelines must be created to ensure the goals of the incentive programs are met (ex: targeted industries, quality vs. quantity).
- It was strongly emphasized throughout the discussions that the NASA Plum Brook Runway is a key component for the economic future of our entire region. We must construct a strong regional partnership to get this project developed and proactively focus our efforts on providing a well-trained workforce and suitable business incentives that will support the types of jobs and businesses that will be generated from this project.

The next steps in this process will be to match the goals identified by the group with organizations that can best develop a plan for implementation immediately. It is time to begin the process of developing our long term strategy for 'Restarting our Engines.'

Chapter I - Capital

“(Build a) network geared toward making financial and intellectual capital available to growing companies in...a range of industries,...seeking returns and economic development.” Community Capitalism: A Lesson from Kalamazoo and Beyond

To retain and attract business, especially in today’s environment, communities must seek ways to create their own homegrown venture capital opportunities. For Norwalk to compete with area communities, we must have competitive incentives and resources. We have a solid base of economic development expertise, local professional networks and great access to state incentives. How can we create new local “capital” opportunities?

What we have in Norwalk:

- Proactive economic development team with knowledge/accessibility to state and federal incentives/programs to help companies through process: job creation & retention programs, energy grants/loans, USDA grants/loans, training grants, EDA grants/loans; state & federal financing programs, procurement contacts/workshops, BWC.
- Competitive local incentives: Revolving Loan Fund, Tax Abatement, Community Reinvestment Area, TIF District, Historic & Rehabilitation Tax Credits, Façade Grant Program, MicroLoan.
- Strong relationships with state and federal officials/ODOD/agencies/political leadership.
- Retention program, recognized at the state & national levels: NEDC Business Appreciation Week (116 businesses visited), Visitation Programs of NEDC, Main Street & City.
- Good relationships and ongoing communication with local businesses and their corporate headquarters.
- Small business community network, business counseling services: NEDC, Chamber of Commerce, SBDC, Safety Council, SCORE.
- General public support and engagement (over 50 volunteers each year participate in Business Appreciation Week).
- Good local resources: strong banking partners, HCDC, WSOS, Huron County Revolving Loan Fund.

Recommendations

A. Resource Network

Goal: *Strengthen our area resource network. Reach more businesses by more widely promoting services offered such as assistance with business plans, grants, succession planning, organizational restructuring and funding sources at the local, state and federal levels. Offer new, enhanced programs such as mentoring by business professionals and also the development of a ‘Crisis Response Team’ which would be made up of a network of professionals such as accountants, attorneys, and bankers. Identify the guidelines of ‘case management’ structure which would better track businesses needing and receiving assistance as well as ensuring they have access to all of the available resources.*

Retention of current businesses in our community! That is the most important aspect of economic development. By strengthening and growing our Resource Network, we can provide current businesses with the resources they need, when they need them. Communicate better and work harder to identify present businesses needs. Present the resources that are available and help make business owners comfortable accessing these resources. Through this strong Resource Network, build a safety net for troubled businesses, offering early detection and direct resources to help struggling business owners. Identify and strengthen partnerships with accountants, entrepreneurs, community and business leaders,

and others to build the strongest network possible. Utilize informational websites, booklets to make people aware and to market the Resource Network.

Factors to Consider:

- Identify gate keepers.
- Have knowledge of grant \$ available for improvement and training.
- Be a support group, but also proactive.
- Create a support group similar to SCORE that also incorporates members still in the workforce.
- Consider competitive nature of business, i.e. resources/incentives for new vs. established.
- Determine who carries the financial burden.
- Continue to get in the eye of the public and local businesses.
- Build more momentum, more requests for support, more potential investors.
- Establish NEDC as the hub/first point of contact.
- Enable small to medium businesses to pick up the phone to discuss situations.

