City of Norwalk, Ohio
Sue S. Lesch, Mayor

Norwalk City Council
Stephen Euton, President
Robert Carleton
Chris Mushett
Shane Penrose
Thomas Stoll
Tera Thornhill
Dwight Tkach
Skip Wilde

Sharon Harwood (through 2005)
Lynn Szabo (through 2005)

Norwalk City Planning Commission
James Orth, President
Stacy Badovick
T. Douglas Clifford
William Kalfs
Kathy Kuhlman
Nancy Miller
Chris Pawlicki

Alex Kelsor (through 2006)

Planning Consultant: WSOS Community Action Commission Inc.
Neil McCabe, President/CEO
Ben Kenny, Project Lead
Norwalk, Ohio Comprehensive Plan

September 2006

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Dear Citizens:

It is a pleasure to present the City of Norwalk’s blueprint for the future, a Comprehensive Plan that examines the issues most likely to influence the City’s development over the next twenty years. By defining who we want to become in the future, this strategic planning document will guide City decision-making in a wide range of areas as we grow.

The Comprehensive Plan is the product of two years of effort by local citizens, business leaders and government officials. Over 700 people played a role in shaping this document, from community forums held in October 2004 to focus groups in the winter of 2005 to resource panels which met during the summer and fall of 2005. All provided input and feedback as the plan developed. As a result, this document does not represent any one person’s vision, but the entire community’s. It clearly affirms the principle and importance of the role of community in implementing the policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.

This plan has already proved to be an integral component of City actions since those public forums. Even in draft form, it has defined who we are in response to requests by developers, and it will continue to influence City development decisions in the future.

While the document describes a vast number of issues requiring attention, a number of priorities must be at the forefront:

- **Community Character/Quality of Life** – The mission expressed in the Comprehensive Plan reflects the fundamental values of the community: We must plan for orderly growth while maintaining our rich heritage and the safe, family-friendly atmosphere we love.

- **Economic Development/Downtown Norwalk** – A healthy business base is the key to the health of the community. We must strive to retain and attract new industry as well as support the entrepreneur and family-owned shops.

- **Infrastructure and Utilities/Natural Resources** – Continued improvements to infrastructure must be designed to meet growth needs and regulations while reflecting good stewardship of our environment and resources. A primary focus must be securing a secondary water source as well as ensuring access to high-speed telecommunications.

- **Transportation/Housing** – We must maintain and build transportation systems that are safe and efficient and advocate for a full mix of quality housing options.

- **Community Services/Facilities** – We must continue to strive for strong and reliable safety forces with adequate facilities and personnel. We must preserve and promote the many service organizations sustaining the City, as they are essential to a sound quality of life.
- Land Use – The heart of this Comprehensive Plan is centered in our Land Use Plan. Where will we grow and how? We must preserve a sound balance between emerging residential use and commercial needs.

Over 300 recommendations are made in this document, each with a targeted time frame for achievement. This timeline may evolve through the years as objectives and priorities change and are meshed with the limited resources available. The timeframes reflected in the Summary Chapter are:

- Short term – to be completed between 2006 and 2010.
- Medium term – to be completed between 2011 and 2015.
- Long term – to be completed in 2016 or later.
- Ongoing – signifying activities that are already or should become an integral part of daily government. They represent the approach the City will take in responding to needs, the environment we want to sustain, and the impression we want to leave with residents, workers and visitors.

This plan is yours. It reflects the vital interests, hopes and dreams of this community. I challenge you to become stewards of the plan, to become familiar with the agenda set forth here, and in the years ahead to challenge our public servants to hold to its vision.

With gratitude for all the hard work put into the development of this plan, and with great pride in the Norwalk community, I am pleased to present the City of Norwalk’s Comprehensive Plan.

Sincerely,

Susan S. Lesch
Susan S. Lesch
Mayor
Norwalk in Twenty Years

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
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Introduction

- 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

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

**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 Eggebrecth
- Sheri Thomas
- Shirley Berry
- Louis Frey
- Richard Moore
- Steve Euton
- Gary Mortus
- John Riley
- Darryl Young
- Pat Schwan
- John Rock
- Ralph Seward
- Doug Berry
- Christopher Pawlicki
- Bill Taylor
- Sharon Rood
- Steve Zigo
- Roland Tkach

**Housing**
- Carole Babcanec, Chair
- Thom Shaffoe
- Jay Ewell
- Norma Schaechterle
- Robin Foushee
- 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
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.
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:
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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
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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:**

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

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

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.
According to the 2000 Census, Norwalk was a City of 16,238 persons when the Census was taken in 1999. This total was the culmination of a century of growth that saw the City of 7,074 increase by 130 percent. Growth by decade was recorded as follows:

### Table 1: Norwalk Population Over Time

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>7,074</td>
<td>7,858</td>
<td>7,379</td>
<td>7,776</td>
<td>8,211</td>
<td>9,775</td>
<td>12,900</td>
<td>13,386</td>
<td>14,358</td>
<td>14,731</td>
<td>16,238</td>
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<tr>
<td>% growth</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
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</table>

Source: U.S. Census

Norwalk witnessed rapid growth during the 1940’s and 1950’s, adding nearly one-third of its population during the post-war boom period of the 1950’s. While growth was inhibited during the 1980’s, a time of recession in the Midwest, the pace of growth has picked back up somewhat, reaching just over ten percent during the 1990’s.

It is important to remember that a municipality’s population increases because of three factors: net immigration into the City, births within the City exceeding deaths, and through annexation of new land and households. It is likely that, in addition to immigration, the City annexed new property during the boom period of the 1940’s and 1950’s.

### Table 2: Huron County Population Over Time

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>32,330</td>
<td>34,206</td>
<td>32,424</td>
<td>33,700</td>
<td>34,800</td>
<td>39,353</td>
<td>47,326</td>
<td>49,587</td>
<td>54,608</td>
<td>56,240</td>
<td>59,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% growth</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census

Huron County’s population generally followed the ebb and flow of the City’s growth trends, with a major boost and the birth of the ‘baby boomer” generation in the 1940’s and 1950’s. While the County experienced two-digit growth over the 1970’s (at 10.1 percent), the 1990’s
The Norwalk, Ohio Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 2: Population and Demographics

The Norwalk, Ohio Comprehensive Plan did not bring the extent of growth witnessed in the City. In fact, Norwalk’s net increase of 1,507 residents was nearly half (46.4 percent) of the County’s net increase of 3,247.

Norwalk in 2000

A closer look at the 16,238 people counted as Norwalk residents for the 2000 Census can be helpful in forming a more accurate picture of the City. A first breakdown considers the population by age group. This helps form a picture of the size of various age groups: school age population, the elderly, people in their working years. Also, grouping by age cohort helps project what the population will look like in ten or twenty years.

Table 3 reveals a fairly evenly dispersed population, with males making up 47.8 percent and females 52.2 percent of the total. There is a large cohort of younger adults, with the largest number in the 25-34 and 35-44 brackets. Retirement is not likely for this group for 20 to 30 years, so they represent a significant labor force.

The median age in Norwalk was 34.2, a bit younger than Huron County’s median of 34.9, and fully two years younger than Ohio’s median of 36.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>1,302</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>1,245</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>1,080</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>1,076</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>1,114</td>
<td>2,289</td>
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<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>1,155</td>
<td>1,252</td>
<td>2,407</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>1,993</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>684</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>544</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>1,121</td>
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<tr>
<td>75 to 84 years</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>873</td>
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<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,758</td>
<td>8,480</td>
<td>16,238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 Census of Population

While nearly nineteen out of 20 Norwalk residents are White, the Black population has held steady for several decades, and the Hispanic ethnic group has grown significantly to become nearly twice the size of the Black/African American racial group. The Hispanic population grew from just 198 in 1990, more than tripling over the decade, to 620 in the 2000 Census. Further, many in Norwalk’s Hispanic/Latino population feel certain that the City’s total Hispanic population is significantly undercounted, and the actual total may be as high as 1,800.

Another interesting characteristic of the population is the origin of its ancestry. The top five ancestries reported by residents for the 2000 Census were German (5,569 people, or
just over one-third of the population), English (1,821), Irish (1,764), United States/American (1,490), Italian (946), Dutch (509), French (409), Polish (361), Scottish (353), and Welsh (256).

Table 4: Race and Hispanic Origin in Norwalk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population, 2000</td>
<td>16,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Race</td>
<td>16,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Other Race</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More races</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. 2000 Census of Population

Table 5: Households in Norwalk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>6,377</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Households</td>
<td>4,232</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With own children under 18</td>
<td>2,213</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married-Couple family</td>
<td>3,185</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With own children under 18</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female householder, no husband present</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With own children under 18</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfamily households</td>
<td>2,143</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Householder living Alone</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Householder 65 Years/over</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with individuals under 18 years</td>
<td>2,376</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with individuals 65 years+</td>
<td>1,586</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Size</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Family Size</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 Census of Population
First, it is important to note that while Norwalk’s population grew by 10.2 percent over the 1990s, the number of households grew by a larger proportion, 13.1 percent. This leads to the correct conclusion that household size has shrunk in Norwalk, from an average of 2.55 in 1990 to 2.49 in 2000. The 2000 average of 2.49 is equal to the State average, but somewhat lower than the Huron County average of 2.65.

Household types by percentage closely follow statewide percentages, rarely varying by more than one to two percent. The greatest divergence is in Norwalk having a larger percentage of households with individuals under 18 years old (37.3 percent vs. Ohio’s 34.5 percent). The incidence of single female householders is slightly greater in Norwalk, and Norwalk’s proportion of households with single householders age 65 and over is nearly two percent greater than the State’s rate (11.9 percent vs. 10.0 percent).

**Income Factors**

Norwalk’s median household income, at $37,778, is less than the County and State medians. While median family income is closer to the County’s median, both are several thousand dollars less than the State median. This holds true for the per capita income as well. Finally, the median income for males living in Norwalk is slightly larger than the County median, and just over $1,000 less than the State median. The median for females is $620 less than the County median, and over $4,000 less than the State median. For the most part, Norwalk’s households and wage earners earn less than the County and State’s labor force, on average.

**Table 6: Income Comparisons: Norwalk, Huron County, and Ohio**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income in 1999</th>
<th>Number Norwalk</th>
<th>Percent Norwalk</th>
<th>Huron Co.</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>6,349</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $14,999</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $24,999</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $34,999</td>
<td>1,059</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>1,184</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$37,778</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>$40,558</td>
<td>$40,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Family Income</td>
<td>$45,789</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>$46,911</td>
<td>$50,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Income</td>
<td>$18,589</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>$18,133</td>
<td>$21,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median earnings, male full-time year-round worker</td>
<td>$36,582</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>$35,760</td>
<td>$37,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median earnings, female full-time year-round worker</td>
<td>$22,165</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>$22,785</td>
<td>$26,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: U.S. 2000 Census of Population*
Poverty: With 289 families in poverty in 1999, Norwalk had a 6.8 percent family poverty rate, slightly larger than the County rate (6.5 percent) but less than the State rate (7.8 percent). Among the City’s individuals, 1,391 (8.8 percent) were in poverty in Norwalk, more than the County rate (8.5 percent), and somewhat less than the State rate (10.6 percent).

Huron County can be classified somewhat as “blue collar” in the sense that the percent of workers in management and professional occupations is about ten percent less than the State percentage (21.2 percent County vs. 31.0 percent State), while the percentage of production and related workers, 30.9 percent for Norwalk and fully one-third of workers for the County, is considerably greater than for the State (19.0 percent). The manufacturing sector, employing three in ten workers in Norwalk and one in three Countywide, only employs one-fifth of the State’s workers. The compensation for this difference is in the additive differences in sector where the City has a smaller percentage of workers than the State, including finance, insurance, and related (a 3.3 percent difference), professional and related (2.8 percent), educational, health, and social services (3.0 percent), and public administration (1.6 percent).

**Table 7: Occupation and Industry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Norwalk#</th>
<th>Norwalk%</th>
<th>Huron%</th>
<th>Ohio%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed civilian population 16 years and over</td>
<td>7,677</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, professional, and related occupations</td>
<td>1,762</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service occupations</td>
<td>1,103</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and office occupations</td>
<td>1,842</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, transportation, &amp; material moving occupations</td>
<td>2,372</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry/Sector</th>
<th>Norwalk#</th>
<th>Norwalk%</th>
<th>Huron%</th>
<th>Ohio%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>2,338</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale trade</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and warehousing, and utilities</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational, health and social services</td>
<td>1,279</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, food serv.</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services (except public administration)</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2000 Census of Population*
Education

Table 8 provides a comparison of the population’s attainment of varying levels of education. Huron County’s level of educational attainment lags somewhat behind the State’s.

Table 8: Educational Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education reached</th>
<th>Number Norwalk</th>
<th>Percent Norwalk</th>
<th>Huron</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 25 years and over</td>
<td>10,234</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th grade to 12th grade, no diploma</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</td>
<td>4,412</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>1,884</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent high school graduate or higher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. 2000 Census of Population

Ohio as a whole has a slightly greater percentage of residents earning Bachelor’s and post-graduate degrees, while the County has a smaller one. While 14.6 percent of the City’s adult population has a college degree, the Ohio percentage is half again higher, at 21.1 percent. Proportions with high school degrees are above 80 percent within the City, County, and State.

Population Mobility

The Census long form asks where respondents lived five years ago, offering a measure of the relative mobility of the population. The following table compares responses between the City, County, and State.

Table 9: Residence in 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population 5 years and over</th>
<th>Number Norwalk</th>
<th>Percent Norwalk</th>
<th>Huron</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived in same house in 1995</td>
<td>7,690</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different house in the U.S. in 1995</td>
<td>7,053</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same County</td>
<td>4,956</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different County</td>
<td>2,097</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same State</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different State</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere in 1995</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. 2000 Census of Population
Norwalk residents appear to be somewhat more mobile as a group than County and State residents as a whole. Nearly half the over-five population (47.1 percent) lived in a different house in 1995, as opposed to 41.4 percent statewide. Most of that group (33.1 percent of the total) lived in Huron County in 1995, indicating that they simply moved to a preferable house or location. This percentage is somewhat higher than the statewide percentage (26.3 percent). Other segments appear to be more similar between the City, County, and State. Among Norwalk’s population, 14 percent lived in a different County in 1995, and 5.2 percent lived in a different State.

Comparisons with Nearby Communities

Table 10, on the following page, presents some comparative statistics for Norwalk and ten nearby communities ranging in population from 6,391 to 24,811. Here is how Norwalk compares with its neighboring cities:

- Norwalk increased in population by 10.2 percent over the decade of the 1990’s. The comparison cities varied from –10.1 percent to +11.8 percent. The average change among all eleven cities was 3.62 percent. Thus, Norwalk can be viewed as having grown at nearly three times the average for this set of communities.

- In terms of percentage, Norwalk had the fourth largest Hispanic population, according to Census figures, and was tied with Tiffin for the fifth largest Black population. Hispanic populations ranged from 12.5 percent in Willard, which is located in close proximity to large agricultural operations using migrant labor, to 0.9 percent in Ashland. Black populations ranged from 18.5 percent in Oberlin to 0.1 percent in Shelby and 0.3 percent in Bellevue.

- Norwalk ranked eighth in the percentage of high school graduates, and sixth in the percentage of college graduates. Three of the cities with a greater percentage of college graduates are, in fact, college towns.

- Norwalk is a relatively dynamic community within this sample, with seven cities having a larger percentage of households that were in the same house in 1995 as they were in 1999. Norwalk had just over half (51.3 percent) in the same home over this time period.

- Norwalk’s commuters were very close to taking the sample’s average time to drive to work: Norwalk’s average was 17.0 minutes, while the mean of all eleven cities was 17.4 minutes, with community averages ranging from 13.8 (Oberlin) to 20.6 (Bellevue).

- Using just a few indicators from the Census, Norwalk could be considered a relatively blue-collar community. Norwalk ranked eighth in the percentage of employees in management, professional, and related positions, but fifth in the proportion of jobs that were in production, transportation, and material handling. Norwalk’s percentage in the first category (23.0 percent) was less than the State total of 31.0 percent, and in the latter category, its percentage (30.9 percent) exceeded the State figure (19.0 percent). Finally, its percentage of employees in the manufacturing sector, at 30.5 percent, ranked
Norwalk fifth among the eleven communities, and exceeded the State percentage (20.0 percent) by over 50 percent.

- Norwalk witnessed a growth in the number of households of 12.1 percent over the 1990’s, ranking it third among the communities in the sample. Norwalk’s growth was nearly four percentage points higher than the sample’s average of 8.2 percent growth.

- Average household size in Norwalk was second only to Willard’s size, pointing toward relatively large household size in Norwalk among similar communities in the region. However, Norwalk’s 2.49 average is identical to the average for the State of Ohio.

- How does Norwalk’s household income stack up compared to nearby communities? The median household income of $37,778 places Norwalk in the middle of the pack among the sample, ranking it fifth of eleven. Similarly, Norwalk ranks sixth in per capita income. Looking at the incidence of poverty, Norwalk’s percentage of families in poverty ranks it seventh among the sample, and in terms of individuals in poverty, Norwalk ranks ninth, pointing toward a relatively low incidence of poverty. Norwalk’s family and individual percentages were lower than the State’s incidence of poverty as well.

- Norwalk’s increase in housing units over the 1990’s, at 11.9 percent, nearly kept up with the 12.1 percent increase in households, and ranked Norwalk fourth among the sample communities, indicating a relatively robust housing market.

- With 61.9 percent of its housing units occupied by their owners, Norwalk ranked seventh. Communities ranged from a high of 73.2 percent owner-occupied in Huron and 70.2 percent in Bellevue, to a low of 50.3 percent in Oberlin and 56.0 percent in Willard. Norwalk’s percentage is substantially lower than the State percentage of 69.1 percent.

- By one indicator, Norwalk’s housing stock is not much older than that for communities as a whole in north-central Ohio. Norwalk’s percentage of units built before 1940, at 30.4 percent, ranked Norwalk seventh. Communities ranged from 47.4 percent in Fremont to 14.2 percent in Huron.

- Owner-occupied units in Norwalk are relatively costly among the sample. Norwalk’s median value of owner-occupied units, at $97,100, ranked it fourth. Median values ranged from $129,800 in Huron, located on Lake Erie, to $72,900 in Fremont, Sandusky County’s County seat. Further, Norwalk’s median rent, at $478, ranked it sixth, in the middle of the pack. Median rents ranged from $519 in Huron to $396 in Shelby.
Table 10: Key Census Indicators for Norwalk and Ten Neighboring Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ashland</th>
<th>Bellevue</th>
<th>Fremont</th>
<th>Huron</th>
<th>Norwalk</th>
<th>Oberlin</th>
<th>Pr.Clinton</th>
<th>Shelby</th>
<th>Tiffin</th>
<th>Willard</th>
<th>Wooster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2000</td>
<td>21,249</td>
<td>8,193</td>
<td>17,375</td>
<td>7,958</td>
<td>16,238</td>
<td>8,195</td>
<td>6,391</td>
<td>9,821</td>
<td>18,135</td>
<td>6,806</td>
<td>24,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 1990</td>
<td>20,079</td>
<td>8,146</td>
<td>17,648</td>
<td>7,030</td>
<td>14,731</td>
<td>8,191</td>
<td>7,106</td>
<td>9,564</td>
<td>18,604</td>
<td>6,210</td>
<td>22,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change 1990-2000</td>
<td>1,170; 5.8%</td>
<td>47; 0.6%</td>
<td>-273; 1.5%</td>
<td>1,507; 10.2%</td>
<td>4; 0.0%</td>
<td>-715; 10.1%</td>
<td>257; 2.7%</td>
<td>-469; 2.5%</td>
<td>596; 9.6%</td>
<td>2,616; 11.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% high school grad</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same home in 1995</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean travel to work</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% mgt prof related</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% prod transp mat'l</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% manufacturing</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Households 2000</td>
<td>8,285</td>
<td>3,315</td>
<td>6,872</td>
<td>3,273</td>
<td>6,349</td>
<td>2,687</td>
<td>2,801</td>
<td>4,060</td>
<td>7,392</td>
<td>2,544</td>
<td>10,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Households 1990</td>
<td>7,632</td>
<td>3,178</td>
<td>6,650</td>
<td>2,820</td>
<td>5,663</td>
<td>2,444</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>3,847</td>
<td>7,009</td>
<td>2,307</td>
<td>8,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change 1990-2000</td>
<td>653; 8.6%</td>
<td>137; 4.3%</td>
<td>222; 3.3%</td>
<td>453;16.1%</td>
<td>686; 12.1%</td>
<td>243; 9.9%</td>
<td>58; -2.0%</td>
<td>213; 5.5%</td>
<td>383; 5.3%</td>
<td>257; 10.3%</td>
<td>1,436; 16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. household size</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med. household inc.</td>
<td>34,250</td>
<td>40,100</td>
<td>34,051</td>
<td>52,289</td>
<td>37,778</td>
<td>41,094</td>
<td>35,564</td>
<td>35,938</td>
<td>33,261</td>
<td>38,922</td>
<td>37,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income</td>
<td>16,760</td>
<td>18,932</td>
<td>16,014</td>
<td>24,942</td>
<td>18,519</td>
<td>20,704</td>
<td>19,177</td>
<td>17,096</td>
<td>16,580</td>
<td>13,942</td>
<td>21,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% family poverty</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% individual poverty</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Housing units 2000</td>
<td>8,864</td>
<td>3,557</td>
<td>7,385</td>
<td>3,818</td>
<td>6,663</td>
<td>2,865</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>4,352</td>
<td>7,868</td>
<td>2,724</td>
<td>10,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Housing units 1990</td>
<td>8,020</td>
<td>3,326</td>
<td>7,001</td>
<td>3,204</td>
<td>5,954</td>
<td>2,580</td>
<td>3,474</td>
<td>4,012</td>
<td>7,461</td>
<td>2,419</td>
<td>9,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change 1990-2000</td>
<td>844; 10.5%</td>
<td>231; 6.9%</td>
<td>384; 5.5%</td>
<td>614;19.2%</td>
<td>709; 11.0%</td>
<td>285; 11.0%</td>
<td>26; 0.7%</td>
<td>340; 8.5%</td>
<td>407; 5.5%</td>
<td>305; 12.6%</td>
<td>1,728; 19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% owner-occupied</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% renter-occupied</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% units built &lt;1940</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med val. owner occ.</td>
<td>88,900</td>
<td>87,100</td>
<td>72,900</td>
<td>129,800</td>
<td>97,100</td>
<td>118,500</td>
<td>91,100</td>
<td>81,300</td>
<td>76,700</td>
<td>75,900</td>
<td>107,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median rent</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 and 1990 Census of Population and Housing
Population Projections

It is important to project a community’s population in order to prepare for the resulting increase in need for services and facilities. As stated previously, population change is the result of a number of factors, including the number of births and deaths, migration into and out of the community, and increases resulting from property annexation. Several existing sources help to develop a reasonable estimate of future population growth in Norwalk.

The Ohio Department of Development projects County-level population in five-year intervals to 2030. The following is the ODOD projection for Huron County:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>59,490</td>
<td>60,830</td>
<td>62,040</td>
<td>62,610</td>
<td>63,430</td>
<td>63,690</td>
<td>64,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Increase</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>330</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% from 2000</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These numbers may seem low, but the methodology used to develop them is fairly sophisticated, and takes into account existing and projected population by age cohort. Analysis also takes into account the County’s historical record and projection of births (which in turn is based on fertility rates by age cohort), deaths, and in- and out-migration. The following is a summary of those historical components of population change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Births</td>
<td>4,493</td>
<td>4,548</td>
<td>4,565</td>
<td>4,480</td>
<td>18,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>2,271</td>
<td>2,449</td>
<td>2,440</td>
<td>2,554</td>
<td>9,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births-deaths</td>
<td>2,222</td>
<td>2,099</td>
<td>2,125</td>
<td>1,926</td>
<td>8,372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>90-91</th>
<th>91-92</th>
<th>92-93</th>
<th>93-94</th>
<th>94-95</th>
<th>95-96</th>
<th>96-97</th>
<th>97-98</th>
<th>98-99</th>
<th>99-00</th>
<th>90-00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>2,809</td>
<td>2,553</td>
<td>2,655</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>3,037</td>
<td>3,017</td>
<td>2,963</td>
<td>2,716</td>
<td>2,822</td>
<td>2,881</td>
<td>28,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outmigration</td>
<td>2,567</td>
<td>2,618</td>
<td>2,669</td>
<td>2,588</td>
<td>2,664</td>
<td>2,649</td>
<td>2,872</td>
<td>2,907</td>
<td>2,946</td>
<td>2,805</td>
<td>27,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net mig.</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>-83</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>-191</td>
<td>-124</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above tables, we can see that over the decade of the 1990’s, births outnumbered deaths by 4,051, and immigration exceeded outmigration by 950, providing for a total net population increase of 5,001.

The Census Bureau has released population estimates by County for July 2004, in which Huron County’s 2004 population is estimated at 60,404. This is very close to a straight-line interpolation of the above 2000 (actually, 1999) and 2005 Census estimates, which would estimate a 2004 population to be 60,606.

A demographic analysis and projection to 2009 has been provided by the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation. That analysis uses the base 2000 Census population total of 16,238 for Norwalk, and offers a 2004 estimate of 16,429 and a 2009 projection of 16,633. The age cohort analysis also indicates a boost in the City’s median age from 34.2 years in 2000 to 34.74 in 2004 and 35.57 in 2009. Comparing this nine-year projection with the County-level projection, with some interpolation, reveals the following:
The Norwalk, Ohio Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 2: Population and Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County projection</td>
<td>+1,340, +2.3%</td>
<td>+2,550, +4.3%</td>
<td>+3,940, +6.6%</td>
<td>+4,530, +7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City projection*</td>
<td>16,477, +1.5%</td>
<td>16,676, +2.7%</td>
<td>16,935, +4.29</td>
<td>17,040, +4.94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The City projection figures were multiplied by 5/4 and 10/9 to make the four-year estimate a five-year one and to make the 9-year projection a ten-year projection. It was found that the rate of increase for the City was approximately 0.65 times the County rate, so this .65 figure was applied to arrive at projections for 2020 and 2030.

The NEDC-provided projections also included the following projections, all of which may have implications regarding the direction of Norwalk’s future growth and markets:

- The Hispanic population was projected to increase from 620 in 2000 to 862 in 2009, an increase of 39 percent over nine years.

- Average household income was projected to increase from $46,907 in 2000 to $52,767 in 2009, median household income from $37,785 to $42,390, and per capita income from $18,570 to $21,234.

- Total population within a five-mile radius of the center of Norwalk was projected to increase from 26,063 in 2002 to 26,807 in 2007, an increase of 744 or 2.9 percent over five years.

- 2000 population within a 5-mile radius of the center of Norwalk was estimated to be 25,653 in 2000; within a fifteen-mile radius, it was 116,937, and within thirty miles, it became 478,164. These areas were projected at 26,121, 117,502, and 478,402, respectively, in 2009.
Community Character

Goals:

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.

Introduction:

Community character is the sum of all the attributes and assets that make a community unique, and that establish a sense of place for its residents. While some traits, such as “good work ethic”, are intangibles, others, such as an attractive central business district, are very visible.

To determine those attributes that contribute most to a community’s character, it is important to listen to the residents and members of the community, to hear what is most important to them. The planning team did this during the October 2004 Community Forums, and again in early 2005 during a series of focus groups. Here is a representative list of those attributes that the team heard most, and that make up the perceived character of Norwalk:

- Citizen involvement and volunteerism
- A family-friendly community with a “small town atmosphere”
- Historical attributes, including downtown and West Main Street
• Business involvement, a diverse business base, and an active Chamber of Commerce
• Importance of being a County seat, and a central location
• Diversity of housing stock; well-kept homes
• Solid and progressive institutions: schools, library, churches, hospital, Performing Arts Center and downtown theater, senior services, parks and recreation center

Forum participants were also asked to offer their vision for the future of Norwalk. Responses that related most to community character included these:

• Maintaining Norwalk’s small town atmosphere while allowing for desired growth
• Preserving Norwalk’s historic districts, neighborhoods, and buildings, especially on West Main Street and downtown, but reaching out to other areas such as properties on Benedict Avenue
• Maintaining Norwalk’s strong interfaith community
• Keeping Norwalk a safe town
• Preserving the positive attitude of residents, and retaining younger residents and graduates with attractive career and lifestyle (recreation, housing) choices
• Maintaining Norwalk’s labor force and their work ethic
• Making Norwalk a welcoming place for new residents and businesses

Finally, forum participants were asked to complete a survey form. Two questions related most directly to working toward a definition of community character. The first question was: “What basic belief or value do you hold as most important for the City of Norwalk”? The most frequent responses were:

• Small town atmosphere
• Safety
• Historic value
• Wholesome community to raise families; small town, family values
• Growth without sprawl; encourage structured growth
• Mix of urban and rural in a small town atmosphere
• People caring about one another
• Friendly to all ages: children, keeping young adults, seniors
• Retention of youth after college
• “Bring good jobs to this great work force”

The other pertinent question asked for a listing of the City’s most valuable assets or positive features, and respondents most frequently gave the following responses:

• History/historic district/need to preserve/strong heritage/architecture
• Small town atmosphere
• Community spirit/dedicated citizens/sense of community and concern
• Close-knit community and neighborhoods
• The people of the community
• Quaintness/appearance/beauty/cleanliness
• Norwalk’s downtown
• Schools and education systems
• Park and recreation department/parks/reservoir/Ernsthauen Recreation Center
• Hospital and health care system
• Its location/proximity to larger cities
• Safety
• Leadership, involvement, team spirit, community working together/service organizations
• Beautiful trees and natural features
• Churches
• Performing Arts Center

Norwalk’s Mayor has been quoted to say that the City’s “focus is to maintain the heritage of the small town atmosphere we love while inviting and embracing growth.” This concisely summarizes the input gathered from the public.

Community Character Shaped by History

![Depiction of an aerial view of Norwalk from the south, in the late nineteenth century.](image)

It is clear from the preceding summary of public input that Norwalk’s history and its preserved historic buildings and other features are vitally important components in making up the community’s character and “sense of place”. Obviously, Norwalk owes much of what it is today to historical patterns of physical and cultural development. Norwalk indeed
has a rich history, and several trends should be noted in order to understand the Norwalk of today. Some of those trends and attributes include:

- Architectural diversity, as amply demonstrated by the housing lining the West Main Street historic district, but also by other housing throughout the City.
- Close ties to the automotive sector, reaching back to the Fisher Brothers and their Fisher Carriage Company founded in 1880, and the introduction of the Auto-Bug and Norwalk Motor Car Company in 1909-1910. Continued linkage with automobiles with the presence of a number of auto supplier industries, corporate office of the International Hot Road Association, and continued growth of Norwalk Raceway Park.
- Close ties to transportation, impacted by such factors as the Milan Canal, railroad activity including the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad existing from 1880 to the present, interurban electric rail systems including Norwalk’s “Dinky”, and the Norwalk Truck Line, once the largest independently owned trucking company in the world.
- Diversity in Norwalk’s manufactured goods, ranging from sewing machines and organs and pianos to furniture.
- Newer ties to the highway construction industry, initiated through the formation of the A.J. Baltes Company, and with numerous spin-off and related businesses thriving today.
- A history of innovation and entrepreneurship, through the successful development of dozens of locally owned and operated businesses in all sectors.
- A history of civic involvement and philanthropy, perhaps best exemplified by the legacy of the Norwalk Truck Lines and its founding Ernsthausen family, which has supported such major assets as the Ernsthausen Recreation Center, a year round aquatic and recreational community center, and the state of the art Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center located within Norwalk High School.

**How Norwalk Appears to Others: Gateways, Corridors, Focal Points, Landmarks, and Other Indicators**

Planners speak of certain physical elements and attributes that help define the character of a community by their mere presence and visibility. Among these are:

- Gateways, or the intersection of a major corridor with the City’s edge that serves as the City’s front door and provides a first impression.
- Corridors, or high profile, high traffic roadways where large numbers of residents and visitors are exposed to an image of the community through the built environment.
- Focal Points and Activity Centers, or those locations within the City that are defined by a large amount of activity and that serve as major points of communal exchange.
- Landmarks may be one of the above focal points, but they also serve as site-specific reference points for the community, promoting an image reflecting the community at large. A landmark creates a specific image for the community.
- The urban edge, where the City’s built environment meets undeveloped land.
- Civic or public space, such as parks and common public areas in a City’s downtown.

All of these attributes should be considered to determine what image is being projected about the City and its character.
Gateways

Norwalk is approached by a number of State and Federal highways. The most notable is U.S. Route 250, which bisects the City from the north and south. Among other highways, U.S. 250 carries tourist traffic from central Ohio to an expanding number of Sandusky area and Lake Erie tourist destinations.

The Ohio Department of Transportation’s 2002 traffic counts noted a daily count of 14,230 vehicles (13,170 being passenger or small commercial) crossing the northern Norwalk corporation limit on U.S. 250, and 11,120 (10,470 passenger and small commercial) at the southeast City limits. The approaches to Norwalk along this highway are major gateways, and their surrounding land uses leave differing impressions. While the southern boundary is defined by a bypassing highway (U.S. 20 and SR 18), the impressive Fisher-Titus Medical Center campus, and larger, older housing, the northern boundary is followed by a large stretch of auto centric business franchises flanking the highway. From the south, Norwalk emerges from the farmlands that dot most of central Huron County. From the north, there is little transition from Milan to Norwalk, aside from a bridge crossing Rattlesnake Creek.

Because U.S. Route 20 bypasses Norwalk to the south, through traffic has little connectivity with the City, aside from glimpses of the new institutional developments south of Shady Lane and Norwalk’s more southerly residential subdivisions. Besides U.S. 250, the most significant gateways are these:

SR 61, including exit from U.S. 20, at Norwalk’s southwest corporate limit, climbs a slow rise, then becoming West Main Street. Like U.S. 250 south, this gateway presents a quick transition from farmland and low-density land use to a residential corridor and the sprawling Sycamore Hills subdivision to the south. ODOT recorded 6,150 daily vehicles on this section of SR 61 (5,870 being passenger or light commercial).

Similarly, SR 61 from the east transitions from farmland and low density (but growing) residential to the East Main Street residential corridor. Some 4,910 vehicles were recorded daily on SR 61 at the northeast Norwalk limit.

Business Routes 18 and 20 both enter Norwalk from the east, with the notable gateway being where they intersect the Route 20/18 bypass. In both cases, there is a notable change in land use from agricultural,
low density residential, and occasional small business use to significantly more intensive land uses. Along SR 18 (Akron Road), the bypass is first followed by the set back Norwalk Furniture manufacturing facility; on U.S. 20 (Cleveland Road), one notices the modern David Price Metals and Maple City Ice facilities, as well as higher density condominiums to the south.

The following photographs present examples of the types of signage and landscaping that can be utilized to present a positive “first impression” and identity for the community.

**Corridors**

Corridors can often help define a City and provide clues to its character. Norwalk’s notable corridors present a study in contrasts. Perhaps its most celebrated corridor is the West Main Street historic residential district, which features one of Ohio’s most eclectic collections of historically significant architectural styles. This district is featured annually with walking tours sponsored by the local Firelands Historic Council, and it is mentioned frequently when residents are asked to name the community’s architectural assets. To a lesser but important extent, East Main Street and Benedict Avenue as well present well-traveled corridors with a variety of notable residential architecture.

A second corridor, which does not set Norwalk significantly apart from other communities, is the Route 250 North commercial corridor that extends from Williams Street, adjacent to the County Administration Building, northerly to the City corporate limits. Nearly all frontage along this corridor is built out, with some property along the northern portion of the corridor having some potential for a change of land use as its location becomes increasingly attractive. In terms of sales and customer visits, this corridor has become the commercial center of Norwalk, with a mix of sit down and fast food restaurants, hotels, big box retailers (including a newly expanded Super Wal-Mart), and other retail and service establishments that are either free-standing or situated within small strip plazas. This is the ubiquitous commercial growth corridor that has emerged within nearly every City of Norwalk’s size over the past two decades. While it may leave the motorist with a message of convenience, prosperity, and disposable income within the Norwalk market area, it lacks any
uniformity or evidence of planning or aesthetic consideration. Opportunity exists to create such a vision.

A very similar corridor exists in Seymour, Indiana, along a stretch of arterial roadway known as “the Mayonnaise Mile”. The photo to the left depicts the unplanned corridor as it existed previously, and the right photo shows how the visual impact of the corridor was enhanced through new roadway treatment, removal of overhead wires, installation of sidewalks for pedestrian access and safety, and signage regulations.

Norwalk is fortunate to have a well-maintained and revitalized central business district, and the downtown corridor defined by East and West Main Street extending from Milan/Woodlawn to Church Street is a vital component in anyone’s imagery of the City. Unlike the 250 North corridor, careful planning has yielded a sense of place and uniformity in the downtown, assisted greatly by the streetscaping project completed in the mid 1990s. While Norwalk’s downtown has lost much commercial activity to 250 North, it continues to house a number of niche commercial, restaurant/entertainment, office and service, and governmental entities, with the most identifiable “anchor” being the County Courthouse located at the “zero intersection” at Main and Benedict. Other highly significant features mentioned repeatedly in community forums and focus groups include the St. Paul church and school complex, other downtown churches, Towne and Country Theater, the Main Street School (formerly Norwalk High School) and the Norwalk Public Library.

A fourth corridor worth mention, characterized by an entirely different set of land uses, has emerged over the past ten to fifteen years. This is Shady Lane Drive, a relatively new connector roadway along Norwalk’s south side, linking two major arterial roads, Benedict and Norwood Avenues. No assessment of Norwalk’s viability and commitment to civic betterment is complete without a drive along Shady Lane Drive. In the course of less than a mile, the driver will see a newly expanded church housing its own school; the newly expanded Fisher-Titus Medical Center campus with its new signature Patient Pavilion tower, outlying ring road, and satellite medical offices; the Gerken Center, an active child day care center designed to serve all child day care needs; the Carriage House, an elderly housing facility providing for independent living; the historic civic structures along an older and tree-lined section of Shady Lane, housing Norwalk’s Services for Aging facility and governmental offices; a public park area with an exercise trail and an impressive and inspiring memorial to the County’s war veterans; the modern home of the Huron County Department of Job and
Family Services; the offices of the County Sheriff, adjoining County jail, and County emergency management office; and the newly completed Norwalk High School with its prominently situated Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center and adjoining sports fields. Nearby vacant or cultivated land south of Shady Lane Drive offers a hint that the potential for future development is great.

**Focal Points and Activity Centers**

Several locations within Norwalk generate significant activity and potential for personal interaction. These are highly important locations that will continue to help shape and define Norwalk’s community character. They include the following:

- **The central business district, “Main Street Norwalk”**: The function of downtown Norwalk is evolving from the days when it was reached by three interurban rail lines and housed the Glass Block, arguably “the most complete department store in Ohio”. But while its retail businesses progressively court niche markets rather than the general public, it also retains its importance as a County center of government, financial institutions, insurance and legal services, and dining and entertainment. An active Main Street Norwalk organization, applying the nationally recognized Main Street principles and practices, is working to develop activities and events, as well as incentives for building and business owners, to increase downtown activity. County government is a major downtown employer, and other attractors include the Public Library, Towne and Country Theater, City offices in City Hall and the Municipal Court, Berry’s Restaurant and other eateries, and more recently, Sheri’s Coffee House (which attracts clients including a significant youth segment with live entertainment, meeting facilities, and Internet access).

- **The U.S. 250 North corridor** attracts considerable retail activity, with such destinations as an expanded Wal-Mart that is purportedly one of the largest in Ohio. The mix of retail, restaurant, and service centers draws considerable activity, and this trend is continuing with the recent development of such additional attractors as a cinema, housing, restaurant, and other mixed uses within the Norwalk Commons development.

- **Norwalk’s school facilities** (both the Norwalk Catholic Schools and Norwalk City Schools) generate significant activity and, as is common in rural communities, act as community and neighborhood centers in sponsoring school plays, concerts, sports events, “fun fairs”, and other activities that draw students, families, neighbors, and others. Within these school systems, major activity centers include Whitney Field (the shared football and track facility), the Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center co-located at Norwalk High School, and the St. Paul Convocation Center.

- **The Ernsthausen Recreation Center** is a major activity center drawing those with memberships as well as one-time users with daily passes. With such features as an indoor walking track and both indoor and outdoor pools, this center has seen increased activity over time.
Other activity centers linked to Norwalk’s park system include Bill Baines Park to the north, which is home to a very active organized softball program, and the Memorial Lake reservoir park, which draws somewhat regionally as an attractive place to fish, picnic, hold gatherings, hike, and enjoy an attractive setting.

Fisher-Titus Medical Center has grown as a regional medical center, and this trend is expected to continue beyond the major expansion whose second phase is now being completed, as additional new technologies and medical specialists are added. With some 850 employees, Fisher-Titus is also Norwalk’s largest employer.