B. Job Creation Tax Incentives

Goal: *Offer tax rebates to companies based on new employee payroll over a certain period of time (i.e. 50% rebate on \$500,000 minimum payroll for 3 years). Rebate is paid at year end based on payroll tax actually paid to the City. Some programs use an average wage mandate (i.e. 200% of minimum wage).*

Many communities currently offer a tax rebate for new jobs created in their communities. These rebates often target a strategic industry or business; for example we might target NASA related businesses, though it may be beneficial to be flexible. Incentives should mandate a Business Plan be in place and investigate the economic benefit the company would have for the City related to these incentives (growth, sales, etc). Incentives should maintain and increase value to Norwalk with a long-term business benefit, not just 5-year or short-term benefits. Mandate a long-term commitment by the company and accountability with no bait and switch. Present the advantages life in Norwalk including the opportunities and reasons to locate here such as the lower costs of living and the quality of life.

Although this incentive is primarily for new business activity, we want to consider job retention not just creation incentives. Consider including diversification and increased productivity as well as new employee payroll (i.e. the 250K machine that improves productivity but reduces 2 employees, increases sales long term, grows employment long term.) Incentivize company development (healthy companies) not just increased employees and payroll.

Factors to Consider

- Healthy companies grow and hire people but it is difficult to measure “healthy companies.”
- Accountability comes with a retroactive rebate. Target building owner or business owner?
- Concentrate on retention – job creation happens through retention.
- Sliding wage scale based on job – target \$11/hr job? Mandate wage rate?
- Offset utility costs through incentives.
- Caution: Income tax incentives based on retention of jobs will shrink the existing tax base. Incentives based on job creation can be more win/win.
- Retention claims are harder to document and back up than new jobs.
- Existing incentive programs providing capital are still wedded to financing fixed assets but many growing businesses desperately need working/operating capital.

C. Local Preference

Goal: *Increase efforts to support and stimulate the local economy by emphasizing buying/contracting locally. Offer a City mandate for local business participation percentage (i.e. 25%) on City projects. Or offer a percentage allowance to local companies who bid on city contracts (i.e. 5% for Norwalk Companies; 3% for County Companies.) Establish a local purchasing team or cooperative so local companies can collaborate to get low prices and share expertise.*

Shop Norwalk first! The commitment to buying local strengthens our local economy. The City of Norwalk should make that commitment. Options to consider include incentives for local companies or mandates for companies outside our area doing city projects to purchase local goods and services. Create a local purchasing team or offer local hiring incentives. Offer incentives to existing businesses to bring their suppliers here.

Factors to Consider:

- Buy local – pass ordinance providing bid allowance to local companies.
- Require local participation in bid specs.
- Develop incentive to have supply companies locate near customer (construction, racing).
- Consider if non-local companies will back off from bidding in Norwalk if there is a local preference.
- Seeing more and more of this requirement on bid specs.
- Benefits local business people.
- Must earn business but appreciate the opportunity to earn it.
- Need to make it a win/win for customers and the businesses.
- Investigate preferences other communities offer for local companies (i.e. Lorain and Lorain County offer approximately 3% preference to local companies).

D. Venture Capital Community

Goal: *Develop homegrown venture capital to attract businesses and partner with other sources of capital. Create a network of investors, bankers, accountants, other professionals to provide cash, expertise, and connections. Provide “pool” of local investors with good return on investment.*

A community that can offer Venture Capital can have a strong advantage in attracting start-up companies to their area. Grants and loans are offered to targeted and start-up companies or to help seasoned companies with expansion or to get over a rough spot. Communities should seek quality over quantity, requiring business applicants to demonstrate their economic benefit to the community and their long term sustainability. In addition applicants should present their Business Plan and Exit Strategy. A partnership should be created which offers mentoring with investors involved in each project, holding a seat on the company’s board. Accounting firms could become more proactive in financing opportunities. The City should investigate possible tax write-offs or other incentives for investors. Other venture capital options might include an offer of a spec building, or a combination of government and local capital. Seek other public financial resources.

Factors to Consider:

- Potential for income for businesses/investors.
- Offer new avenues for financial opportunity (business).
- Advantage of support team.
- Keep deals private/discreet.
- Don’t just hand \$ over.
- Courting & marriage of potential business with the Capital Group is important.