Other major employers that are generating significant activity include Norwalk Furniture Corporation, Mayflower Vehicle Systems, New Horizons Baking Co., Maple City Rubber Co., and the numerous occupants of the Firelands Industrial Park straddling the northern extension of Republic Street (Janesville-Sackner, American Coating Specialists, and EPIC Technologies, among others).

In terms of recreational activity, the importance of Norwalk Raceway Park cannot be overlooked as a generator of activity for tens of thousands of drag racing fans over the course of its racing season. For several extended weekends each summer, NRP serves as the City’s primary attractor of people from outside the Norwalk area, helping fill hotels and restaurants. The existence of NRP and its annual promotion of the “Thunder in the Streets” event in downtown Norwalk, as well as the corporate offices of the International Hot Rod Association in Norwalk, contribute to the image of Norwalk as a center for motor sports, linking at least psychologically with its status as a location for a number of automotive parts suppliers.
Landmarks

What specific images come to mind when residents are asked to identify prominent Norwalk landmarks? The following are suggested landmarks with which residents may feel the strongest attachment, for a variety of reasons:

- The Huron County Courthouse, a prominent feature within the downtown streetscape;
- The Norwalk Public Library, a prime example of Midwestern Carnegie libraries.
- Norwalk and St. Paul High Schools, and for many nostalgic alumni, the former Norwalk High School, now serving fifth and sixth graders as the Main Street School.
- Fisher-Titus Medical Center
- Norwalk Raceway Park
- The West Main Street historical residential district

Norwalk’s Urban Edge

In the minds of residents, Norwalk’s current boundary to the east and south can well be defined by the U.S. Route 20 bypass. For the most part, urban land uses, including some of Norwalk’s newest residential subdivisions, exist “inside” the bypass, and a rural, agricultural, and low-density residential use of land defines most of the property “outside” the bypass.

The urban edge is less well defined to the north, where commercial uses have extended to the northern border of the City, stopping only at the physical boundary posed by the Rattlesnake Creek corridor. It is expected that the urban edge will continue to push to the north, northwest, and somewhat northeast, as agricultural and vacant land is converted over time to a variety of uses. This expectation is based in part upon the recent development of condominium and single family housing along Westwind Drive.
Civic and Public Space

Norwalk is well endowed with a variety of public spaces. These vary from the “pocket parks” (such as Bresson and Pohl Parks) in downtown Norwalk, to the vast acreage of Memorial Lake Park.

Norwalk benefits from a good mix of public spaces. While the downtown area does not have a notable public “square”, the courthouse setback provides some public space, and two small pocket parks, Bresson and Pohl, provide a break between buildings. The entire central business district is a well-used public space, with the addition of attractive lighting and street furniture added during the 1990’s. The downtown performs a number of typical civic functions, including housing a number of County offices, City Hall, the post office, and the public library. Other civic and governmental functions are based along Shady Lane, and at the County Administration Building on Milan Avenue on Norwalk’s north side.

A number of neighborhood parks are interspersed within the City’s neighborhoods, some of which (Stoutenburg on Norwood Ave., Elm Street, Pleasant Street) are highly visible from well-traveled arterial or connector routes. As the City has grown, relative ease of accessibility to these parks varies by neighborhood. Memorial Lake Park offers an opportunity to enjoy a large park setting with intact natural features, including boat and fishing access to the three reservoirs and wooded walking trails. Also nearby, Huron County maintains a small wooded “nature lab” with a loop trail on South Norwalk Road.

In addition to the City’s park system, civic space exists along Shady Lane, with a variety of public use buildings, and with the prominent location of County parkland and the veterans’ memorial.
Strategies and Recommendations

Strategies linked to community character seek to preserve and strengthen those attributes that have been identified as of most critical importance in maintaining Norwalk’s sense of place and identity.

Strategy 1. Preserve and market Norwalk’s central business district, West Main Street district, and other historic neighborhoods that project a unique and positive image.

1. Investigate the relative benefit of transforming Norwalk’s Architectural Review Board into a Norwalk Historic District Commission, charged with promoting Citywide preservation and beautification, and enhancing the City’s historic tradition. This review board enforces the architectural standards set forth by City legislation, on a case-by-case basis. Its purpose will be best served by providing guidance prior to and during any proposed project involving alteration of historic properties, rather than as a policing entity after alterations have been made. This Board can also serve a positive purpose by recognizing and rewarding outstanding public and private beautification efforts. Although the Architectural Review Board already has a roster of contributing members, future members may be selected from the City administration or legislature, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Firelands Museum and Historical Society, as well as involving others with historical, architectural, or other community expertise. Develop new structure, goals, and procedures, by 2009.

2. Review and revise Norwalk’s Architectural Review Guidelines by researching the feasibility of, and then (if feasible) developing a Historic Area and Building Ordinance that ensures the preservation and enhancement of designated historic areas and properties. This ordinance should cover renovation and construction of buildings, signage, and parking restrictions in historically sensitive areas. Wherever possible, such an ordinance should provide incentives for preservation, rather than prohibitive regulations and penalties. Developing such an ordinance and making it effective will take considerable time and discussion, in order to balance preservation and development forces to reflect Norwalk’s true character and commitment to preservation, while maintaining a close watch over the historic integrity of historic properties and areas. Many of the relevant issues, such as the boundaries of a downtown historic district, and the degree to which development should be restricted, are unresolved, and will require further study before a revision to the Guidelines is finalized. Involve the Architectural Review Board and City administration, Main Street Norwalk, and the Chamber, and possibly additional interested parties. Put in place by 2009.

3. Continue to increase the number of historic property designations within the City, with consistent application of criteria for designation, with special consideration to expansion
of historic areas to include significant properties along major corridors. These areas may include East Main Street from the central business district to Old State Road, West Main Street extended to the western City limits, Benedict Avenue from the central business district to Executive Drive, and Whittlesey Avenue north to League Street. Initiate within one year (by 2008) and ongoing. Involve Main Street Norwalk, Historical Society, and City administration.

4. Increase public awareness of historic preservation through special programs of education. Develop annual beautification and preservation awards to recognize projects and properties that have contributed to the City’s overall image of preservation. Publicize these awards, which can be given at a public function such as the annual Chamber dinner. Local and area newspapers and other media (radio, public access cable) can recognize and publicize these and other preservation efforts. Initiate within two years (by 2009); present awards annually thereafter.

5. Establish more formalized partnerships with business and community organizations that support preservation efforts, such as the Firelands Museum and the Firelands Historical Society, and area and State historical preservation commissions. This is a continuous activity.

6. Ensure that policies and decisions on community growth and development respect the City’s historical heritage and enhance overall community viability. This will be a responsibility of the Planning Commission, as well as other decision makers and entities, and is an ongoing activity.

7. Preservation and recognition of visible signs of Norwalk’s heritage should occur on several fronts. First, historic preservation and heritage awareness should become a large component of any tourism effort maintained by the Chamber, Main Street Norwalk, or any future entity focused on tourism. Ensure that historic properties and attributes are featured prominently in any tourism-related publications. Similarly, the City of Norwalk’s website should promote historic Main Street Norwalk and its historic housing stock, as well as major local industries and area attractions. At Norwalk’s gateways, attractive and highly visible City Limits signs of professional quality should promote Norwalk’s historic heritage and traditions. These elements should be in place within one year (2008), with the tourism focus in place as a priority by 2009.

8. Encourage expansion and use of the Firelands Museum and the Laning Research Center. This facility, the oldest continuously operating museum in Ohio, has fallen prey to national trends of diminished museum patronage. Undertake efforts to market the museum and link it to the overall interest among City residents in Norwalk’s historic preservation. Bring the museum – and its contents – to greater public awareness by using volunteered storefronts as displays of artifacts. Continue the practice of encouraging and facilitating programs that expose and educate children at the museum. The adjacent properties of the Laning Research Center, Firelands Museum, and Norwalk Public Library collectively offer the potential of a significant research “complex”. This can be an ongoing activity involving the mentioned facilities and their organizations.
9. Focus on specific historic properties through the increased planning of “old house tours” and inclusion of video tours on public access television. Implement within two years (by 2009).

Strategy 2: **Support and strengthen Norwalk’s program to welcome and “network” new residents and community members**

1. Fisher-Titus Medical Center has initiated a new program based on a “Welcome Wagon” model, to welcome new families to Norwalk, provide important community information, and allow for interaction with others through planned activities. Other entities, including the City administration, local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, local churches, and Main Street Norwalk, should work to maintain and develop this program. It is likely that such a program will require dedicated staff time, possibly provided by an existing FTMC or Chamber employee, but efforts should be made to compensate that employee for project time, and to train him or her about community information, event planning, and network development. Incorporate a method to include information about local businesses and industries as well as public services, entertainment and recreation venues, and local churches. For this reason, Chamber involvement is important. This program is already in place and its growth will take place on an ongoing basis.

Strategy 3: **Further establish a one-stop “Welcome Center” at the Chamber of Commerce office**

1. Norwalk’s Chamber of Commerce already has welcome packets, and many visitors call on the Chamber to gather information about the community, its businesses, and its amenities. The Chamber’s office is centrally located downtown, and highly visible from the main intersection of Benedict/Whittlesey and Main Streets. This office also houses the United Fund, Norwalk Economic Development Corporation, the Main Street Norwalk program, and Norwalk Community Development Corporation, and thus is truly a “one stop shop” providing information on Norwalk businesses and services. It is logical to further publicize the Chamber office as a “Welcome Center” offering enhanced information packets with pertinent information in folders for new and prospective residents. Such detailed information as refuse pickup schedules, water rates and billing, school locations, hospital and medical services, local utility billing procedures, current information on local churches and their facilities and programs, and a map of the City should be included. The importance of historical properties and amenities can be reinforced through their representation in the information packets. More detailed information on each topic could also be available with separate and more detailed information for those who are particularly interested. Volunteers could be solicited to assist in this activity. Enhanced information should be developed and available within a year (2008), then updated annually.
Strategy 4: Update the City’s website and maintain the network of linked websites to reflect the City’s character, cherished attributes, and commitment to balancing growth with preservation.

1. People, households, and businesses that are considering Norwalk for a new location increasingly use the Internet to learn about their prospective new home. It is important for Norwalk’s website, or several closely linked websites, to reflect the positive character and attributes of the community, as well as presenting the salient facts sought by the web surfer. Web sites should never be considered as static, completed products, but should rather be treated as dynamic sites in need of frequent updating. If one site must necessarily be maintained without such change, provision should be made for an alternative, but well linked, site that can be modified to reflect seasonal changes, coming events, and recent accomplishments. As an example of a dynamic website, a web cam could be focused on an important new civic building under construction to graphically document progress. The City should provide codified ordinances over the website, as well as such important documents as this Comprehensive Plan.

Information should be gathered from such important sources as the school systems, hospital, City Hall and County government, utility providers, churches, and media. Care should be taken to provide some continuity between linked sites through a shared logo or header.

The City’s schools and the computer knowledge held by their students should be tapped to develop websites and update information. This could be framed as a Civics project, enabling the City to reduce web development and maintenance costs while giving the students insight into the functions of local government and civic organizations. Further, the services of the schools and their computer students on the website is one more positive aspect of community coordination to promote!

It is suggested that the following sites, minimally, be closely linked and interrelated: City of Norwalk, Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk Economic Development Corporation, Huron County, Norwalk City Schools, Norwalk Catholic Schools, Fisher-Titus Medical Center, Huron County government.

Interlinked websites involving the above entities and the use of high school students should implemented within two years (2009), and updated continuously.

Strategy 5: Maintain Norwalk’s senior services

1. Develop an inventory of all services and facilities focusing on the area’s elderly population. Include information that promotes Norwalk as an attractive location for seniors. This information may include data on low-maintenance housing and condominium developments, distance to shopping and services, and availability of entertainment and health services, all of which make Norwalk a prime location for comfortable “aging in place”. Publish as a user-friendly directory. Make sure the information is available in the Welcome Center at the Chamber of Commerce office, and that it is displayed on the Norwalk website, with links to senior-specific websites. Include Senior Services events on the community calendar portion of the website.
Extend invitations for seniors to volunteer at the welcome center. This should be initiated within one year. See the Community Services chapter for more recommendations linked to senior services.

2. Include Senior representation in making recommendations for future programs in the City. Include seniors on City boards or resource panels. This activity should be ongoing.

3. Consistently consider the needs and wants of the growing elderly segment of Norwalk’s population, but be mindful of the diversity and varied interests within that 60+ segment. For example, recreation programming should include passive activities and facilities such as walking or biking trails, and intergenerational activities that encourage socialization. The timeframe is ongoing.

Strategy 6: Visible public support of Norwalk’s public service programs

1. The community continues to have distinct groups of citizens whose special needs must be addressed to support them in a satisfactory lifestyle. Continue to give support and assistance to such entities as service clubs, clothing and food banks, and several senior citizens’ services. Information is available on an information and referral basis through the United Fund office, which can also be a part of the one-stop Welcome Center co-located at the Chamber office, and on the linked network of web sites. Service clubs should be kept aware of support groups in need of physical and financial assistance.

   The City government can continue to show support for these efforts by providing resolutions of support and other public announcements. Officials should also continue to research and apply for project funding through governmental and foundation grants. Service agencies and their mission and work could also be profiled by local media. These action steps can be taken over the next year.

2. Ensure that service facilities are located at sites that are compatible with adjacent uses, and that are easily accessible by their participants. For example, Norwalk’s clothing bank is not currently in an optimal location, but alternative sites are limited by rent budgets. A community-wide effort should be enlisted to maximize the outside (grant, in-kind, fundraising) resources that can be dedicated to such projects as a newly located or co-located (with a compatible or complementary service) clothing bank. The timeframe for this activity is ongoing.

See the Community Services chapter for more information. Also, the previous discussion concerning corridors and gateways, while related to community character, is addressed in terms of recommendations in the Transportation chapter of this document. Many of the landmark buildings are further addressed in the Community Facilities chapter.
Natural Resources

Goals:

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.

Introduction:

A community’s natural resources and features are among its most valuable assets. It is important for comprehensive planning to balance planned future development with the preservation of those resources that are valued. While some resources are treasured for their aesthetic beauty, others, such as the supply of drinking water, are important for their contribution to community health and well-being.

During the community forums and focus groups, residents expressed an interest in the preservation of a number of natural resources. Among their comments were the following:

- Additional green space is necessary; green spaces in all developments
- Green space is an important part of small town atmosphere. People look for and expect it. But it is hard to set aside land in a subdivision. It drives up costs per usable acre. Need to use some ratio of land, expecting more for larger subdivisions
- Continuity of greenery; green space in downtown area; greenscaping of Whittlesey Avenue from City Hall to League
- Tree replacement-keep trees; plant additional maple trees; plant trees along U.S. 250 North
- Develop Norwalk Creek as a riverwalk; clean up Norwalk Creek
The following narrative describes the physical, natural, and environmental attributes of the City of Norwalk that must be considered within the framework of a comprehensive plan. In some cases, these attributes represent positive aspects of the community that should be preserved for aesthetic value. In other cases, they present barriers to development and construction (such as wetlands, flood plains, or poorly drained soils) that should be heeded.

**Flood Plains**

Norwalk Creek and adjacent lands present the only areas of 100-year flooding in Norwalk (designated “Zone A”). Portions of the creek consist of areas between the limits of a 100-year flood and a 500-year flood or areas subject to 100-year flooding with average depths of less than one foot or where the contributing drainage area is less than one square mile (designated “Zone B”). This flood zone corridor extends for virtually the entire length of the City, east to west, from the spillway of the Memorial Reservoir to its farthest point downstream, west of the Sycamore Hills subdivision. Norwalk Creek flooded significantly on July 4, 1969, after a large rainfall caused a breach of the Memorial Reservoir. Today, the creek provides a number of public viewing opportunities, specifically at Bremser Park on Elm Street and at the Jaycees Park and adjacent sledding hill (“Hogan’s Hill”) on Pleasant Street. The demarked flood plain along this riparian corridor ranges from approximately 200 to 800 feet in width.

Another “Zone B” exists just inside City limits, north of Washington Street and just east of its intersection with State Street, and extending northwesterly along a corridor parallel to and approximately 700 feet west of Whittlesey Avenue. Areas of minimal flooding (“Zone C”) are noted in several areas within Norwalk: north of the Upper Reservoir in the vicinity of the W&LE railroad tracks; south of Christie Avenue in the vicinity of the high school soccer field; in the westernmost portion of the City north of U.S. 20 (in the vicinity of the Big Lots store); and just west of Cline Street between Glover Avenue (to the north) and Fruen Street (to the south).

**Wetlands**

The National Wetlands Inventory of the United States Department of the Interior has identified a number of wetlands within Norwalk, mainly around the relatively undeveloped periphery of the City. They are located, in general, to the west along the eastern Huron River branch, along Norwalk Creek from the reservoir to Elm Street, and within the Norwalk reservoir system itself. None of these wetlands pose any restriction on development, as they are located...
in areas that are primarily not capable of or likely to be planned for development.

Soils

Norwalk, like most of Huron County, is on till plains, located in the Central Lowland Physiographic Province, which includes most of the glaciated parts of Ohio. Several glaciers formerly covered Huron County, including the Late Wisconsinan Glacier, which occurred 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. Late Wisconsinan drift covered all the material deposited by previous glaciers, underlain by shale and sandstone. Most of the till plains, including most of Norwalk, are nearly level to gently rolling, and some areas along streams are steeper. Glacial deposits range from less than two feet to more than 150 feet in thickness. Available water supplies occur as reservoirs in coarse grained lenses and stratified layers of sand and gravel.

Norwalk is located at the intersection of three major soil groups that are typical of deep and moderately deep soils of upland till plains and lake plains. These groups include the Bennington-Cardington-Condit association in the southwest portion of the City; the Kibbie-Tuscola association in the eastern portion; and the Chili-Oshtempo-Haskins association to the north.

Predominant soil types in Norwalk and its potential growth areas are listed below. Although many of the general soil types found in Norwalk exhibit “severe constraints” to development, that fact alone does not necessarily preclude such development. Often, mitigating steps such as soil stabilization or drainage must be taken to develop the property safely.

BgA: Bennington; vicinity of fairgrounds, airport, and Norwalk Raceway Park; severe limitations to construction due to wetness.

Cm: Colwood; western edge of Norwalk; severe limitations to construction due to ponding.

CoB: Condit; south of Norwalk, severe limitations to construction due to ponding.

HkA: Haskins; along Route 20 east of the airport; severe limitations due to wetness.

JtA: Jimtown; south side of developed Norwalk, along Benedict Avenue; severe limitations due to wetness.

KbA: Kibbie; north of Norwalk in likely growth areas; severe limitations due to wetness.

OsB: Oshtempo; east side of developed Norwalk; slight limitations to construction.

TuA and TuB: Tuscola; north side of Norwalk and its east side along routes 18 and 20; severe limitations for excavations and dwellings with basements due to wetness; moderate limitations for dwellings without basements and commercial buildings; wetness and shrink-swell characteristics.
Views/Viewsheds

Because of its level to gently rolling topography, Norwalk does not lend itself to a large number of views and vistas that need to be preserved. The best such views occur primarily along the Norwalk Creek, as one encounters it, and in the preserved scenery of the sprawling Norwalk Memorial Reservoir and park. Care should be taken to protect the existing views of the creek and its surrounding vegetation, and of other attractive natural areas, from inappropriate development.

Tree Canopy/Urban Forestry

Norwalk is known as “The Maple City”, and for good reason, beginning with founder Platt Benedict planting maple trees along Main Street in 1830. The predominance of mature trees lining Norwalk’s streets and thoroughfares contributes to the overall attraction of the community. Norwalk has an active Tree Board that determines which trees pose dangers and require trimming or removal. At the property owner’s request, trees on City property (tree lawns) can be planted with one of several selected species.

The Park and Recreation Department has initiated a successful program where community members can contribute to the planting of trees in parks and public places to commemorate a loved one. This program has proven successful. It is expected that Norwalk’s tree programs, and its status as a “Tree City USA”, will continue.

Balance Between Development and Protection of the Environment

Participants in the community forums, focus groups, and resource panels repeatedly cited the need to preserve Norwalk’s natural resources that contribute to the small town feel of the community. This includes a need for preservation and, in growth areas, the set-aside of open space and green space. Elsewhere in this plan, methods by which new subdivisions and property owners can contribute to open space are discussed. It is also suggested that developers consider, and the City provide incentives for, methods of development that can lead to designated common space within those developments, achieved through clustering of housing units and other methods of “conservation design”.

The main principles of conservation design consist of: flexibility in site design and lot size; protection and management of natural areas; reduction of impervious surface areas; and sustainable storm water management. Efficient use of conservation design principles can produce significant reductions in construction and infrastructure costs, reduction in the costs
of municipal storm water management, and the creation of connections to existing natural areas, open space, greenways, and trails. Culturally significant properties that should be preserved can be included side by side with those natural areas to be preserved when undertaking conservation design practices. Conservation subdivision design can be employed by following a process that includes identification of significant resources existing on a proposed development site, identifying potential development areas (the “building envelope”) and locating housing sites within the development envelopes, designing a street and trail network to link the homes, and adding lot lines, ensuring that each lot meets minimum lot requirements, but allowing for reduction of standards (such as smaller setbacks) for lots. House lots can be enhanced by designing direct views and access to open space within the subdivision.

Conservation developments usually cluster smaller lots on a tract of land, instead of distributing them over the entire acreage in a traditional style. With smaller lots, these higher-density residential developments tend to be more cost-effective to construct and serve with the necessary infrastructure. Norwalk’s subdivision review process allows for the conception of such a Planned Unit Development. However, the evolution and success of such a design in Norwalk will be dependent largely upon a determination that a significant market exists that will prefer higher density, smaller lots, but access and proximity to open space. Evidence exists in planning literature that buyers appreciate the value of a smaller lot with nearby permanently protected open space.

**Norwalk’s Park System**

The City of Norwalk has developed a Citywide park system that offers a variety of park settings and facilities. This system provides a park within walking distance of much of the City, although some of the newer, peripheral subdivisions are farther removed from the park locations. This challenge will be intensified as the City grows and additional housing is constructed. Existing parks include the following, listed by classification:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Park</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini Park</td>
<td>Bresson</td>
<td>W. Main St.</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>Benches, fountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-Park</td>
<td>Pohl</td>
<td>E. Main St.</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>Benches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-Park</td>
<td>Workers’ Memorial</td>
<td>League St.</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>Benches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Bremer</td>
<td>E. Elm St.</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Ballfield, playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Mead Park</td>
<td>Huron St.</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>Playground, ball field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Stokely</td>
<td>Northwest St.</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>Playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Stoutenberg</td>
<td>Norwood Ave.</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>Playground, basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Baines</td>
<td>Plank Rd.</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>Ballfields, shelter, concessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Bishman</td>
<td>Republic St.</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>Ballfield, playground, shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Jaycees/Hogan’s</td>
<td>Elm/Pleasant</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>Tennis, playground, shelter, sledding hill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adding the reported acreage, the City has about a half-acre in three mini-parks, 4.85 acres in four neighborhood parks that largely serve nearby residences, 38.05 acres in six community parks or outdoor facilities that provide for Citywide needs, and 322.74 acres at Memorial Lake Park. Additional grounds and facilities are provided by the Norwalk and St. Paul school systems.

The Huron County Youth Soccer Club utilizes a variety of private and school properties for soccer venues, including land owned by Norwalk City Schools (notably the Middle School fields), Fisher-Titus Medical Center, and St. Peter Lutheran Church. An independent baseball program for youth, the Lefty Grove league, also operates within Norwalk, using ball fields on private property behind the VFW Post on Milan Avenue.

While the St. Mary Street Skate Park is listed in the above table, it is currently in disuse while a private nonprofit entity is raising funds to equip and prepare the park. Another specialized, private outdoor facility is a BMX bicycle track that is located south of the Huron County Department of Job and Family Services offices on Shady Lane.

**Strategies and Recommendations:**

**Strategy 1: Protect and maintain natural resources through creation and enforcement of regulations and codes, and through proper planning.**

1. As discussed elsewhere in this plan, a method must be developed to provide revenues for the acquisition of land for new neighborhood parks and greenways. The existing park system in Norwalk is fairly effective in bringing public park space within walking distance of most neighborhoods and homes. However, as the City’s neighborhoods radiate outwards, with such new subdivisions as Executive Estates and Fairwood to the south, and Westwind Drive and Hunters Glen to the north, and Sycamore Hills to the west, the need for new park space toward the City’s edges will become increasingly evident. Perhaps the most equitable way to provide financial support for the acquisition of new park space, as well as ongoing operational funding, is through a one-time assessment upon the sale of new residential lots. That assessment has historically been a relatively negligible fifty dollars. In other communities, the assessment may be as much as $2,000. Current discussion proposes a fee of $500 to be charged to the developer of new residential housing units, who, in effect, will pass the cost on to the buyer of the new home. It may be possible to make this charge somewhat proportionate to the value of the lot or the house under construction, so as to not unduly inhibit construction of lower cost homes. This charge would be earmarked for new parkland or green space acquisition, development, and maintenance. If sufficient
funds are collected, they could be used for land banking of desirable property for future park and public space development. It is recommended that the City determine whether new park acquisition can be reasonably be accomplished with such a fee structure and, if so, that a new fee structure be implemented within two years (by 2009).

2. In the case of larger planned developments, the administration should work with the developer to determine the feasibility of the designation of land within the development as a park or green space. Such land donation should be considered, when feasible, in lieu of the financial developer fee described in the previous recommendation. Also the conservation design practices described previously should be encouraged in order to increase the attractiveness of park and green space development by residential developers. Examine Norwalk’s zoning and subdivision ordinances to ensure that they provide for creative use of conservation practices such as clustering and planned unit developments. The City should examine alternative ways to create incentives for developers to allow for green space. This is an ongoing activity, involving the planning commission, administration, and Council.

3. Ensure the community’s awareness of environmentally sensitive areas, including wetlands and flood zones, by controlling development through zoning and other means. Maintain updated maps of flood plains and wetlands for public examination. This is an ongoing activity, involving the zoning and building office, where such maps can be housed.

4. Preserve existing scenery and views in such areas as parks and green space throughout the City.
   
a. Landscaping should be designed and maintained at critical focal points such as “gateway” approaches to the community (as discussed in the “Community Character” chapter). Gateway development should be completed by 2008, and should include elements of “branding” to reinforce the sense of place within Norwalk. Gateways and other highly visible properties should be maintained on negotiated easements or property under municipal ownership. Civic and garden clubs can be encouraged to participate in the development and maintenance of such landscaping.

b. Develop a system to reward and recognize best practices by private homeowners and business/commercial property owners, with the awarding of special recognition for items that may include “front yard of the year” or “commercial landscape of the year”.

5. Norwalk’s current raw water supply derives from the inflow of Norwalk Creek into the City’s reservoir system. The quality of this water source is subject to the practices of landowners within the watershed that feeds the reservoir. Especially important are the practices of landowners whose property lies adjacent to the creek. While this watershed is nearly all outside Norwalk’s municipal bounds, the City should encourage efforts of County officials, including the Huron Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the County’s Emergency Management Agency, to encourage and provide incentives for
“best management practices”, including the planting of filter strips and buffer zones along the riparian corridor, conservation tillage, animal waste management, and other practices. Financial incentive programs exist through the SWCD to encourage such practices by property owners. The City should support and encourage the use of such programs by area property owners. This is an ongoing activity.

6. Ensure the presence of mature trees in Norwalk by undertaking the following ongoing activities:
   a. Continue the ongoing work of the Tree Board for removal of deteriorated trees and the encouragement and facilitation of a tree replacement program, which typically provides replacement trees on tree lawns in rights-of-way fronting residential properties.
   b. Publicize the Park Department’s Tree Memorial program, where community members can memorialize a deceased friend or family member by donating a tree to be planted in a City park or public space with a commemorative plaque.
   c. Encourage best management practices during construction to ensure that trees designated for preservation will survive construction. Encourage site designs that reduce or minimize tree loss.

7. The City of Norwalk and the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation have taken a proactive approach to Brownfields identification, mitigation, and development. Activities have centered on the former Norwalk Foundry property, and an environmental assessment of that property is underway, funded by a grant from the Clean Ohio Assistance Fund. The City’s efforts to identify Brownfields, obtain resources to assess their environmental status, and prepare them for redevelopment should continue. It is recommended that a task force be appointed by the City to assist in the identification and inventorying of additional Brownfield sites within the City, and, with professional assistance, to assess the development potential, environmental status, and feasibility of clean-up measures to bring those sites into productive use. With the receipt of an EPA grant in 2006, the task force should be appointed in the near future, and their work should be considered ongoing for a long term.

8. Develop regulations that require developers to landscape retention ponds. Safety measures, such as fencing in many cases, must still be undertaken, but the visual impact of a retention pond can be positively influenced by the addition of rudimentary landscaping, such as tree plantings or introduction of wildflowers. Implement within one year (2008).

Strategy 2: Promote and support public access to and enjoyment of natural resources, including provision of a perpetual supply of water.

1. Implement steps to complete planned improvements that increase the usefulness of the Memorial Lake Park area, by:
   a. Planning and constructing an amphitheater within the Memorial Lake Park area as a venue for concerts and other cultural, educational, or other public events. Site the amphitheater with consideration for adequate parking and ingress/egress, and sight lines from the amphitheater seating (i.e. facing the water without sun glare).
b. Completing the paved walking trail around Memorial Lake.
c. Developing additional concepts for the diverse use of the reservoir park, based on public interest.

2. Continue to examine options for the provision of a perpetual supply of water to supplement the collection of surface water from the Norwalk Creek watershed. Over the next two years, alternative sources of raw or, more likely, treated water should be analyzed. Consider the cost of infrastructure to extend outside distribution lines and connect them to Norwalk’s system, as well as rate and fee structures of the alternate sources. Known potential sources include Erie County and/or the City of Sandusky, and the Northern Ohio Rural Water Authority. See the Infrastructure chapter for further discussion.

3. Encourage the potential use of land trusts to accept land for preservation through donation or acquisition. This practice is more likely to be followed in rural, agricultural, and undeveloped land outside the City limits. Such organizations as the Firelands Conservancy can be contacted and utilized to facilitate the process. To preserve the public’s enjoyment of the reservoir park and its natural areas, a focus should be placed on the preservation of adjacent and nearby properties to the east and south of the reservoir. Such preservation methods, or the possible use of a purchase of development rights, may be a long-term objective, taking ten years or more to accomplish.

4. Encourage the awareness, utilization, and enjoyment of nearby accessible natural areas, such as the Land Lab property owned and maintained by Huron County on South Norwalk Road. This is an ongoing activity.

5. Wherever appropriate, design or implement steps to minimize the environmental effects of a land use upon sensitive neighboring properties. This may include designing parking lot lighting to reduce glare on adjacent properties, planting trees and other vegetation to form natural sound and visual barriers, and taking steps to reduce the noise levels created by certain land uses.

Strategy 3: *Develop sufficient natural and passive parks and recreation facilities for the size of the community.*

The City’s existing park system was described immediately preceding the listing of strategies and recommendations. General consensus is that neighborhood parks are serving existing neighborhoods well, and many community-wide needs are met through the community parks and Memorial Lake Park. Some community needs, however, are bringing the park system to full capacity, including a burgeoning softball schedule involving several leagues. Further, the Huron County Youth Soccer Club is seeking a single site for the development of enough soccer fields at one location to serve the needs of the entire league.

1. The City should set a long-term goal that every neighborhood should have a community park within walking distance. Communication is necessary between the planning commission, those who undertake land acquisition through purchase or gifting, the Park Board, and others in the administration, to determine plans and priorities, especially for
high-density neighborhoods without reasonable walking access to a neighborhood or community park. This should be an ongoing activity, incorporating a definitive study of high-needs areas for park accessibility.

2. The City’s system of “paper” streets and alleyways should be examined in light of the potential for midblock and interior walkways and greenways. It may be possible to connect streets and destinations through a network of well-planned walkways. Where the City does not already own property, easements could be obtained with property owners, subject to financial feasibility. An example of such a system is the informal pathway from Norwalk High School, through the soccer field complex, across Christie Avenue and through the Middle School property, to either Benedict Avenue to the east, or through a mid-block path to Stoutenberg Avenue to the north.

3. As described in more detail in the Quality of Life chapter, connect Norwalk to other communities through trails and greenways, focusing upon connections with Rails to Trails, including a possible connection to Milan by using the abandoned northerly railroad right-of-way now owned by the City, and consider connections with such destinations as Baines Park, the Ernsthauen Community Center, and the reservoir. Link critical areas and destinations, including the central business district, through designated trails. In developing such trails for walking or bicycling, efforts should be expended to connect and network the disparate elements of the emerging trail system. Also, consider the creation of a trail along Norwalk Creek along the segment from the Memorial Lake reservoir to Elm Street. (See Quality of Life chapter for more detailed and phased trail system recommendation).
Housing

Goals:

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.

Introduction:

The land use classification requiring the greatest land area within the City, by far, is residential use. The topic of housing was mentioned and discussed frequently during the community forums, often in the context of special needs groups, and particularly relating to the elderly. The major thrust was to provide appropriate housing, including physically accessible homes and apartments, to allow seniors to remain independent and live in their community as long as possible. Other discussion points included:

- Stabilizing and bringing consistency to declining neighborhoods, including possibly enforcing housing codes to take care of the elderly, and planning for the maintenance and upkeep of homes.
• Supporting housing renovation and restoration with tax abatement.
• Affordable housing, including rental properties, for those just entering the housing market.
• Developing attractive upper-floor apartments in the Downtown area.
• Planned development of new and emerging residential areas, including possible themed housing areas.

The 2005 Norwalk Comprehensive Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS)

Housing for low and moderate income persons and special needs groups was addressed in detail within the City of Norwalk's Community Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS), completed in October 2004 and most recently revised in February 2005. Through a process that develops needs statements, then adopts strategies to meet those needs, the Norwalk CHIS included nine strategy statements, which are summarized below:

1. Rehabilitation of Norwalk's aging and most deteriorated housing stock, much of which is owned by low and moderate income and elderly households. Rehab assistance has come in the form of deferred and forgivable payments from the City's ongoing Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP), funded through a series of Federal HUD grants, and coordinated with weatherization and energy conservation assistance also being provided for income-eligible households, as well as other rehab funding offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Housing Service.

2. To complement the more comprehensive rehabilitation program, a subsidized housing repair component would be able to respond to local needs for the improvement of a single housing system or element. These funds would enable low and moderate income and elderly households to repair a leaky roof or malfunctioning furnace when needs arise. As with the rehab program, the repair component would be partnered with other funding sources, such as USDA “504” home repair loans and grants and weatherization and utility payment assistance programs.

3. Home ownership is viewed within the CHIS as a laudable goal, and the third strategy provides methods to encourage it. CHIP funds are set aside to provide down payment assistance when a funding gap is identified, coupled with the use of CHIP funds to rehabilitate affected housing units that can be feasibly and affordably brought to standards. To ensure a household's successful transition to homeownership, the strategy also includes homeownership counseling, offering information and advice on mortgage finance, budgeting for housing and related costs, and simple home maintenance. A final component of the homeownership strategy is the support of the efforts of the Firelands Area chapter of Habitat for Humanity to provide new and affordable housing units for low and moderate-income households. Habitat has been active in developing affordable housing in Norwalk.

4. The need for an adequate, affordable, and attractive stock of rental housing was viewed as another area that requires a specific strategy. One form of assistance in this area would be a source for matching forgivable loans to landlords who own affordable rental property in Norwalk and express a willingness to maintain that affordability. Other potential funding sources to boost and improve the City's rental housing stock include
HDAP/HOME funds, the Affordable Housing program of the Federal Home Loan Bank, Rural Housing Service “515” program, and HUD special needs housing funds such as the Section 202 elderly and Section 811 programs. Finally, employing code enforcement as a means to improve the quality of rental housing was given a moderately high priority.

5. This strategy addresses complementary services for elderly and disabled households that would enable them to remain independent and live in their own homes. Services mentioned include the Meals on Wheels program offered through Huron County Services for Aging, public transportation offered on a curb-to-curb basis, and a chore service and other programming provided through Huron County Services for Aging.

6. Tenant based housing assistance, in the form of rental vouchers commonly known as Section 8 Certificates, is an important component serving those with the lowest incomes. The CHIS reported that while the supply of rental units to house Section 8 certificate holders appears to be adequate, the greater need is for a greater supply of certificates. There is a reported waiting list of over 500 eligible households countywide, with a current supply of 583 certificates in use. The committee that developed the CHIS plan recommended the introduction of additional tenant based rental assistance, although the opportunity for such increase appears unlikely. The committee also strongly supported the development of new housing for the elderly, “a group with a rapidly rising percentage of the population”, and the production of more physically handicapped-accessible units for both elderly and non-elderly renters.

7. Another strategy addresses the needs of the homeless in Norwalk. At the time of the development of the CHIS, it was determined that there was a broad-based need for further study of the County and City's homeless population by type and geographic area, the formalization of a “Continuum of Care” approach to homelessness, and the development of a survey and study of gaps in the supply of emergency and transitional housing and services for the homeless.

8. The CHIS supports an increase in the number of quality affordable rental units, through new construction, rental rehab financing for landlords, monthly tenant based subsidies, and additional production of direct subsidy units. One recommended source to spur housing production of this type is the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, which is in fact being used in Norwalk to develop at least two new elderly housing projects.

Newer subsidized housing in Norwalk: Homestead Estates on N. West Street.
The CHIS strategy addresses the need for housing alternatives that promote the highest possible degree of self-sufficiency for the County's mentally disabled population. Plans are reportedly underway to provide an eleventh housing unit within the City to house two more persons, in addition to the thirty already housed in the City.

**Profile of Housing in Norwalk**

While the CHIS focused on special needs and low to moderate-income housing, this comprehensive plan is concerned with the entire scope of housing in Norwalk. It is thus helpful to observe the characteristics of the City's current housing supply as reported in the 2000 Census of Housing and other sources.

The 2000 census counted 6,687 housing units in Norwalk, of which 6,377 (95.4 percent) were occupied. This is a higher occupancy rate than the statewide rate of 92.9 percent. The homeowner vacancy rate was 1.5 percent (close to Ohio's 1.6 percent), and rental vacancies were 5.0 percent (less than Ohio's 8.3 percent), perhaps signaling a limited rental housing supply.

Of the 6,377 reported occupied housing units, 3,945 units (61.9 percent) were owner-occupied and 2,432 (38.1 percent) were renter-occupied. Countywide, the homeowner rate was 72.2 percent (indicating that Norwalk is a center for rental housing within the County), and statewide, it was 69.1 percent.

The average household size of owner-occupied units was 2.73, and of renter-occupied units was 2.41, somewhat larger than the statewide average household sizes of 2.62 and 2.19 respectively.

Nearly one-third of Norwalk's housing units (4,220) were single detached units. Another 609 (9.1 percent) were two units, 524 were in 3 or 4 unit structures, and 441 were in 5 to 9 unit structures, 217 were in 10 to 19 unit buildings, and 170 were in larger, 20+ unit buildings. There were 301 mobile homes.

The following tables present some additional data regarding housing in Norwalk, in comparison with Huron County and Ohio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Norwalk #</th>
<th>Norwalk %</th>
<th>Huron Co. %</th>
<th>Ohio %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-Mar 2000</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1998</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1959</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939 or earlier</td>
<td>2,023</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2000 Census of Housing*
Norwalk’s housing stock is not greatly different than the State’s in general, although the City and County have a significantly greater proportion of housing built before 1940, and slightly less housing built in the 1940’s, 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s. A slightly larger percentage was constructed in the 1990’s, indicating residential growth that may be exceeding the State as a whole.

Norwalk’s median number of rooms is 5.7, as opposed to the County’s 5.9 and the same as the State’s 5.7. The median size is thus similar to that Statewide, and slightly smaller than in the County as a whole, which includes a large number of rural housing units.

Another interesting variable is the length of tenancy in a housing unit. The following table compares the number of households by the year they moved into their unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Norwalk #</th>
<th>Norwalk %</th>
<th>Huron Co. %</th>
<th>Ohio %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-March 2000</td>
<td>1,367</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1998</td>
<td>1,767</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969 or earlier</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 Census of Housing

Norwalk appeared to have a large amount of movement in the latter 1990’s, with over one-fifth of households moving between January 1999 and March 2000. Significantly fewer Norwalk residents moved to their present home in the 1970’s, but the other time categories appeared to be similar between the City and the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner Occupied Housing Value</th>
<th>Norwalk #</th>
<th>Norwalk %</th>
<th>Huron Co. %</th>
<th>Ohio %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $50,000</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>1,768</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 to $299,999</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300,000 to $499,999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,000 to $999,999</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000,000 or more</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (dollars)</td>
<td>$97,100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mortgage status and selected monthly owner costs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mortgage status and selected monthly owner costs</th>
<th>Norwalk #</th>
<th>Norwalk %</th>
<th>Huron Co. %</th>
<th>Ohio %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With a mortgage</td>
<td>2,301</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $300</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300 to $499</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 to $699</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$700 to $999</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Mortgage status and selected monthly owner costs (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Norwalk #</th>
<th>Norwalk %</th>
<th>Huron Co. %</th>
<th>Ohio %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,000 to $1,499</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,500 to $1,999</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,000 or more</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (dollars)</td>
<td>$864</td>
<td></td>
<td>$849</td>
<td>$963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mortgaged</td>
<td>1,221</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (dollars)</td>
<td>$267</td>
<td></td>
<td>$271</td>
<td>$289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Gross rent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than $200</th>
<th>$200 to $299</th>
<th>$300 to $499</th>
<th>$500 to $699</th>
<th>$700 to $999</th>
<th>$1,000 to $1,499</th>
<th>$1,500 or more</th>
<th>No cash rent</th>
<th>Median rent (dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>151</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>$478</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>$474</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>$515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2000 Census of Housing*

In summary, Huron County and Norwalk enjoy a relatively low cost of housing. Norwalk’s median housing value in 2000, at $97,100, was less than the State median of $103,700, and the monthly mortgage and associated costs, at $864, were less than the State’s median of $963. Further, the median monthly rent in Norwalk was $478, less than the State median of $515.