- Organize existing capital investors.
- Carefully set rules.
- More capital is available than investment opportunities today.
- Offer a creative way to get financing for a capital project. Remove the financing hurdles and rigid appraisal guidelines.
- Outwardly incent current businesses in place for growth. The businesses we have are our life blood, so let's leverage what is already here.
- Helps get Norwalk on the map as supportive of new entrepreneurial ventures.

Chapter II – Infrastructure

“The infrastructure of growth is no longer water or sewer lines. Today, the infrastructure of growth is engineering schools, high-tech incubators and research institutions.” Community Capitalism: A Lesson from Kalamazoo and Beyond

Today infrastructure goes well beyond the typical services of water, sewer, and electric. We must consider all the physical needs a business might have. Area communities offer building options at little or no rent. Internet access and even the economic development structure that is available can be marketable assets. What current infrastructure assets can we market and expand on?

What we have in Norwalk:

- Abundant water and wastewater capacity as well as access to fresh water.
- Good transportation systems/roads with good access to highways and the potential for rail expansion.
- Industrials parks with available space as well as other available buildings throughout the city.
- Great economic development programs, strong business retention & expansion programs, recognized at the state & national level.
- Business networking opportunities through Norwalk Economic Development Corp., Chamber of Commerce, Manufacturers’ Council, SMART Team, Safety Council, Main Street Norwalk.
- HUB Zone designation with proactive government contracting/procurement workshops & outreach/promotion.
- Consideration of alternative energy options including a current wind study.
- Good Internet availability.
- NASA Runway Taskforce, supporting and promoting development at NASA Plum Brook.

Recommendations

A. Utilities

Goal: *Strengthen our competitive advantage by providing strong, affordable utility infrastructure with adequate utilities for future growth. City water and sewer utilities are plentiful and affordable. City must seek out new partnerships and options for electric, natural gas and new technologies.*

An integral factor for most business decisions is the availability, reliability and costs for utilities. Make every effort to ensure we are competitive with other communities on this front. Take control of local electric rates, which may be some of the highest in the country. Investigate AMP Ohio or other electric alternatives. Consider buying back the grid system to purchase our own electric, thereby providing lower costs and becoming more competitive with other cities. A co-op should be considered and a committee formed to investigate. Seek alternative energies such as wind turbines, bio-gas, etc. Review all energy resources and offer opportunities for both the city and local businesses to become more energy efficient. In addition to the standard utilities, pursue efforts to improve technology and internet communication i.e. fiber optics, speed, security. Consider providing Internet technology and/or City Wi-Fi.

Factors to Consider

- Consider geothermal options.
- Explore lower rates with Amp Ohio.
- Who would pay for Wi-Fi?
- Cash out Power Plant \$ via vote to buy electrical infrastructure.
- Investigate legal issues with Ohio Edison.

- Investigate legal procedures, constraints, and ramifications of seeking a new electricity provider.
- Review school districts in this area which have a “gas consortium.”

B. Transportation

Goal: *Build on our good location and highway systems to expand our transportation options to attract a more diverse business base. Research options for area rail spurs and a community rail yard, NASA Plum Brook runway, and north/south corridor.*

The City should explore any and all possibilities to expand transportation options. Explore more railroad accessibility and establish a city rail spur to give an additional transportation option to current and future businesses. Collaborate consistently with the efforts to ensure that the NASA expansion/runway project is completed to offer additional transportation option as well as a powerful new economic driver. Continue efforts to improve the north/south corridor from Columbus through Norwalk to Lake Erie. Improve access for Summit Motorsports Raceway.

Factors to Consider

- Combine political strength for the NASA Runway– get state support, high paying jobs, proximity creates economic growth
- North/South corridor, take away the transportation issues.
- Capitalize on Cedar Point/Kalahari – 5 million people.
- Summit Raceway, improve access especially north/south, getting in and out around track.
- Study to see if combining companies’ needs would support rail spur.
- Investigate if the rail spur would be cost effective vs. the commitment the business could give the City to recoup the investment.
- Consider transportation route to Cedar Point. The north/south transportation experience for those traveling through Norwalk is painful. Find a solution to fix this and also gain something out of it.
- Take advantage of regional assets and opportunities.

C. Market Our Infrastructure

Goal: *Market the strong infrastructure assets we have. Research what companies look for when considering a new community. Identify and market the advantages we have relative to other local communities.*

We should better market our infrastructure assets including our transportation assets such as our access to freeways and the ease of transportation from out of town and to local businesses; and our abundant water and sewer services. Ensure utilities are adequate for future growth. Our HUB zone designation is a great asset that should be more aggressively marketed and utilized. Market the intangible infrastructure we have such as the government/business environment we have. There are very strong business relationships with the City of Norwalk government which must be marketed. Oftentimes people may not realize this until they need it. Consideration should be given to co-marketing with other businesses through websites, testimonials, and videos to attest to the strength of these relationships (i.e. Wheeling & Lake Erie website).

Factors to consider:

- Weather – moderate – utilities are better than too hot, too cold.
- Hub Zone – need to use more.
- Gas is cheap.

- Web presence quality.
- State is unfriendly to business (so much red tape & regulations).
- Norwalk is Business Friendly now.
- Make the State of Ohio business friendly with special attention to Workers Comp issues.
- Aggressively pursue relationships with corporate headquarters outside Norwalk.

D. Building Options

Goal: *Offer new businesses a competitive advantage to locate in Norwalk by utilizing empty buildings. Tenants receive tax break; rent subsidized for first few years; or provide low rent/ no rent facilities.*

To compete with neighboring cities in attracting new businesses, the City must find affordable rent options which can provide great incentives for a company to locate. Form a team to recruit no rent/low rent landlords and assist in matching them with tenants. Advertise available empty space. Look for ways to recycle empty buildings, offering options such as local warehousing for companies or a Distribution Hub for the area. Seek to expand the Norwalk Community Development Corp. ability to help with facilities, building space, renovations, and build to spec options. Though these are good programs for new businesses we must remain a resource to strengthen current businesses and expand their ability to grow.

Factors to Consider

- Work according to a plan.
- Consider the competition for existing businesses when new companies get low/free rent.
- Require entity being considered for space to have some “skin in the game” to make it work.
- Utilize the NCDC “build to order” model to help facilitate quick building construction.
- Offer short-term rent incentives on Main Street.
- Find good, productive tenants and get them in the buildings.
- Offer subsidized rents for limited period.

Chapter III – Education

“Great minds do great things. Communities that succeed will increasingly focus on access to education that is relevant, lifelong and delivered in a manner that encourages the recipient to make the community home for life.” Community Capitalism: A Lesson from Kalamazoo and Beyond

Education is more important than ever. A well trained work force will attract companies to expand and locate in Norwalk. With the current unemployment rates, now is the time to put into place solid educational options. What programs are the best to strengthen the workforce and benefit business needs?

What we have in Norwalk:

- Excellent private and public schools which provide choice and opportunity; top honors academically and athletically.
- Great High School Graduation Rate and strong GED programs for those without High School diploma.
- Outstanding educational opportunities – Preschool through Grade “16” with great proximity to numerous vocational schools, colleges, and universities.
- Proactive Huron County Job & Family Services office with knowledge and access to numerous training grant programs for financial assistance to employers and the workforce for training/tax credits, such as Incumbent Worker Training Grant Program & Outreach to Businesses, other Job Training in options for business.
- Strong United Fund & Support Programs emphasizing training & career development.
- Workforce Certificates - non-degree stackable certificates for those on long-term career paths.