### Recent Housing Activity in Norwalk

Records from the Norwalk Planning and Zoning Department reveal the nature and extent of new residential construction within the City. City officials have noticed an increase in the number of condominium units constructed in new developments near Westwind Drive, Route 20 east, and Executive Drive. The preponderance of these units appears to be a response to the needs of smaller, “empty nest” households. However, single-family units for ownership remain the predominant type of new housing in Norwalk, and will likely continue to be. The following table summarizes that information.

#### Table H-4: Residential Building History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Building starts</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Value of units</th>
<th>Residential Alterations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>$6,732,293</td>
<td>$769,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>7,028,859</td>
<td>862,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5,776,063</td>
<td>976,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5,652,507</td>
<td>1,750,669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2,923,675</td>
<td>1,139,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3,164,337</td>
<td>1,248,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49*</td>
<td>4,652,487</td>
<td>1,453,831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monthly data are broken down further by type of unit constructed. The number of units and buildings, and the level of investment in housing, have fluctuated from year to year, peaking with 95 units in 1998. However, after a significant decrease in the early 2000’s, recent housing starts have begun to increase again, with very level activity in 2003, 2004, and 2005. For the past five years, we can trace the following development by type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Building starts</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Value of units</th>
<th>Residential Alterations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42*</td>
<td>5,428,769</td>
<td>1,120,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>7,459,800</td>
<td>974,385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8,155,156</td>
<td>960,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8,140,208</td>
<td>940,203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Building Reports, Norwalk Planning and Zoning Dept.
* 2001 also included a permit for apartments on 22 Summit St. Those units not added to total. 2002 included permit for Homestead Estates; those units also are not added.

The number of single-family residences has increased over the past five years, while the number of multi-unit buildings (typically duplexes and triplexes) has remained roughly the same. Condominium development has leveled off, decreasing in recent years.

Diversity of the housing stock: (L) A home in the West Main Street historic district. (R) Newer homes in Executive Estates
Future Housing Demand

For planning purposes, it is important to project how many housing units will be required to accommodate future population growth. The ODOD projection of population for Huron County forecast a 6.6 percent increase, countywide, between 2000 and 2020. Basing a projection on recent history and Norwalk’s 10.2 percent increase over the 1990’s would yield an increase of 21.4 percent over the next twenty years. A “middle path” projection may indicate a twenty-year growth of approximately 12 percent.

Assuming the current average household size of 2.49 will continue to be accurate, these projections would indicate a need over the next twenty years for 430 housing units (or 21.5 per year) under the slow-growth scenario, 1,398 new housing units (or 70 per year) under the continued high growth scenario, or 782 new housing units (or 39 per year) under the 12 percent, “middle path” scenario. Siting of new residential areas is discussed in the land use chapter.

With the demand for additional housing units will come the need to expand residential subdivisions onto currently undeveloped land. While there are some parcels and tracts of undeveloped land within the City, there will also be pressure to expand outward. The land use chapter of this plan proposes generalized locations where residential growth is targeted over the next twenty years.
Strategies and Recommendations

Strategy 1: *Provide sufficient affordable housing that is of good quality and sustainable.*

There is a challenge in providing housing that is affordable to Norwalk’s low and moderate-income population, but that can also be sufficiently profitable to spur a developer or builder to provide such housing. A third requirement for affordable housing is that it would be attractive and durable enough to create aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods, retain its property value, attract residents, and blend in well with surrounding housing and other nearby land uses. This housing takes several forms, including owner and renter occupied housing. The following are suggested actions to ensure adequate affordable housing:

1. Encourage the planned development of lower-cost ($125,000 and under) new housing for eligible households when demand warrants. This may be accomplished by researching state-of-the-art methods being used to construct housing in this price range. The City should also explore providing incentives to developers to encourage the construction of affordable units, including, when feasible, waiving some conditions or costs. Planning officials could consider flexibility in design, such as narrower lots, smaller setbacks (or even “zero lot line” development for one side), Planned Unit Development proposals with clusters of homes on small lots and accessible common space, and small single family or “cottage” development. Methods should be explored where up-front costs can be deferred, possibly paid back upon sale of property. Developers have cited front-end costs as often the most prohibitive factor. This is an ongoing activity.

2. The City has a positive recent history in working with Habitat for Humanity to develop affordable homeownership opportunities, and that relationship should be continued. Currently, Habitat is working in a new site, just north of Willard Avenue, where as many as twelve new units may be constructed. The City has been able to assist in providing new roadway access and utilities to these sites. Similar future sites, with good access to stores and employers, should be planned, in order to continue the momentum of the Habitat chapter. The current site will take as many as five years to develop, and additional sites will be needed to continue Habitat’s activities beyond Year Five.

3. Another potential source of affordable housing may be the upper stories of some properties in the downtown area. Some of these properties are currently being explored; issues of physical accessibility must be overcome, but in cases where access by a stairway is not an issue, some downtown properties may hold potential for the development of residential units. This is an ongoing activity involving downtown property owners, Main Street Norwalk, and the City administration, which may be able to offer incentives through establishment of a Community Reinvestment Area district, revolving loan funds, and housing funds.

4. In pursuing affordable housing, the City should convene an Affordable Housing Committee to explore options and best practices. Members should include developers, City officials, social agencies, and lenders. The committee can be convened within three
5. All available resources should be used to assist in the development of affordable housing. This includes the continuation of the CHIP program administered for the City by WSOS CAC, local lenders’ incentive programs, Habitat programming already discussed, USDA and Ohio funding programs, and other resources. Overall programming should include homeownership counseling and training in budgeting and finance, homeownership issues, and avoidance of predatory lending.

6. Available resources should also be sought and obtained to maintain the significant existing stock of affordable homes, often located in the City’s older, more central neighborhoods. New incentives should be explored to encourage investment in these older homes. One such program is the Ohio Community Reinvestment Area program (see program description).

7. Support the City’s Housing Task Force and those who are actively involved in the housing “Continuum of Care”, to strengthen and maintain the network of services associated with affordable housing. This Task Force includes representatives of the Miriam House (a transitional housing facility), Habitat for Humanity, Metropolitan Housing Authority, Salvation Army, Erie-Huron Community Action Commission, Huron County Department of Job and Family Services, and Services for Aging, among others. It is important for the task force to communicate progress reports and specific needs. The affordable housing committee referred to in Section A above should coordinate with this broader Task Force.

8. Extra care should be taken to ensure a stock of safe, attractive rental housing that responds to the needs of a diverse rental market, ranging from subsidized affordable housing to upscale rental properties, without diminishing the property values of adjoining and nearby properties. This is an ongoing activity that should produce tangible results (new rental housing) within five years (2012).

Landlords should ensure the maintenance and upkeep of their rental properties. Although they may prefer a voluntary system, and tenant responsibilities should be enforced as well as those of the landlord, City officials should consider more stringent enforcement or more inclusive codes to ensure a safe and attractive housing stock. Any such property maintenance regulations should be consistently enforced on an ongoing basis.

9. The remaining strategies of the 2005 Norwalk Community Housing Improvement Strategy should be followed, including
   a. Housing rehab and repair activities (HUD CHIP, USDA 502 and 504);
   b. Weatherization of low income qualifying homes;
   c. Maximum availability of utility payment assistance (LIHEAP);
   d. Use of down payment assistance programs available from the City and from lending institutions;
   e. Rental rehabilitation assistance in the case of units that are targeted for low and moderate income tenants;
f. Maintenance and expansion, if ever available, of tenant based rental assistance;
g. Acquisition or construction of new units and supportive services for special needs populations such as the mentally and physically disabled.

Strategy 2. **Maximize the attractiveness and diversity of Norwalk’s housing supply**

Today’s households require a diverse housing stock, with needs and requirements varying by income, household size, age, disability, and personal interest and preference. Norwalk is already fortunate to have such diversity, ranging from older, centralized “century” housing to a growing condominium housing stock and executive housing in outlying subdivisions. This diversity needs to be continued and encouraged to ensure that the varied households within the City, with similarly varied needs and wants, can be appropriately housed.

Housing will always remain largely market driven, with new housing constructed in response to market demand. Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in condominiums, and as a result, developments such as Hunter’s Glen and Shaker Village (depicted on the next page) have been constructed. The City must simply ensure that it is facilitating, and not hindering, the development or rehabilitation of attractive and desirable housing, and that it continues to maintain its positive reputation as an efficient and desirable city in which to develop and construct housing. A parallel goal is the encouragement of “infill” housing development within the City on parcels that are suitable for residential use, in close proximity to shopping, services, and employment, and currently vacant and undeveloped but serviced with needed utilities.

1. Monitor the City’s plan review, permitting, and inspection processes to ensure that they are efficient and timely, while serving the public purpose of safety and conformity with existing zoning and subdivision regulations. From all sources and focus groups held in conjunction with the planning process, Norwalk’s processes appear to be viewed as user-and developer-friendly from the standpoint of timeliness and cost. This should be viewed as an important competitive asset for the community, although steps should be taken to ensure that such user ease is balanced by the protection of the public good.

2. Provide adequate public infrastructure to the existing housing stock, using Federal and State programs when available, such as targeting CDBG-funded infrastructure to low and moderate-income neighborhoods. Recognizing the limited availability of municipal government to finance new infrastructure, research possible options where the City finances the cost of infrastructure in new developments up front, and receives reimbursement from developers as lots are sold.
3. Target areas on the urban fringe and adjacent to the City as residential growth areas. This comprehensive plan includes a generalized description of such growth areas to the northwest, northeast, and south of the City. Specific areas include property immediately south of the City, which has witnessed the development of executive housing on larger lots, and property adjacent to the northwest and northeast quadrants of the City, as housing subdivisions, condominium development, and potential elderly housing developments. This is an ongoing effort over the next twenty years.

4. Encourage housing development and any resulting annexation to take place within the Norwalk School District. It is recognized that the natural northward growth of the City, for example, will make this difficult. However, southward growth will ensure continued growth of tax base within the Norwalk City School district. This is ongoing and involves developers, Realtors, and community officials.

5. Allow for innovative housing development and design when it meets needs for health and safety and provides an attractive and marketable alternative to traditional housing design. This may include Planned Unit Development designs with smaller lots and common space, cluster housing, modular construction, and new construction techniques. Many of these alternatives may prove popular to the growing elderly and near-elderly segments of the population, allowing them to “age in place” without moving to more currently attractive or responsive locales.

6. Facilitate the development of executive housing subdivisions. Such housing is strongly market-driven, and few such housing units are constructed speculatively. However, the City should ensure that it is positioned so that a variety of readied sites are available for construction. This may include provision of adequate utilities to the site, and in the long run may require the annexation of property for the development of sites with available utilities. Agreements for compensation (tax sharing) should be pre-arranged with adjacent townships in order to expedite the development process. Likely locations for
The Norwalk, Ohio Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 5: Housing

executive housing include properties south of the U.S. 20 bypass (which are encouraged because of their location within the Norwalk City School District), as well as northwest and northeast of existing development. Wherever possible, executive housing in “infill” areas within the City should be encouraged as well. (An example is the Deerfield subdivision located south of Gallup Avenue.) This policy should be encouraged over the next twenty years.

7. Another style of housing that will add to Norwalk’s housing diversity, as well as potentially attracting younger adults, is the development of upper stories in downtown buildings into attractive loft apartments. Incentives should be explored to assist building owners in developing upper story apartments when feasible. Conformity to accessibility codes should be researched, as well as the cost of meeting those codes, and alternatives such as strategically placed elevators or stairwells that can serve more than one building should be considered. This ongoing activity will rely most upon downtown property owners, with assistance provided by the City administration and Main Street Norwalk association. This is considered a long-range activity, which may take ten years or more to achieve a “critical mass” of attractive downtown apartments.

**Strategy 3: Adequate housing for the elderly and disabled.**

With the aging of the Baby Boomers and increased life expectancy, Norwalk faces an expanding elderly population. One important goal is to ensure a supply of housing that allows seniors to remain independent as long as possible. Similarly, housing should be available that includes amenities and design features that allow people with disabilities to remain as independent as possible. This is a public purpose in that supporting such independence can reduce dependence on governmental assistance and the significantly higher costs associated with supportive housing.

Those associated with senior housing should encourage the construction of accessible housing, with the elimination or reduction of barriers to accessibility. Incentive programs and available services can be used to realize this goal. The area’s demographics and the size and potential of the elderly segment should be communicated to developers.

1. Make information available to elderly and disabled households on programs and resources that can assist them in maintaining and adapting their homes to remain independent. Programs include CHIP rehabilitation and repair programs, USDA section 502 and 504 programs, and other programs (including locally available resources through United Fund and other agencies) that can provide for accessibility, including handicap ramps. This information and referral program should be ongoing, with participation and cooperation from the City administration, the CHIP administrator, contractors, Services for Aging, and the United Fund office.

2. Provide and communicate the availability of programs that assist elderly and disabled households and individuals to remain independent within their current homes. Services contributing to this independence include “Meals on Wheels”, homemaker services, chore services, Passport programs to provide nurse and housekeeping visits, and other program offerings from Services for Aging. This action step is also ongoing in nature,
and involves Services for Aging, Fisher-Titus Medical Center (the Call Alert system and home health services), United Fund organizations, the County Health District, churches, and other agencies.

3. Assist in the facilitation of new housing developments targeted to the elderly and/or disabled. An example is the new Norwalk Commons elderly housing component on the City’s northeast side. Assistance from the City may be in the form of information on community and market area demographics, made available by the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation. Such developments may require the assistance of tax credits, bonding, or Federal grant and loan programs, and will involve developers, the Planning Commission, City Council and administration, and often will also require participation by tax credit or financing agencies such as the Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing.

4. Assist in advocacy for additional assisted housing for the disabled as specified needs are documented and funding resources become available, and for assisted housing for the elderly should a gap in the supply of such housing become evident. This planning and development involves developers and contractors, as well as the MR/DD Board and, in some cases, the ADAMHS board.

Strategy 4: Preservation of the existing housing stock.

Norwalk has an exceptional and diverse housing stock. Many of its older homes have reached the century mark, and homes with notable architectural features abound throughout the City. However, this housing stock, both renter and owner occupied, is always at risk of becoming deteriorated, and efforts should be promoted to maintain the physical integrity and aesthetic attractiveness of each housing unit, in order to maximize Norwalk’s quality of life, its ability to attract new residents, and property values for resident owners and landlords alike.

Whenever possible, incentives should be offered to facilitate property improvements and maintenance. In some cases, however, existing (and possibly new) property maintenance codes should be applied consistently throughout the community to ensure that a minimum of community standards for appearance and safety is enforced. Programs should also instill pride in one’s home and neighborhood.

1. This recommendation applies to this strategy as well as others in this chapter: Use available Federal and State programs to assist in the rehabilitation and repair of the housing stock (such as CHIP funds, USDA 502 and 504), as well as exploring low-interest bank financing programs. The City administration, State and Federal agencies, and local lenders can help implement this ongoing strategy.

2. Provide incentives for the historic preservation of older, architecturally significant properties. Make owners aware of historic property tax credits. Entities assisting with this effort include the City administration, historic organizations, lenders, and Realtors. Also, within one to two years, publicize the existence of historic districts and properties listed on the National Register of Historic Properties, and publicize the requirements for being listed. Consider a local program of recognition of historic properties, such as a
Examples of the variety of housing styles in Norwalk: wood frame and brick construction

plaque for “century homes”. Increase the City’s partnership with the Ohio Historic Preservation Office, by becoming a Certified Local Government, and by taking advantage of their technical assistance programs that can help property owners with their preservation activities.

3. Instill neighborhood pride and identity by delineating and identifying specific neighborhoods within Norwalk. This can be accomplished with signage and the development of a map indicating neighborhood bounds. This concept could be piloted in one neighborhood, and local reaction can be gauged, before the program becomes more widespread.

4. Stabilize and improve declining neighborhoods and properties through more rigid, uniform enforcement of existing property maintenance codes, and the review and revision of the code as deemed necessary. Consider the implementation of a rental property maintenance code after discussion of its benefits and feasibility. A rental maintenance code should be developed carefully, through the use of a “blue ribbon panel” representing all interests. Such a code may take three years (2010), with a major education component to communicate the community benefits of such a code before adoption. The Planning Commission would be involved in this activity, as well as the Council and administration, and the members of the blue ribbon panel.

5. Research the feasibility, cost effectiveness, and alternative models for carrying out the tasks involved in inspecting new or renovated housing in Norwalk. Options include maintaining the current practice of voluntary application for permits, as well as a more inclusive approach that includes routine inspection after improvements have been completed. It may be most feasible to adopt a scaled-down procedure that would selectively inspect a portion of new construction and rehabilitation/renovation projects based on some predetermined criteria. This option could be designed to focus on projects and housing units where safety factors and issues are most pronounced, yet the program could be scaled to operate within an affordable budget and within City staffing constraints.
The “blue ribbon panel” described in the previous recommendation could be utilized to help develop this activity and discuss alternatives as well. Discussion must include consideration of the ongoing cost of all alternatives, including any staffing requirements. No alternative should be advocated which places an undue cost burden on building and property owners or developers to pay inspection and related fees.

From discussions within a number of resource panels, as well as the input of public citizens in community forums, it is evident that the appearance of the community and specific properties within the community is an important issue for Norwalk. Because of this importance, it appears prudent to examine the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of these alternatives. The purpose of this initiative is to improve resident safety and welfare, to protect property and property values, but not to provide disincentives to develop new projects or improve buildings and the housing stock within the City and County.

Because of the potential impact on property owners of both building inspection and property maintenance codes, it is suggested that both recommendations may, if implemented, take up to ten years to be designed as effectively as possible and put in place.

New homes under construction at Hunter's Glen
Transportation

Goals

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.
8. Develop the Huron County Airport as an asset to the community and region, and the business base.

Introduction

Norwalk’s transportation system involves its state and federal highways, streets and alleys, sidewalks, bicycle paths, railroad facilities, and airport. As in most communities, elements of the transportation system have been studied and recommendations have been made multiple times over the past decades. Transportation was also discussed from many perspectives during the community forums. Some of the items pertaining to transportation that were mentioned at the forums are listed below.

- Eliminate truck traffic on U.S. Route 250 through town; effective planning of industrial traffic; develop truck alternative route
- Provide accessible, affordable public transportation
• Norwalk should be people and pedestrian friendly; complete the sidewalk program
• Bicycle paths should be completed through town
• Develop the Norwalk/Huron County Airport
• Improve traffic control; alleviate traffic congestion; coordinate traffic lights and patterns
• Faster and better access to major highways
• Develop railroad access; lack of rail spurs hinders economic development
• Access management needed along the developing north side
• Need better signage for Downtown parking, promote free parking

Some specific recommendations also resulted from the forums and focus groups, including the following:

• Connect Westwind to North West Street and develop that area
• Develop center turn lanes on Benedict Avenue
• Install a light, and a turn lane on the east side, at the intersection of Old State Road and Cleveland Road (business Route 20)
• Construct turning lanes on Christie Avenue at Norwood and Benedict, and on northbound Norwood at Fair Road/Shady Lane
• Improve the intersection of Old State Road at Route 61, and Cleveland and Akron Roads on the east side of town
• Improve traffic flow on Milan Avenue (U.S. 250) from League Street northward to Milan
• Improve Old State Road as an alternative route to bypass the central city
• Northward extension of Cline Street

**Functional Classifications of Ohio Roadways**

When discussing roadways and their purpose, design standards, and traffic capacity, it is important to use and understand the standardized terms employed by the Ohio Department of Transportation, design engineers, and others in the field. The following descriptions are based on the manual, “Highway Functional Classification – Concepts, Criteria and Procedures”, published by the Federal Highway Administration. The functional criteria and characteristics are qualitative rather than quantitative. The following is an explanation of the hierarchy of roadways by functional classification:

• **Urban Principal Arterial**: Serve major activity centers, highest volume corridors, and longest trip demands. Carry a high proportion of total urban travel on minimum of mileage. Interconnect and provide continuity for major rural corridors to accommodate trips entering and leaving the urban area and movements through the urban area. Serve demand for intra-area travel as between central business district and outlying residential areas. Milan Avenue, from League Street north to the City limits, is an example.