Recommendations

A. Entrepreneurship

Goal: *Build on our long tradition of entrepreneurship to inspire innovation, new business growth, and creativity in our youth.*

The City has a long tradition of entrepreneurship beginning with Platte Benedict, the City’s founder, the Fisher Family, founders of Body by Fisher and A.J. Baltes, the father of our local construction industry. Build on that tradition with a focused effort. Create a resource for entrepreneurial ideas. Teach youth the power of free market economics. Offer Entrepreneurship opportunities such as Junior Achievement and Imagination Destination. Build a partnership with public education to offer outreach to high school students and to educators in the classroom at all levels. Offer inspiration with role models in science, math, and engineering by energizing career shadowing opportunities. Offer teachers and educators the opportunity to interact with business and other inspirational leaders. Utilize distance learning to offer personal attention, technology, and online classes and programs. Raise awareness of these opportunities for families & students

Factors to consider:

- School support (Norwalk Public and Norwalk Catholic Schools, EHOVE)
- Teacher training to encourage creative thought and adventure
- Teach and encourage – it is okay to fail, just try!
- Direct more emphasis and incentives toward nurturing, prodding, and supporting Norwalk’s innate but under-the-radar innovators of “crazy ideas that just might work.” New local businesses come from someone with a good idea.
- Investigate Entrepreneurship Program at Ashland University’s School of Business

B. Teach to Grade 14

Goal: *Make education in English, Math and Technology to a Grade 14 level (Associates Degree) affordable and accessible for all interested employees/employers and the unemployed.*

Raise the bar and level of expectation in the entire community by offering an easy and affordable educational leg up. Partnering this effort with the economic stimulus opportunity provided with the NASA runway expansion would make this an area suited for high tech economic development and new business. Focus on English, (reading & writing), Math (basic skills & economics), and Technology, (availability, applications, & utilizations) to provide employees with a global view, understanding of what things cost and real economic impact on business. There is great potential for the entire community and benefit for all ages. It is a re-learning for the young and old and would impact our youth as their parents become more educated.

Factors to consider:

- Real possibilities without great cost.
- Offer possible college credits, keep cost down for college credit, provide variety of opportunities with variety of universities.
- Educational pathways to include certifications that may lead to degree.
- Market education opportunities to provide training to meet company needs.
- Kalamazoo Promise Methodology for career pathways/technical training (applies to everything), book talks, audio books/e-books.
- We could/should be able to keep our young educated people here if we have the jobs to support them.

C. College Branch

Goal: *Attract a branch of a college/university to locate here or put college classes into one of our available buildings.*

Elevating the level of education in the City would be much easier with a college branch or regular classes available. Some of those classes are here, but a more coordinated effort should be put forth. Work with local businesses to assess what educational gaps need to be filled. Once learning experience needs are found, meet with area colleges and schools to entice them to come in to teach classes. Work also towards an internship/guaranteed future job incentive with local business to draw attendance.

Factors to consider:

- Consider an ITT Tech or other trade related school to benefit the many blue collar and trade-oriented businesses in our area.
- Provide diverse options and programming by not tying a facility to a specific college/university.
- Take a wide, open-minded approach to fill the facility with enough activity to make it a vibrant, rich centerpiece adding value to Norwalk.
- Consider possibility of classes being taught here in available buildings by BGSU Firelands.

D. Matchmaker Site

Goal: *Develop a website to match local high school students and alumni with available job opportunities in our area. Match up high school students with local businesses and job opportunities while they are in school and considering higher education and professions.*

Address the concern of the “Brain Drain” for the area by early contact with high school students and ongoing contact for students who leave the area for college. Establish contact with local companies and school systems to assess needed jobs and who is available to fill the position. Seek out local businesses that would be willing to hire high school students for part-time positions to inspire interest in a career. Seek potential funding to offer scholarships and incentives for students such as job training incentives and help for students who continue to work for a business while in school. Build a database of local high school alumni with their college, major, degrees, and/or profession to keep them connected with local job opportunities.

Factors to consider:

- Consider how Fisher-Titus supports their employees who want to further their education.

Chapter IV – Talent

“Gone are the days when advanced economies can focus on natural resources or low cost. The number one indicator of sustainable success is the creation, development, and deployment of talent.” Community Capitalism: A Lesson from Kalamazoo and Beyond

One of our great strengths is the talent found in this community. It is apparent in our history of entrepreneurship from our founder Platte Benedict, through the Fisher Family, John Ernsthausen, and A.J. Baltes. Dozens of homegrown and family businesses are built and thrive because of this same innovation and drive. What are the best ways to foster ingenuity and the entrepreneurial spirit?”

What we have in Norwalk:

- Strong Entrepreneurial Heritage to draw on and build on.
- Solid work ethic, homegrown and recognized.
- Available workforce with a rising level of education.
- FTMC is talent driven offering examples of recruitment, training programs and support.
- Innovative business support programs involving much local talent.
- Good business involvement/networking.
- Strong Economic Development Programs, Main Street, Chamber of Commerce, Community Partnerships.

Recommendations

A. Incubator

Goal *Support entrepreneurs with reasonable space costs and intensive business assistance and consulting services. Combine these resources with investment capital options to create a strong recruitment tool.*

Talent + Facilities + Ideas + \$\$\$ = Entrepreneurship. Create an incubator that is linked to a targeted industry (manufacturing, furniture, health care, entertainment, tourism, construction, automotive, IT). Link with an industry-focused state cluster. Provide networking and support, along with shared spaces to create the synergy that sprouts entrepreneurs. Develop an understanding of the challenges of new businesses and possibilities including the legal and governmental issues. Offer counseling with options like SCORE and business plan counseling plus other services/resources through accountants and lawyers. Engage current building owners by offering tax breaks and/or rent subsidies. Seek private commitment to remove restrictions and instill pride.

Factors to Consider

- Consider Southview Business Center as incubator center; could use part of building for classroom learning.
- Low cost for business.
- Assistance at entry level.
- Venture Capitalist Group could “cherry pick” best of best from incubators.
- Set limits/boundaries such as a timeframe.
- Organize a plan (committee).
- Consider the cost of management and building maintenance.
- Marry talent with a good work ethic and it creates an unstoppable machine.

- Tie-in directly to the “resource network” goal under the Capital chapter.
- Consider the pros and cons to tying an incubator to a specific industry. Con: it limits possibilities. Pro: it may help develop a competitive niche and “brand.”
- Link with Fisher-Titus regarding health care.
- Marry the incubator projects with building options, entrepreneurship, and capitalism to create an entire package.

B. Internships

Goal: *Keep the best and the brightest in the community by matching local college students and local companies with compatible career options. These internships should offer wages and/or scholarships.*

Seek local internships to attract young college students of graduates back to the area. Some internships may already exist. Other businesses may be willing to create internships but face the real challenge of the dollars to fund them. Examine local resources to keep tabs on what is available and publish opportunities. Research what local foundations may be available that could be tapped into in the name of education. There should be a focused effort to accumulate capital to fund this effort.

Factors to Consider

- Smaller businesses are challenged with designing internships and matching to the right student Orientation and supervision are challenging.
- Develop stronger shadowing programs. Shadowing is not internship, shadowing leads to internship.
- Educate high school students about local opportunity as they begin to think about a career.
- Many kids consider returning 6 – 8 years after college – nurture their entrepreneurship.
- The chicken or the egg? Build internship to fit kids’ education or educate kids to fit the job.
- Ensure there are jobs available for graduates wanting to return to Norwalk.
- Provide field trips to these businesses so that our young people can get involved.
- Target internships to Norwalk grads, leading to potentially rewarding careers in Norwalk, may be a way to partially stem the “brain drain” tide.
- Train senior executives as mentors with programs such as Junior Achievement

C. Talent Driven Companies

Goal: *Companies and organizations share best practices to select and develop talent across industries to raise the level of human capital in the community.*

Develop a culture of partnership to create a universal drive throughout business to attract talent to our community. Offer opportunities for current employers to further develop talent and raise employee satisfaction. Develop programs to motivate existing firms to be more competitive through educational opportunities such as plan reading, construction management, and writing proposals for the construction industry. Through strategic planning, help businesses to utilize our existing talent pool (i.e. the 100 sewers who were laid off from Norwalk Furniture or the growing number of available construction workers). Identify students’ attributes and limitations to strengthen the link between each set and prospective employment. Explore how to develop “talent” in students at home and at school.