• **Urban Minor Arterials**: Interconnect with and augment the principal arterials. Serve trips of moderate length at a somewhat lower level of travel mobility than principal arterials. Distribute traffic to smaller geographic areas than those served by principal arterials. Provide more land access than principal arterials without penetrating identifiable
neighborhoods. Provide urban connections for rural collectors. Norwood or Washington Street may be examples of minor arterials.

- Urban Collectors: Serve both land access and traffic circulation in residential and commercial/industrial areas. Penetrate residential neighborhoods. Distribute and channel trips between local streets and arterials. Distinction is sometimes made between major collectors and minor collectors, based on levels of usage. Elm Street may be considered a collector, between Woodlawn, Benedict, Norwood, and Pleasant Streets.

- Urban Locals: Provide direct access to adjacent land. Provide access to higher systems. Carry no through traffic movement. Many streets throughout the City and in subdivisions serve this function.

The 1997 Norwalk Thoroughfare Plan

To offer continuity among Norwalk’s planning projects, it is important to consider and include the recommendations offered in a thoroughfare plan completed for the City in 1997. Several of the recommendations made in that plan are carried forward in this comprehensive plan, and should be implemented over the coming years. Those endorsed recommendations will be described in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

- Major Street Extensions
  - Extend Executive Drive across Benedict Avenue and connect to Fair Road (Shady Lane). This would make a direct connection between Executive Drive and Shady Lane without the current jog onto Benedict, and provide a major collector of east-west traffic on the south side.
  - Extend the U.S. 20 bypass on the east side of Norwalk to the north to intersect with SR 61, and then continue northwest to U.S. 250 North of Norwalk. (This major acquisition and construction project has been discussed for a long time.)
  - Extend Perrin Road north from Gibbs Road to SR 61. This would serve as a minor collector, and take some traffic off Old State Road.
  - Extend South Pleasant Street southward from its terminus into Elm Street and generally parallel with Norwood Avenue, connecting to Fair Road. This would create a minor collector and open significant acreage within the City for infill development, likely residential.
  - Extend Republic Street west across Milan Avenue, connecting to Plank Road. This major collector would benefit some industrial traffic and provide additional east-west access in the northern growth area along the U.S. 250 corridor. Also, Pleasant Street could be extended north of Washington Street to Lovers Lane Road, connecting to the westerly Republic Street extension and providing a route from northern U.S. 250 to West Main Street avoiding the 250 corridor in town.
Provide East-West connection between Milan Avenue and Whittlesey Avenue, creating a major collector (This has been accomplished with the construction of Westwind Drive).

- Construct an access road between Plank Road and Cline Street, effectively extending Cline Street northward. This access road, parallel to Milan Avenue (U.S. 250) and providing access from the Eagles building on Cline Street to the Drug Mart/Aldi’s complex and the Apples shopping center, would terminate to the north at Westwind Drive at its intersection with Plank Road. Construction would channel north-south traffic accessing these destinations on a formalized access road alignment and relieve congestion on U.S. 250.

- Extend Ontario Street southward, connecting to the City-owned rail right-of-way, and then continuing within the rail right-of-way to connect Schauss Avenue and East Main Street. (This project has been largely completed as planned, resulting in a more directly traversed major collector for truck and car traffic northward from east Main Street to Ontario/Republic Street.)

- Extend North Pleasant Street farther to the north. This would connect to the westward connection of Westwind Drive and provide a northwestern loop and major collector, opening agricultural land for development.

- Extend Christie Avenue across Norwood Avenue and connect to the extended S. Pleasant Street. This minor collector would create an inner loop connecting Benedict Avenue and W. Main Street, and would presumably handle some traffic generated by the middle school on Christie and the high school on Shady Lane.

- Local street extensions recommended in the 1997 plan included extending West Willard Avenue west to Whittlesey and north to what is now Westwind Drive; and extending Grand Avenue to connect to Sherman Street.

- Major road and intersection upgrades included upgrading Ohio Street between Jefferson Street and Whittlesey Avenue, widening Benedict Avenue from Executive Drive to Norwood Avenue (with the provision of a center turn lane), widening League Street between Whittlesey Avenue and Milan Avenue (this has been completed), upgrading Ontario and Republic Street, and studying, then improving as deemed important, intersections at Old State Rd. and SR 61, Executive Drive and Benedict Avenue, Fair Road and West Main Street, Schauss Avenue and East Main/Cleveland Rd. (this has been accomplished), Cline St. and League St. (this has also been completed, with provision for right turn only from Cline), Whittlesey and League (also completed with the widening of League St.), and Old State and Akron Rd. (SR 18).
Past and Present Trends in Transportation

ODOT provides traffic counts at key intersections on state and federal routes. The three most recent traffic counts were taken in 1992, 1999, and 2002. Looking at the results of those counts may provide some insight into traffic patterns and changes in Norwalk.

Table 6-1: ODOT Average Daily Traffic Counts for Norwalk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traffic Section</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 61 spur</td>
<td>5520</td>
<td>2060</td>
<td>7580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 61</td>
<td>5520</td>
<td>2060</td>
<td>7580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. 250</td>
<td>3440</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>5180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 18</td>
<td>2330</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>3310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co Rd 245</td>
<td>3670</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>5520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 601</td>
<td>4340</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>5520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 61 (includes Main St.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW Corp. Norwalk</td>
<td>3820</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave Norwalk 61 spur</td>
<td>7390</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>7730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Street</td>
<td>8290</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>8660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. 250 (Whittlesey)</td>
<td>9190</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>9580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan Ave.</td>
<td>11910</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>12410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland St.</td>
<td>6720</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>6870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Corp. Norwalk C-52</td>
<td>3920</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>4110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 601</td>
<td>3820</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. 250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Corp. Norwalk</td>
<td>13280</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>14090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plank Rd.</td>
<td>16870</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>17700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan Ave. enter League St.</td>
<td>8980</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>9680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League enter Whittlesey</td>
<td>7560</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>8280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 61 (Main St.)</td>
<td>11860</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>12510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Corp. Norwalk</td>
<td>10200</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>10810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. 20</td>
<td>9770</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>11470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-148 (Norwalk Rd.)</td>
<td>4210</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>6080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ohio Dept. of Transportation

The above table shows that traffic counts along the major State and Federal highway corridors have not increased over time and, in fact, have decreased slightly in a number of cases. The U.S. 20 numbers refer largely to the southerly bypass that skirts the southern boundary of the City. That highway witnessed a significant increase in daily traffic counts between 1992 and 2000, easing somewhat in 2002 (owing perhaps to improvements to the Ohio Turnpike, which parallels it). SR 61 counts refer to intersections along West and East Main Street, respectively. Along this arterial route, which connects residential areas to the east and west with the central business district, traffic counts are very similar between 1992 and 2002. The counts increased throughout the route between 1992 and 2000, and fell slightly in 2002.

U.S. Route 250 is the most well traveled corridor in Norwalk, with its highest daily count at the northern corporate limits, entering the increasingly commercial corridor along Milan Avenue. Counts exceeding 11,000 vehicles per day (down from 12,000+ in 2000) are sustained from the League/Whittlesey intersection to the southeast corporate limit, at the
location of Fisher-Titus Medical Center. Along the U.S. 250 corridor, traffic counts generally increased through town from 1992 to 2000, then fell back slightly in 2002, with the exception being the south side of town, where it increased slightly.

**Larger Trends**

The Ohio Department of Transportation issued a planning document entitled “Access Ohio 2004-2030”. The third chapter of that document was entitled “Demographics, Economics, and Travel Patterns – Conditions and Trends”. Some of the statewide trends reported or projected in that chapter are worth repeating here, as they have implications for the transportation system in Norwalk, as they do for any community in Ohio.

- Ohio’s population is projected to grow by 8.5 percent between 2000 and 2030, with the greatest growth (over twenty percent) in metropolitan fringe counties, such as Delaware and Medina. Within this projection, Huron County’s population is projected to grow by 7.6 percent.
- Ohio’s population is in fact shifting more than it is growing. The overall effect is some decentralization of the population, spreading out and creating a new pattern of urban boundaries. With this lower development density comes an increased dependence on the private automobile, with increased demand on the State’s highway system. Longer driving distance may extend peak commuting periods.
- ODOT also envisions a trend toward increased single-occupancy driving and vehicle miles traveled.
- Ohio’s population is getting older, and the state’s “baby boom” population includes approximately one-third of the state’s population. Between 2000 and 2030, it was projected that those over 65 will increase by 750,000 (or 49.8 percent) and those aged 35-54 will decrease by about 250,000 (or 7.4 percent), suggesting that there may be fewer people in the traditional workforce making trips during peak travel times. Also, an increase in the number of older drivers may result in a greater mid-day peak.
- Although people over age 65 make 22 percent fewer overall trips than younger people, they actually make a comparable number of non-work trips as those under 65. In fact, older men make substantially more non-work trips and travel slightly more miles than younger men, but because of their flexibility, they tend to avoid peak times and make most of their trips between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.
- Between 1990 and 2000, the number of households in Ohio grew 8.7 percent, nearly twice the percentage increase in general population growth of 4.7 percent. In 2000, Ohio’s average household size was 2.49 persons, less than the national average of 2.59 persons, and this trend toward smaller household size is expected to contribute to an increase in the number of vehicle trips per person.
- Between 1960 and 2000, the number of registered vehicles in Ohio grew by 162 percent, from 3.9 million to 10.3 million. Today, there are more registered vehicles than people in Ohio, with 11.9 million vehicles registered in Ohio in 2002, including 8,347,600 passenger cars, 1,664,000 noncommercial trucks, and 900,000 commercial vehicles.
- Rates of automobile ownership in Ohio are not expected to increase as rapidly as they have in the past because the U.S. market for automobiles is expected to reach a saturation point between 2015 and 2025.
• The increase in households, vehicle ownership and licensed drivers has translated into an increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (or VMT). Looking at these changes (a doubling between 1960 and 2000) in combination with the limited number of new lane miles of roadways being constructed (less than a 15 percent increase) clarifies why congestion has increased.

Railroad Transportation

Norwalk is served by one east-west rail line, which is owned and operated by the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad. The railroad offers switching and other service to sidings along their line. The number of industrial and commercial properties serviced by the railroad and adjacent to the main line is limited. In order to assemble a large industrial property adjacent to the rail line, it is necessary to consider land outside the current City limits, such as farmland to the west, north of U.S. Route 20 and south of Washington Street. However, there is some potential within the City for vacant land adjacent to the railroad property to be served by existing facilities or a new spur.

Norwalk-Huron County Airport

Private noncommercial air traffic is handled for the Norwalk area by the Norwalk-Huron County Airport, located three miles east of Norwalk and just south of U.S. Route 20. The airport is a public use, general aviation facility that was constructed in 1968. The airport is owned by Huron County, and is guided by a six-member Authority whose members are appointed by the County Commissioners. The airport is managed by NOFA, Inc., a contract management company.

The airport features a 4,209 by 75 foot, east-west runway, of which 3,969 feet are usable for landing and the full distance is available for takeoff. The current runway configuration does not provide adequate coverage to meet the “95 percent criterion”, whereby all runways should be oriented such that aircraft may use the airport at least 95 percent of the time with crosswind components not exceeding that of the critical aircraft (which in this case is a Beechcraft Bonanza). The airport is served by three designated taxiways, connecting the main ramp, runway, and business complex. The airport has an FBO (fixed base operator) building with various amenities for pilots and passengers. Hangars provide storage for three aircraft in Building A, eight aircraft apiece in Buildings B and C (T-hangars), and private storage in Building D. A business complex building stores an additional three aircraft. Water is supplied to the airport by Northern Ohio Rural Water, and
sanitary sewerage is covered by an on-site septic tank. Power is provided with three-stage electricity from Ohio First Energy, and gas is supplied by a 150-gallon propane tank with service to the FBO Building and business complex.

The current fleet at the airport includes 28 based aircraft, of which 25 are single engine, one is multi-engine, and two are rotorcraft. Projections in the current airport master plan call for that number to increase to as many as 38 based aircraft by the end of the planning period, 2026. Further, airport staff state that there is a waiting list of ten aircraft for hangar space.

The airport’s operations in 2005 included 3,648 local operations and 2,752 itinerant operations, for a total of 6,400 operations. The general aviation operations forecast conducted by the master plan’s author projects this to increase to 5,415 local and 4,085 itinerant operations (9,500 total) in 2026. The plan notes that the proximity of Norwalk Raceway Park accounts for an increase in operations in season during racing events.

Another trend that will have a positive effect on the airport is stated in the master plan: “The predicted increase in light jet and charter/fractional ownership aircraft makes the Airport an attractive option. Airport management states that air taxi/corporate aircraft have accounted for at least 10 to 16 operations a month. A new air taxi service called “Sky Taxi NE” has begun local service in northeast Ohio. Norwalk-Huron County Airport is one of three airports in the area from which the air taxi will have service.”

The Airport Master Plan notes that current trends having a bearing on the development of the airport include the use of global positioning systems for navigation, the increasing use of charter/air taxi services, and the growing Very Light Jet aircraft market. Providing facilities for business jet aircraft increases the accessibility to small markets and cities by jet aircraft. The plan recommends that “To assure flexibility and the potential response to the increased activity of larger business jets over 12,500 pounds MTOW (maximum takeoff weight), consideration should be given to lengthening the usable runway to 4,300 feet…to accommodate future demand of B-II aircraft. This would require an overall length of the runway to be 4,968 feet with the existing displaced thresholds.” Also recommended is a partial parallel taxiway to provide access to the most active runway end or a full taxiway linking both runway ends to the apron and terminal areas. A future phase of the report will examine the need for a second, crosswind runway.

**Public Transportation**

Public transportation service is provided throughout Huron County by Senior Enrichment Services of Huron County. This agency operates a fleet of vans and other vehicles, supported in part with funding from the Ohio Department of Transportation. Curb to curb transportation to and from any point in Huron County is available on demand, but the rider must call to request the ride 24 hours in advance. The cost of a cross-town ride in Norwalk is $2.00 in 2006. Transportation is also available in Norwalk from two local taxicab businesses.
Strategies and Recommendations

Recommendations from the 1997 Thoroughfare Plan were examined by the transportation resource panel and planning consultant, and several of them are incorporated where applicable, along with additional recommendations.

Strategy 1: Smooth and efficient flow of traffic

Strive to provide smooth and efficient transportation flow within the City, to nearby connecting highways, and by continuation of active transportation plan improvements when fiscally possible.

1. Utilize better access management, especially on major thoroughfares, to improve traffic flow. Access management involves minimizing the number of intersections with major arterials, eliminating or prohibiting entrances to and egress from individual private establishments, and developing parallel service roads to handle local traffic. In some cases, one-way streets can be considered and configured to eliminate multiple exits onto one street.

Access management has become increasingly necessary to overcome a number of adverse social, economic, or environmental impacts. Among those are an increased number of vehicle crashes, a reduction in roadway efficiency, unsightly commercial strip development, degradation of scenic landscapes, more cut-through traffic in residential areas because arterials are overburdened, and increased commuting time, fuel consumption, and vehicle emissions as driveways and traffic signals intensify congestion and delays along major roads.

City officials can consult the Ohio Department of Transportation’s “State Highway Access Management Manual”, which describes regulations that provide for greater safety and improved traffic flow on State highways. The strategies included in this manual can be applied to non-state highway arterials and thoroughfares as well. Further, some of the principles and practices of access management include the following (and are described in more detail on the following page):

- Limiting the number of driveway permits for an area, thereby restricting the number of driveways;
Principles of Access Management

The goals of access management are accomplished by applying the following principles (source: National Transportation research Board):

1. **Provide a Specialized Roadway System:** Different types of roadways serve different functions. It is important to design and manage roadways according to the primary functions that they are expected to serve.

2. **Limit Direct Access to Major Roadways:** Roadways that serve higher volumes of regional through traffic need more access control to preserve their traffic function. Frequent and direct property access is more compatible with the function of local and collector roadways.

3. **Promote Intersection Hierarchy:** An efficient transportation network provides appropriate transitions from one classification of roadway to another. For example, freeways connect to arterials through an interchange that is designed for the transition. Extending this concept to other roadways results in a series of intersection types that range from the junction of two major arterial roadways, to a residential driveway connecting to a local street.

4. **Locate Signals to Favor Through Movements:** Long, uniform spacing of intersections and signals on major roadways enhances the ability to coordinate signals and to ensure continuous movement of traffic at the desired speed. Failure to carefully locate access connections or median openings that later become signalized, can cause substantial increases in arterial travel times. In addition, poor signal placement may lead to delays that cannot be overcome by computerized signal timing systems.

5. **Preserve the Functional Area of Intersections and Interchanges:** The functional area of an intersection or interchange is the area that is critical to its safe and efficient operation. This is the area where motorists are responding to the intersection or interchange, decelerating, and maneuvering into the appropriate lane to stop or complete a turn. Access connections too close to intersections or interchange ramps can cause serious traffic conflicts that result in crashes and congestion.

6. **Limit the Number of Conflict Points:** Drivers make more mistakes and are more likely to have collisions when they are presented with the complex driving situations created by numerous conflict points. Conversely, simplifying the driving task contributes to improved traffic operations and fewer collisions. A less complex driving environment is accomplished by limiting the number and type of conflicts between vehicles, vehicles and pedestrians, and vehicles and bicyclists.

7. **Separate Conflict Areas:** Drivers need sufficient time to address one set of potential conflicts before facing another. The necessary spacing between conflict areas increases as travel speed increases, to provide drivers adequate perception and reaction time. Separating conflict areas helps to simplify the driving task and contributes to improved traffic operations and safety.

8. **Remove Turning Vehicles from Through Traffic Lanes:** Turning lanes allow drivers to decelerate gradually out of the through lane and wait in a protected area for an opportunity to complete a turn. This reduces the severity and duration of conflict between turning vehicles and through traffic and improves the safety and efficiency of roadway intersections.

9. **Use Nontraversable Medians to Manage Left-Turn Movements:** Medians channel turning movements on major roadways to controlled locations. Research has shown that the majority of access-related crashes involve left turns. Therefore, nontraversable medians and other techniques that minimize left turns or reduce the driver workload can be effective in improving roadway safety.

10. **Provide a Supporting Street and Circulation System:** Well-planned communities provide a supporting network of local and collector streets to accommodate development, as well as unified property access and circulation systems. Interconnected street and circulation systems support alternative modes of transportation and provide alternative routes for bicyclists, pedestrians, and drivers. Alternatively, commercial strip development with separate driveways for each business forces even short trips onto arterial roadways, thereby reducing safety and impeding mobility.
- Installing a median or other means to prevent left turns in areas where turning movements are being limited.
- Providing a turning lane and room for acceleration/deceleration for the planned limited access points.
- Ensuring clear views through limitation of signage and appurtenances at corners where limited access is allowed.
- Planning shared access to multiple sites through one driveway or roadway.
- Regulating the minimum distance between access points, and between intersections with cross-streets.

It is recommended that a corridor plan be developed for the U.S. 250 North corridor, from League Street north to the City limits. This corridor has witnessed significant growth in the number of adjacent businesses that generate traffic, as well as the number of vehicles and turning movements along this segment. Plans are underway to join Cline Street to Westwind Drive to the west of Route 250, providing access to a number of retail centers, including Drug Mart, the Apples shopping center, Wal Mart and the adjacent plaza, and a number of outlots. Longer-range plans may relieve corridor traffic further through a connecting road from Willard Avenue to Westwind, west of the Drug Mart and Norwalk Korners buildings.

The 250 North corridor should be planned more comprehensively, with the emerging Norwalk Commons mixed use complex, and other developments to follow. Corridor planning should consider turning lanes approaching intersections, service road alignment, sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians, improved intersections, where necessary, to accommodate truck turning movements, signalization at key intersections, and visual improvements (including landscaping, signage, construction of a gateway, and funding sources for corridor improvements). A plan should be developed within two years, and implemented within five years.