Factors to consider

- We have the ingredients for the recipe – we need to put it together.
- Time consuming and capital consuming; requires patience.

- SCORE exists in community already (seek further development)
- Create a means of identifying each individual's talents and abilities. Use DJFS. Get talent listings from businesses for a match.
- Create a resource to travel the college recruiting fairs with talent needs from Norwalk businesses.
- Community reunions - every five years or so, opportunities, housing, how do you come home; these people bring back outside experiences.

D. Youth in Civic Organizations

Goal: *Develop strategies to involve young adults in opportunities for networking, building community pride, and leadership training. Need to keep producing community leaders to step up and get involved.*

Create a program similar to Project Leadership that is target to a specific age group such as 20 to 30 year olds.

Factors to consider

- Work with Project Leadership to include more potential leaders.

Chapter V – Place

“Understanding the demographics of your community is important, but understanding the culture of your community is even more important.” Rick Warren

Place is who we are as a community. What are our strengths and weaknesses? What do we want for the future? What attributes do we have to help us get there? The Comprehensive Plan uses two entire chapters to define Norwalk, the chapters on Community Character and Quality of Life. The Mission Statement of the City may best define the place we are: “The Norwalk area is a community that is committed to preserving its rich heritage and fulfilling quality of life while fostering planned growth.” The challenge in these times is to preserve that quality of life while forging ahead to build a stronger business base.

What we have in Norwalk:

- Exceptional quality of life; small town living at its best.
- Strong and vibrant Central Business District.
- Centrally located with good transportation accessibility.
- Good, available workforce with strong work ethic.
- Close proximity to Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo and Lake Erie.
- Great educational opportunities with public & parochial schools and area universities.
- Strong historic connections with Historical Society and Firelands Museum.
- Ready access to excellent medical facilities.
- Land readily available.

Recommendations

A. Promotion

Goal: *Find the resources to promote Norwalk for the many attributes we have both for quality of life and for business recruitment. Consider a plan to publicize our city statewide and nationwide.*

Identify the attributes that make the city a great place to locate a business. Pinpoint the strengths we offer to an organization looking to expand or relocate. Aggressively market these strengths on a nationwide scale with economic development outreach such as a Red Carpet Tours, where target industries can be attracted. Form a unified effort with the City, the State, Economic Development and the Chamber. Presentations should include such information as educational perks, funding incentives, talent pool, infrastructure and state sponsored incentives.

Factors to consider:

- Highlight what we offer to the world of commerce.
- Understand the reasons that business come and the reasons they leave.
- Communicate to America why business should come here
- We have almost everything we need. We need the world to know.

B. Branding

Goal: *Make us a destination! Create a theme or brand that quickly and clearly identifies who we are to visitors and businesses looking to relocate.*

Norwalk is a very distinctive place with very identifiable attributes. Capture this sense of place with a clearly identifiable brand so the City can best be promoted. This branding should be used at all levels of promotion and marketing of the city.

Factors to Consider:

- Create a Raceway Park extension into the city
- Capture the quality of life and the low cost of living
- Give more thought to the whole “branding” concept, destination marketing, and competitive advantage to highlight what feature (or features) should be spotlighted and spit-polished to make Norwalk distinctive – “unique positioning.”

C. Build on tourism

Goal: *Partner more aggressively with the tourism drivers in the area such as Summit Motorsports Park, Cedar Point, Kalahari, Eagle Creek. Strengthen our marketing efforts individually and regionally to capitalize on our tourism assets.*

We are the home and the gateway to significant tourism attractions. Leverage the proximity to these attractions to help local retail and restaurants, small Mom and Pop shops. Promote our own tourism and historic attractions. Much has been done, but much more could be done.

Factors to consider:

- Niagara Falls is Cedar Point and Norwalk is Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Communities need to band together, think regionally.
- Create local convention center/ conference center.
- Connect Summit visitors to Main Street.
- Assist in development of oval track/speedway to go along with the drag strip.