2. Define and improve truck routes to better move through and around town. While the completion of a northerly bypass is not likely, existing routes could be enhanced to handle truck traffic and turning movements. Northbound traffic can be directed on Route 61 as well as Cleveland and Akron Roads, to turn north on Schauss Avenue, using Republic Street through the Firelands Industrial Park to reach U.S. 250 north.

While it is recognized that the construction of a new bypass is improbable, given the funding constraints and priorities of the Ohio Department of Transportation, it is still important to advocate for the bypass improvement whenever appropriate. Future funding scenarios, coupled with increased tourist-based and other traffic, may make such a project – which would include a lengthy environmental review phase, acquisition of significant acreage, and engineering and construction – feasible at some future date. The bypass alignment would present a new corridor north of the existing terminus of the U.S 20 bypass, to the north, then curving northwesterly to join the existing U.S. 250 south of Milan.

A less expensive alternative to the new alignment of a U.S. 250 bypass is the upgrading and designation of existing roadways as a truck bypass. Such a bypass will involve
Greenwich-Milan Townline Road (which diverts from U.S. 250 south of Norwalk and joins SR 601 to the north, and which is scheduled for improvements by the Huron County Engineer). A closer bypass alignment would include Old State Road northward from U.S. 250 at the five-point intersection, widening Akron Road from Old State westward to Main Street, and improvements to the intersection of Main Street, Akron Road, and Schauss Avenue, which, with Ontario and Republic Streets to the north, could serve as segments of the bypass. Realignment and improvement of roadways to serve as truck bypasses and remove through traffic from the downtown can be considered a moderately long-range activity, taking up to ten years to complete.

3. New technology should be used to manage traffic lights and improve traffic flow, particularly along the SR 61 (Main Street) and U.S. 250 (Benedict/Whittlesey) arterials in the downtown. Potential use of newer technology should be pursued to manage traffic lights in this area and maximize traffic flow at any given time. It is possible that conversion of traffic lights may be cost prohibitive. Thus, it is suggested that a plan for overall system-wide improvement, especially in the Downtown area, be formulated, then budgeted to the extent possible within a multi-year capital improvements plan. This should occur within five years.

4. Improve the gateways to the City at U.S. 250 (North and South), Cleveland Road/Main Street (formerly Route 20), Akron Road (formerly Route 18), and S.R. 61 (East and West Main Street). A series of impressive and uniform gateways along each of these roads will convey a sense of entry into the City. Beyond the gateways, efforts should be considered to create a sense of “avenue or boulevard” with landscaping and other uniform treatments. See the Community Character chapter for more discussion of gateways, which should be constructed within two years.

5. Consideration should be given to turn lanes along busy segments where there are considerable turning movements. Turning lanes would aid traffic flow at major intersections along Benedict Avenue (such as Elm and Christie), at Christie and 

Gateways as they exist at U.S. Route 250 south (left) and Cleveland Road from the east (right).
Norwood (particularly impacted by the Middle School traffic), and for northbound traffic approaching Fair Road on Norwood. Turn lanes, which can involve acquisition of additional right of way, can be constructed within five years.

6. To maintain traffic flow during special events that involve street closures, consider temporary traffic patterns for the downtown area. It is possible that such detours should include one-way traffic on Seminary and Monroe Streets. This could be implemented within one or two years, if deemed necessary.

**Strategy 2: New or Modified Roadways, Future Thoroughfares, and Addressing Through Traffic (north-south)**

Include expectations for future thoroughfares and projected new traffic generators and destinations within transportation planning, and hold to that plan to accommodate future growth. Address the needs of through traffic (especially north-south) and truck traffic both through and within the City.

1. It is recommended that, subject to engineering feasibility studies and the City’s ability to finance these significant capital improvements, the following roadway improvements be planned in order to spur planned growth in target areas and improve accessibility and traffic flow within the City. These recommendations are depicted on the thoroughfare improvement map, and should be considered as long-range activities that will occur as the City grows, with their timeframe dependent upon the City’s rate of growth.

- Extend North West Street to the north to connect to an extended (to the west) Westwind Drive. Within the new rectangle of developable land that is bounded by these new roads, three streets might be extended north: Pleasant Street, Newton Street, and State Street.
- Extend Republic Street westward from its terminus at U.S. 250, to Plank Road, or further west beyond Plank Road to Whittlesey.
- Extend Pleasant Street from the point where it turns and becomes Elm Street (adjacent to Jaycee Park), southward to Fair Road. This extension will allow infill property, much of which is currently agricultural farmland, to be converted to residential development.
- Extend Industrial Parkway in the Firelands Industrial Park, which currently ends at a cul-de-sac, further east, to intersect with Route 601 or Perrin Road.
- Extend Firelands Boulevard, serving a residential subdivision on Norwalk’s south side, east to Old State Road, opening more land to residential development.
- Consider widening some of the City’s well-traveled roads, such as Benedict Avenue and Cleveland Road from East Main Street to the City limits.
- Extend Ohio Street westward to North West Street, using the Ohio Edison right-of-way along the former Pennsylvania Railroad corridor. This road extension will be helpful in providing access to businesses and industrial plants located on the west side of the city, and potentially for business access to the Wheeling and Lake Erie rail line.
2. To ease turning movements and traffic flow, improve intersections where major routes converge. Recommended intersections for improvement include:

- Cleveland Road and Old State Road
- East Main Street and Old State Road
- Old State Road and Townsend Avenue – eliminate the four way stop; allow through traffic on Old State.
- Williams and Willard Avenues on Milan Avenue. These streets need better demarcation.
- Milan Avenue at Cline Street. This intersection will be reconfigured when Cline Street is extended northward past the Drug Mart shopping area.

Strategy 3: **Vehicular and Pedestrian Safety**

Ensure that roadway planning accounts for vehicular and pedestrian safety, with well-maintained and marked roadways.

1. Consider the growing future needs for parking in Norwalk’s central business district, including exploration of alternatives to increase parking spaces in high-demand locations. Expanded street parking and lots are viable alternatives. While parking garages have been discussed, they are cost prohibitive without a significant revenue stream from parking fees.

Other measures can help improve the ability of customers and others to park in the downtown area. Business owners and employees should be encouraged to park in off-street lots, and not on the street. It should be understood by all stakeholders that on-street parking is for short-term use by customers and patrons, and that off-street parking is a preferable location for long-term parking by employees.

It has been widely acknowledged during the planning process that there is no significant parking problem in the downtown. Aside from a small number of critical times during special events, ample parking is available within one to two blocks of virtually every destination in the central business district. Rather than a parking problem, it is more likely that there is a parking perception problem. Drivers may not be aware of available parking lots and spaces. Thus it is recommended that free parking lots and their locations are promoted with improved signage, including wayfinding “you are here” maps, and with marked distances to lots from Main Street.
Certain portions of lots or spaces should be set aside for downtown residents’ long term parking needs, including the use of stickers for residents. Municipal zoning requires a set number of spaces per dwelling unit, but the creation of new upper floor housing units cannot always be accompanied by the creation of new parking spaces. Thus, the existing supply of spaces should be examined to determine which spaces are marginal for short-term parking purposes, but satisfactory in meeting residents’ needs. A downtown overlay zoning district could account for the realistic parking needs of specific uses downtown.

2. Promote a more pedestrian friendly, “Walk Norwalk” downtown. Consider an area within the central business district that is traversed by pedestrians only. Ensure safety in crossing the street through well-marked crosswalks and appropriate signalization. Enforce regulations prohibiting bicycles and skateboards downtown. These improvements can be introduced on an ongoing basis.

3. Maintain and expand the City’s sidewalk repair and installation program to ensure a people and pedestrian friendly City. Specific areas should be targeted for the installation of sidewalks, because of their potential for significant pedestrian traffic. These roadway segments include North West Street and Fair Road to the Huron County Fairgrounds, pedestrian routes to the Ernsthausen Recreation Center on Republic Street, and high traffic business/retail centers such as Route 250 North, which has also witnessed an increase in access to residential areas. Improve safety at crosswalks where sidewalks approach busy intersections. Other targeted areas for sidewalks include the reservoir and the Republic Street/Route 250 intersection.

4. Utilize the expertise of the Huron County Rails to Trails organization leadership and any potential grant funding sources to expand bicycle trails throughout the City. (See the Quality of Life chapter for details on bicycle trail planning). Encourage visitors to the Downtown area with signage at trailheads leading into the central business district and around the City.

5. Explore the potential of developing the Norwalk Creek area as a “river walk” type of resource. Clean up the area, straighten the channel to improve flow and reduce flooding, and remove trees along the banks. See the Natural Resources chapter for more recommendations on Norwalk Creek.

Strategy 4: **Enforce Traffic Rules and Regulations**

Enforce standards and traffic rules and regulations systematically to improve safety and ease congestion on local streets, by practicing these ongoing strategies.

1. Utilize modern technology to improve traffic control devices and signals to provide for the most efficient flow of traffic and to enhance vehicular and pedestrian safety. Consider automatic signals that trigger for emergency vehicles. Use traffic studies and counting devices to assess current traffic patterns and signals, eliminating and adding signals as warranted. Improve traffic coordination within the Downtown area.
2. Enforce traffic ordinances now on the books. Assess traffic speed patterns at critical spots throughout the City and target patrol problem areas. Utilize reserve forces and bicycles, where appropriate, for traffic enforcement.

3. Be consistent in new street development and street improvements, consistently following City and state guidelines.

Strategy 5: **Support Airport Planning Efforts**

City and County government and economic development officials, as well as the Airport Board and Fixed Base Operator, should develop the Norwalk-Huron County Airport as an asset to the community and region, and to the business base.

There is no need to duplicate the planning effort now underway on behalf of the Norwalk-Huron County Airport; in lieu of specific strategies, it is recommended that the findings and recommendations of the current airport plan be supported and implemented as they are developed over the next one to two years, unless it is ascertained that formal airport planning is inconsistent with the goals of the City and this document. Nevertheless, the airport’s role as an economic development asset, and its location within a potential growth area, should be integrated in overall City development planning.

Strategy 6: **Railroad System**

Because of the potential and growing needs of industry and the desire to improve our assets to attract new industry, the City should work to maintain and facilitate improvements to the railroad system serving the City and its businesses.

1. Build a stronger alliance with the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad, especially the real estate and economic development staff, to create a more collaborative environment to foster potential growth in rail activity in Norwalk. This ongoing effort will involve NEDC, the City administration, developers, Realtors, and local businesses seeking rail access.

2. Explore the interest in expanded rail service of local industry as well as the potential interest in rail of business and industry that might be recruited to our area. NEDC would be the prime entity to carry out this task, which can be completed with an assessment of needs by 2008.

3. Identify and inventory the potential sites for rail service in the Norwalk area and strategize how partnerships and funding sources could be harnessed to develop these sites. Consideration should be given to the ready access of the switching capabilities at Hartland Center. NEDC, working with the City administration, can include this factor within their site analysis process, which is ongoing.

4. Consider more innovative uses of rail that do not require an actual industry rail siting, such as the use of container trucks at an industry site to move product to a local
container shipment area at a rail site. This is an ongoing activity involving NEDC and specific businesses within the Norwalk area. All these activities also involve close coordination with the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad.

Strategy 7: **Public Transportation**

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.

1. Explore ways to partner with the County as they continue to develop the consolidated public transportation system to provide for the area needs. This could include fixed route systems and/or pick-up points throughout the City. Primary entity is now Services for Aging, which is operating the consolidated system throughout Huron County. The City administration should work with them to ensure that Norwalk residents' needs are met effectively. This is an ongoing activity.

2. Encourage and collaborate with private enterprise to enhance the public transportation options. Business needs can be assessed by NEDC during their annual survey and visitation of businesses, and by HCDC during any retention and expansion survey processes.

3. Establish a shuttle service of a “Main Street Trolley” system from Norwalk Raceway Park to various pick-up points throughout the City. This activity can be explored by Services for Aging, as well as by the Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk Main Street Program, Norwalk Raceway Park, and other businesses interested in such a venture.

4. Investigate and promote options that provide out-of-county service for area residents. Such service has been provided in the past, but is subject to budgetary considerations. Services for Aging is the primary entity responsible for such planning and implementation. A preliminary assessment of feasibility could be completed by 2009, with implementation to follow, subject to funding, market demand, and feasibility.
Utilities and Infrastructure

Goals:

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 “City of the art” in accessibility, capacity, and speed. Explore the feasibility of achieving a totally wireless community.

Introduction:

The community forum and focus groups yielded some residents’ considerations and priority issues regarding utilities and infrastructure. Among the comments received were the following:

- Infrastructure should keep pace with growth
- Develop a plan to increase Norwalk’s raw water supply; a “perpetual” supply of water; work to develop a water line from Lake Erie, possibly using the right of way purchased by the City from railroad. Work with other entities (such as Erie County, Northern Ohio Rural Water Authority, or NORWA) to obtain this alternative source of water.
- Continue the City’s sidewalk, curb, and gutter replacement program
- Encourage “green” sources of energy. For example, consider use of windmills for supplemental energy; could be located in industrial parks
- Continue with storm and sanitary sewer separation
• Rural Water can supply another source of water to the City
• Consider development of a backup power supply for the City
• Curb and gutter is needed on East and West Main Street
• Fiber optic installation should be implemented
• Expand water and sewer south beyond the Route 20 bypass
• Fiber optics and wiring should be extended as underground utilities
• Aggregate purchase of utility services for consumers; bulk buying gas or electricity
• Cell phones should work anywhere in the City (and County).
• Develop an “eastern utility district” to serve developing areas to the east
• Stay current with new technology
• Competition for cable television
• Increase public access on cable television
• Need exists for an agreement with Rural Water; must come to terms to preserve land for development as industrial or commercial, requiring more water pressure and capacity than may be available unless City provides water

Current Facilities: Water

Norwalk’s public drinking water supply originates from a series of three reservoirs on the City’s southeastern corner, drawing water from the east branch of the Norwalk Creek. The Norwalk water treatment plant is located adjacent to the reservoir on Old State Road. This plant has a capacity of 4.0 million gallons of treated water daily, well in excess of average daily use of 1.75 million gallons, and peak use of 2.0 to 2.5 MGD. Recent improvements have included chemical storage upgrades.

Plans are underway to upgrade the water treatment plant. One project will improve the reaction basins (pools for water and chemicals to mix together) and, later, membrane filtration. The reaction basins will resolve a recent THM problem, and further regulations will be addressed as needed. Another project will repair the reservoir spillway. Both projects together are estimated to cost $1.25 million.

Treated water is stored in two elevated storage tanks: the 750,000 gallon tank at West Chestnut Street, and a newer 500,000 gallon tank at the Norwalk Reservoir.

Water consumption in Norwalk in recent years has actually decreased, due in great part to cost-saving conservation practices put in place by industry, including internal water recycling processes, and aggressive leak detection by the water distribution department.
Current Facilities: Wastewater

Norwalk’s wastewater treatment plant has a maximum capacity of 8.0 million gallons a day, with an average daily flow of 3.0 to 3.5 MGD. Construction is underway to correct and improve upon some deficiencies at the “front end” of the process. Improvements will include a new head works building and operations center, primary clarifiers, sludge storage tanks, and increased size of the equalization basin, providing a buffer for storm flows. The cost is estimated to be $7 to 8 million for the improvements at the plant site.

Once these improvements are complete, the front end of the plant will be able to handle up to 15 MGD, but the back portion will still be limited to the current 8 MGD. In the longer term, that portion of the plant can be upgraded and capacity increased through the addition of secondary (biological dissolve organics and solids) and tertiary (phosphorous) processes.

In addition to imminent plant improvements, significant plans are being put in place to improve the sanitary sewer system at key locations throughout the City, separating storm from sanitary sewage and thus correcting inflow and infiltration problems. The separation plan will see implementation over a fifteen-year period, and will involve the construction of new trunk lines at South Pleasant Street (in the vicinity of the Jaycee Park area), Washington Street (with a line to the north of Washington, connecting to the plant) and Cline Street.

Another long-term need cited by wastewater treatment officials is to acquire additional land for the treatment plant. While significant acreage to the west is owned by the City, it cannot be built upon, and there is a need to acquire acreage to the north to effectively accommodate growth. Expansion to the east is not practical because of the commercial land uses within close proximity in that direction. Acquisition will become necessary when the City begins planning for the secondary, “back end” improvements described previously.

Current Facilities: Other Utilities in Norwalk

Natural gas distribution is provided in Norwalk by Columbia Gas of Ohio. Electricity is provided by First Energy (Ohio Edison). The available voltage varies throughout the City, with 69kVA lines in some industrial areas. Telephone service is supplied by Verizon, and there are plans to upgrade their lines through the installation of optical fiber throughout the City. This process may take several years.
Cable television service throughout the City is provided by Time Warner, which also offers “Road Runner” cable Internet service and a new digital telephone option. High speed telecommunications for broadband Internet access can be obtained through a number of Internet Service Providers, including Advanced Computer Connections, Time Warner’s “Road Runner” service, HMC Limited, Dragon Internet, and Linden’s Satellite Communications. While Norwalk has not developed any provision to be a wireless or “wi-fi” community, several locations within the City, including the campus of Fisher Titus Medical Center and some retail locations, have become wireless.

**Future Infrastructure Needs Cited by Public Works Officials**

Some of the City’s known infrastructure needs have been described under the water or wastewater descriptions. A major improvement is the long-term control plan, a combination of wastewater treatment plant and sewer system improvements, estimated at $15 million in total, that will be undertaken over the next fifteen years. Other potential projects in various stages of conceptual development or planning include the following:

- Eventual need for infrastructure to serve new development occurring in the “Norwalk Commons” area, west from U.S. 250 along Stower Lane, and potentially further east.

- Infrastructure to service the growing north and northwest portion of the City. As noted, the sanitary sewer long-term control plan includes extending a new sewer trunk line north from North Pleasant Street to Shaffer Road, and east from Whittlesey Avenue to the treatment plant. A future extension of Westwind Drive or the development of additional subdivisions in this area will require new water distribution lines as well.

- The City continues to undertake a systematic replacement of deteriorating or undersized water lines. During the current year, a line will be replaced along Ohio and Jefferson Streets; a similar project was completed for Rose and Bouscay Avenues. In many such projects, smaller diameter lines (such as the four inch lines on Rose and Bouscay) are replaced with larger diameter lines.

- The provision of sanitary sewer lines, as well as water, to a potential growth area east of the City and roughly bounded by U.S. Route 20 to the north, S.R. 601 to the east, and S.R. 18 to the south has been under discussion for several years. This would enhance the development potential of land in the vicinity of the Norwalk-Huron County Airport, the Commerce Fields industrial park, and the Norwalk Raceway Park. While the City continues to study the feasibility, cost, and design of a sanitary sewer to cover this region, the provision of water would be subject to the newly executed agreement reached between the City of Norwalk and the Northern Ohio Rural Water Authority. Under this agreement, there are provisions for either entity to supply water in this region, depending upon the level of need and other factors.

- With steady growth occurring along Norwalk’s south side, a need has been perceived for a new water line just north of the U.S. 20 bypass, from the water treatment plant area west to
the Fisher Titus Medical Center and further west as needed. Currently, this area is only served by a twelve-inch line.

- Development south of the bypass may reach a level that requires sanitary sewer service. While the concept of a second wastewater treatment plant on the City’s south side has been discussed, preliminary engineering feasibility reports indicate that the construction of a trunk line with necessary lift stations, possibly following an alignment along the City’s western edge and linking to the new North Pleasant trunk line described previously, will likely be more feasible.

- Finally, need has been expressed for a water line that can bring water from a source to the north into the City of Norwalk. While the existing reservoir system has historically supplied the City’s needs, there have been incidents when the capacity of the reservoir system to provide for daily needs and also maintain adequate reserves has been strained. Therefore, it is agreed that a link to Lake Erie via some water resource, which may be Erie County or Northern Ohio Rural Water, should be explored, minimally to provide a secondary back-up source. Ultimately, it could become the City’s primary source of raw - or treated - water.

**Strategies and Recommendations**

The following recommendations were developed from community forums, and from a series of meetings held by a Utilities and Infrastructure resource panel. Panel members included representatives from the City administration.

**Strategy 1: Planning infrastructure improvements to guide and entice progressive, desired growth**

The City of Norwalk needs to ensure that growth is anticipated, either because of new businesses and industries that are considering a location in Norwalk, or because of new residential areas being added. The City needs to be prepared to provide the infrastructure that will be needed.

1. Continue to strive to accommodate new and expanding businesses and other entities that may plan to locate or grow in Norwalk, by providing sites and facilities with suitable water capacity, wastewater treatment capacity, and through communication and cooperation with energy providers, necessary electrical power and natural gas. This ongoing activity involves City officials (public works officials, Mayor, Council, water and wastewater departments), developers, utility companies, and the Ohio Department of Development and other utility financing agencies and authorities.

2. Consider and research methods by which Norwalk can gain a competitive advantage over other prospective development locations through its provision of water, wastewater collection, utilities, and other infrastructure. Factors may include pricing and price structuring, quality, capacity, level of compliance with U.S. and State authorities, “shovel-ready” sites with infrastructure in place, responsiveness to needs, storm drainage capabilities, or other factors. In some cases, the cost of utilities may be a significant
economic development issue, and efforts are needed to provide competitive pricing. Beginning in 2007, it should be possible to assemble a “rapid response team” to respond to specific prospects’ utility needs. Depending upon the issue, the team should be composed of City officials and developers, plus, potentially, an advisory committee of local leaders, including representatives of public utilities, to adequately brainstorm the problem and reasonable solutions. Also, NEDC and the Chamber should be involved as project advocates.

3. As part of the ongoing effort to supply adequate utility quality and quantity, keep public utilities involved and engaged as growth is anticipated. Be prepared to consistently address issues of quality and delivery of services throughout the community. Officials from the City and utilities should be involved, as well as NEDC, County and township officials as appropriate, and affected developers and businesses.

4. Replace underground utility lines as needed and complete the City’s sewer separation program. Continue to maintain Norwalk’s facilities, budgeting appropriate funds for maintenance and operation, and continue to plan for growth, which, while bringing new revenue sources, will also add new costs as the system grows. Involve City officials, as well as outside project funding programs, which may include the Ohio Department of Development, USDA Rural Development, Ohio Water Development Authority (OWDA), Ohio EPA, and the Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC), and financial consultants.

Strategy 2: Coordinate long range infrastructure plans with financial planning and the search for outside resources.

Long range facility and financial planning, including research for grants and low-interest loans, should be conducted concurrently and in a coordinated fashion. New sources of income may be needed to make a necessary project affordable, in addition to the existing and traditional sources of revenue. Revenues must not only fund and finance the construction of needed and desired improvements, but must also cover the maintenance, operation, and planned replacement of these facilities as needed. Thus, infrastructure planning must include a budgeting component (see “Capital Improvements Planning”, chapter 14).

1. The Norwalk water and wastewater departments maintain a capital improvement plan in spreadsheet form. It is recommended that this procedure be developed into a City-wide capital improvements planning process that would incorporate other items such as City building maintenance and construction, vehicles, possibly computer and IT systems, and other major capital expenditures. A Citywide capital improvements plan should be put in place and functional by 2009.

2. Investigate options for coordinating the City’s grant application processes. For example, one entity could be responsible as a clearinghouse for coordinating the application process when applying for grants to support the development of utility improvements. That entity could rely on City staff’s collective knowledge base that includes the variety of State and Federal programs funding water and wastewater projects, including grants and low interest loans. Grant research, proposal writing, and funding coordination
should be an ongoing effort, and may involve City officials, as well as business and economic development entities (NEDC) as applicable, and WSOS CAC, Inc., which provides information on environmental infrastructure financing and budgeting.

3. Options and policies should be explored where developers would share the cost of new infrastructure development that will serve the site of their development projects with the City. One possible form of assistance would be the use of tax increment financing, where a portion of a new development’s property taxes would be diverted to finance the cost of a needed public improvement. Tap fees can also be used to recoup initial costs of utility hookups. The use of such options, as well as other means to include private funding of improvements that benefit a specified private development, should be explored in every applicable case. This process will involve officials from the City administration, applicable developers, and in the case of economic development projects, may also involve NEDC.

4. Similarly, in cases where infrastructure is desired for a project outside the current City corporate limits, City officials should partner with applicable township officials, possibly using vehicles such as a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) or Cooperative Economic Development Agreement (CEDA) to share and distribute revenues from a given project. It may be necessary for the City and a township to jointly contribute to project costs initially, with an agreement to share revenues and hence a return on their joint investment. This should be an ongoing policy, and would involve City and applicable township officials, as well as officials at the County level, including the Commissioners, developers and land owners in the affected area, and economic development offices such as NEDC, HCDC, and the Chamber.

5. The inevitable spread of broadband Internet service may provide a future income source as well, helping finance public improvements related to communications infrastructure. This may emerge as a long-range public revenue source during the twenty-year planning period covered by this plan. City officials, Internet service providers, and development officials may be included in the development of this option.

Strategy 3: *Monitor and evaluate the needs of residents, businesses, and institutions to ensure that needs are met and to plan for prioritized improvements when they are not.*

1. Explore methods by which the City can discern whether the needs of community businesses, institutions, and residents are being met with regard to City-provided utilities. A task force can be employed to determine whether the entire population or a sample should be surveyed, other entities that should be included in a survey of needs, and the type of survey method that should be employed (door-to-door written questionnaire, telephone survey, Internet survey such as “Zoomerang”, or other methods). This survey should be convened by 2009. It would involve City officials, the appointed task force, and a consultant to oversee survey design and deployment.
2. Plan community forums, if feasible, to supplement the survey input, and to obtain additional input. City officials and other involved parties can be used to plan and complete the forums, by 2009.

Strategy 4: Develop and follow a progressive schedule of maintenance and replacement for water and sewer systems, streets, sidewalks, and other elements of infrastructure.

In recent years, the City has conducted or commissioned a number of engineering studies concerning specific projects. The development of such studies is an ongoing effort, and will always be necessary. It is also important to organize a long-range schedule for all maintenance and replacement projects. This is part of the capital improvements planning process described in chapter 14, and involves an effort to consider each project and its benefits and impact within the greater context of the City as a whole.

1. In order to provide for contingency or succession planning in the event of the retirement of a key City official with specialized and unique knowledge of public works projects and plans, all existing infrastructure and a history of its repair and replacement should be cataloged as accurately as possible. Research should be conducted into computer programs that can be used to set up the inventory, as well as helping plan for the systematic replacement or maintenance of these systems. Once the software options have been analyzed, the City should choose and purchase the most effective software. This process should be completed by the end of 2008, and will involve City officials, advisory consultants, and software vendors.

2. Using the expertise of department heads and managers, organize all existing schedules into a clear-cut plan for ongoing maintenance and replacement for the next twenty years. This would be a component of the overall capital improvements planning that is recommended as a formalized and Citywide process previously in this chapter, and should also involve a wide-ranging financing plan for improvements, including a formalized debt policy. A consultant and City officials should be involved in this process, which should be put in place during 2008. Officials should build in the necessary flexibility to allow for changes that will be necessary in the event of unexpected emergencies, new State or Federal mandates, or other unknown variables that may impact prioritization of projects and scheduling of maintenance or replacement.

3. As an ongoing element of the planning process, monitor the needed funds for all planned action items, and work with the administration and Council to set aside and revise, as necessary, the necessary funds for the planned maintenance and replacement program. This should be an ongoing activity, involving department leaders, the Mayor, the Finance Director, and City Council.
Strategy 5: **Monitor utility and infrastructure needs to allow for planned and orderly growth, and to ensure that a lack of infrastructure will not present a bottleneck to that development.**

If the community is to grow, utility companies, and the City as the provider of water and sanitary sewer services, must be proactive in providing needed sources of power, communication services, and other basic services. There should be an ongoing effort to work and communicate with utility companies to keep them aware of potential plans for growth.

1. As growth areas move from planning concepts to actual sites for planned growth, water and sanitary sewer lines must be planned, designed, and constructed. Resources must be identified to pay for these extensions, and may include grant and loan proceeds from applicable programs of USDA Rural Development, Ohio and US EPA, OWDA, OPWC, and other sources; tap fees for users; utility rate billing for users; and other sources such as tax increment financing as applicable. City and, as applicable, Township officials should be involved, as well as engineering firms, and landowners and developers. This is an ongoing process that will take place over the twenty-year planning period.

2. Maintain the City's wastewater treatment plant and undertake, through 2008, the planned improvements to the “front end” of the plant as described earlier in this chapter. This step, already underway, involves the City administration and wastewater treatment department, the project engineer, and the project contractor.

3. Plan for the future expansion of the wastewater treatment plant, by taking the following steps:
   - Consider new methods for the biological treatment process. After the plant improvements now underway are complete, the bottleneck to increased capacity will occur at the secondary and tertiary treatment processes. The City should then, subject to available finances, install the new secondary and increase the capacity of the tertiary processes, as the need becomes apparent (ongoing).
   - In order for the plant to undertake an expansion with an optimal design, the City should purchase the necessary land to the north, to allow for expansion. This should occur by 2009.

4. Coordinate with other elements of this comprehensive plan to implement the economic development and land use recommendations regarding growth areas. Specifically, consider extending water and sewer services to the east, with potential line extensions along U.S. 20 to the south, S.R. 601 to the east, and S.R. 18 to the north. Elements of this process include:
   - Further study of the eastern district growth area and its potential for specific land uses, as well as needs of present land uses, including the Norwalk-Huron County Airport and the Norwalk Raceway Park.
   - Coordinated study of likely water and sewer system demands placed by new uses.
• Costing of appropriate extension of water and sewer service, which may include, in addition to the distribution lines, such elements as pump stations, storm water retainage, and an elevated storage tower for water.

• Budgeting of expenses, likely utility billing revenues, and other revenue sources.

This process will involve City and Township officials, the Airport authority, property owners, the consulting engineer, and economic development officials from the City and County, and NEDC. Planning should begin in the short term, with the eastern district served by needed utilities by 2011.

5. Public utility companies serving Norwalk (Ohio Edison/First Energy, Columbia Gas of Ohio, Verizon) should be involved and engaged in planning for future growth, within developed areas and planned growth areas. This may be best achieved through scheduled, infrequent progress meetings (perhaps quarterly) or Internet correspondence that can update all parties on previous issues, new items of concern, and planned changes and growth. This process should be initiated in 2006.

6. The City should continue to coordinate with the Northern Ohio Rural Water Authority. Great strides have been made over the past year in developing a protocol for service to growth areas outside the traditional service area (bounded by the U.S 20 bypass). This process includes involvement of the City and Township, NORWA, developers and land owners, a consulting engineer, and economic development officials including NEDC and, as applicable, HCDC and other County officials.

Strategy 6: Provision of technology networks that are “state of the art” in accessibility, capacity, and speed.

In order to remain competitive, there is a need for Norwalk to keep up with the continued proliferation of advances in available technology. Voice, video, and data communication should all be included in plans to move forward within the City, as well as in cooperation with Huron County and the region. City officials will need to work with County officials and others to plan for systems that will serve the broad area necessary for providing needed services and anticipating technology changes into the future. Since technology advances and new platforms cannot be predicted with any reliability, the most important guidance is for the City to be flexible enough to adapt to new and emerging technologies that will best benefit the community, its business base, and its residents.

1. A meeting should be held with one or more consultants (including any qualified local-based provider) to lay groundwork for a master plan to provide needed and desired services. The broad-based team helping shape the configuration of Norwalk's technology should include City and County officials, one or more consultants, the Chamber, NEDC, Fisher Titus Medical Center, the Norwalk Public and Norwalk Catholic school systems, and emergency management organizations. If it is deemed appropriate, a task force can be appointed to conduct the research and make recommendations.
All three areas of communication (voice, video, and data) should be included in the plan, along with consideration of quality of service and prioritization of data. A network design can be developed with licensed and unlicensed spectrums in wireless, providing the proper design to avoid interference and other pitfalls. The plan must include, in addition to a listing of necessary capital improvements and equipment costs, a revenue and cost projection. The plan should be monitored continuously by the task force.

Any such plan must also include input from current communications providers, including Time Warner, which supplies digital television, cable Internet, and, now, digital telephone service within the City of Norwalk. The other primary service provider is Verizon, which has a plan to serve the entire community with fiber optic cable, providing an opportunity for high-speed Internet service as well as improved telephone service.

**Strategy 7 Provide a perpetual supply of sufficient water to support the future population and business base.**

A critical goal of this comprehensive plan is to ensure that there will be an adequate source for the provision of water to supply future growth and needs. It is believed that the best plan will involve joining the Lake Erie grid. A worthwhile plan to use Huron River water was developed several years ago, but it is widely believed (and it is the consensus of the Utilities and Infrastructure Resource Panel) that this new opportunity will be most advantageous to the City of Norwalk.

1. Make a commitment to achieve a connection with a raw or treated water provider on the Lake Erie grid. Potential suppliers include the City of Sandusky and/or Erie County, and the Northern Ohio Rural Water Authority, all of which are capable of supplying water of sufficient volume to serve the City of Norwalk. This can be a backup to the existing water supply, now derived from Norwalk Creek through the use of an upground reservoir. It is possible that the connection can be made by using the City-owned right-of-way to a former rail line running north from the City to the Milan area. Alternatively, a new line can be constructed by or in cooperation with Erie County or NORWA.

   Construction should be complete with the new supply connected within ten years.

2. Plans should be made to increase water storage or treatment facilities as required to meet future water quality standards and fire code benchmarks. Such planning is an ongoing effort, involving the City Water Department and consulting engineers, as well as the Ohio EPA and other regulatory agencies. No short-term need for additional treated water storage has been identified at present.

3. Over the longer range of this plan, the City will need to assess the benefits and costs resulting from remaining in the business of treating and supplying water. At some critical point (possibly when a new mandate requires a significant capital expenditure to upgrade water treatment or distribution), this analysis should be performed, with one of two outcomes: either the City’s system will be upgraded under City ownership, or the City will contract with an outside provider for the provision of sufficient treated water,
subject to all regulations and requirements. When and if this becomes a significant issue, it is recommended that a blue ribbon panel be empanelled to discuss the alternatives available, and the relative benefits and costs of each.
Community Facilities

Goals:

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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.

Introduction

Many of Norwalk’s community facilities, whether owned and operated by local government or nonprofit corporations, are considered among the City’s finest and most treasured assets. Many of these facilities are strong and growing institutions with which many residents identify. A number of them have made strong, recent commitments to improve physical plant or construct entirely new buildings, and the combined growth of many of these community facilities have changed the face of Norwalk. The growth of public and private facilities along Shady Lane, from the Fisher-Titus campus to the Norwalk High School, is evidence of the level of civic investment in the community and County.

In several cases, large investments have helped an institution or organization in positioning for future population growth and a resulting increase in demand for services.
Simultaneously, institutions are investing in significant technology upgrades – such as the creation of a totally “wireless” campus at Fisher-Titus Medical Center, and advances in distance learning and computer labs in Norwalk’s schools.

This chapter will review the current location and condition of a number of community facilities, largely concentrating on buildings, then list the recommendations developed for each. For continuity of presentation, information and recommendations will be grouped around each community facility. In some cases, such as police and fire protection and recreation centers, Norwalk’s municipal government has overall control. In other cases, such as medical care, schools, and the public library, the City is an active partner in supporting the facility in serving and improving the quality of life of Norwalk’s community members.

For all community facilities, several general principles should apply, and should be taken into consideration during their planning processes. These general considerations include:

- Will the facility as proposed most effectively enhance Norwalk’s quality of life?
- Will the facility as proposed meet the needs of all age groups?
- Is the facility site accessible to its users, with adequate provision for access by drivers and pedestrians, and parking?
- Is there a stream of revenue to pay for the facility’s construction, as well as its ongoing maintenance and operation?
- Is consideration given to all reasonable alternatives, including the use of existing facilities and space within the community, as well as the construction of new facilities?
- Is facility planning undertaken in coordination with other elements of planning outlined in this comprehensive plan, including provision of utilities and infrastructure, transportation, existing and emerging adjacent and nearby land uses, projected spatial and population growth trends, and environmental compatibility of the proposed site?

Input was sought by the resource panel from leaders representing each of the facilities and institutions described below, and their input is included within the recommendations.

**Input from Community Forums**

During the October 2004 forums, community members had much to say about the community’s facilities, and many were consistently listed among the City’s greatest assets. Comments pertaining to community facilities included the following:

- Strong library; expand the library
- Expand or construct a new fire station
- Continue growth of Fisher-Titus Medical Center
- Ensure landfill (transfer station) continues as a destination for trash in 20 years
- Expansion of school libraries
- Alternative learning center and classroom availability for lifelong learning, adult learning
- Provide for urgent care needs
- City and County government buildings are important elements in the downtown area.
Community Facilities and Recommendations

1. General Government Facilities

Norwalk’s City Hall houses its administrative offices, including the Finance department, Law Director’s office, Mayor and Safety Service Director’s offices, Clerk of Council’s offices, and the Zoning/Inspection department and Public Works offices. The building is centrally located on Whittlesey Avenue and is in good condition. There are no plans to renovate or expand the building. Should there be a need for expansion, the building could be extended to the east into an existing short-term parking area.

Huron County has operated a number of offices within the County Administration Building on Milan Avenue. This property has several meeting rooms, extensive off-street parking, and it houses the County Commissioners and their staff, the County’s Education Services Center, the County’s General Health District and clinics, the County election board offices, the County’s Cooperative Extension offices, and the Huron County Development Council offices.

The County purchased the former Citizens National Bank building (12 E. Main St.) adjacent to the Huron County Courthouse in downtown Norwalk (renamed the County Office Building), and more recently, they purchased the former Outdoorsman Building for future expansion and records maintenance. While the Courthouse now exclusively houses the County’s juvenile, probate, and common pleas courts, the County Office Building houses the County’s Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder, and Prosecuting Attorney’s offices. The Public Defender is located next door, at 16 E. Main Street. The ownership by the County of virtually the entire block from the Courthouse to the former Outdoorsman building ensures that Huron County should have sufficient office, meeting, and storage space into the foreseeable future.

Other important County offices include the County Engineer’s facility on West Jefferson Street and several offices in the Shady Lane complex and on Shady Lane Drive, including the Department of Job and Family Services, Sheriff’s office and former jail, and Emergency Management office. The older Shady Lane complex houses the license bureau and title office, Services for Aging and its public transportation service, Veteran’s Services, and the
County dog warden. The Shady Lane area is well suited to public purposes requiring public access, as off-street parking can be designed into the planning process, and the location of Shady Lane Drive on Norwalk’s south side, close to Route 250 and the U.S. 20 bypass is accessible from other locations throughout the County. Services for Aging is analyzing alternatives for the construction of a new senior center to serve the Norwalk area and house administrative offices.

**Recommendations:**

1. It is recommended that Services for Aging include co-locating at least some of their activities and programming to the Ernsthausen Recreation Center when that facility undertakes an expansion. The potential for intergenerational activities and the potential for increased use of the Ernsthausen facility by a growing elderly population presents a number of opportunities to improve the quality of life for many residents.

2. Consider maximizing the use of existing City and County office buildings, including their potential as venues for meetings.

**2. Police Services**

Norwalk has a full-time police department with 24 full time officers, six full time dispatchers, a full time clerk and a part time clerk. Assuming a current population of 17,000, Norwalk has 1.41 officers per 1,000 population.

Norwalk’s police station (right) also houses the City’s Municipal Court, which is used as a meeting place by City Council. Constructed in 1997, the building is expected to serve the City’s needs for the next twenty years.

Police response times range from two to five minutes for 911 calls, with some delays in responding to more congested growth areas to the north. According to the police chief, the greatest change in the police department is the increasingly time-consuming nature of police work through changes in the law, liability management, increasing documentation requirements, and meeting citizens’ expectations. Other trends and concerns include an increase in drug activity, mounting traffic concerns, and Internet fraud. The relatively new police station continues to adequately serve the current needs of the City’s law enforcement and justice systems.

**Recommendation:**

1. Review the need for improvements and upgrades to the City’s police facilities and technology (such as in-car computers) on a regular basis, perhaps every five years.
3. **Fire and EMS Services**

Norwalk’s fire department operates out of a centrally located fire station that was constructed in 1912. While the location is excellent for response time throughout the City and service area, the station itself presents limitations in storage of equipment and space for training and housing personnel. Clearance for some vehicles is two inches, and the building is not energy efficient. The present building has no facilities for training, restroom facilities are antiquated, and there is no room for loading hose, performing vehicle maintenance, or storage for turnout gear and other firefighting needs. Construction of a larger facility (or expansion of the existing one) that would take advantage of the current, central location is possible, but would require clearance of a larger site and a reduction in the size and capacity of adjacent parking lots.

There is a need to study all alternatives in the near future. The current site is beneficial because of its central location and the resulting low response times (the primary locational criterion). An alternative site would need to be within proximity of the current location to continue to produce similar response times to all destinations within the service area. Because of the low-acreage need to support a fire station site, it is hoped that one or more suitable central sites would be possible for consideration.

This plan projects a continued outward pattern of growth, with residential and commercial growth to the north, industrial growth to the east, and residential development continuing to the south. This balance of geographic growth may further indicate the continued need to maintain a geographically central location, but also points to the need to take steps to maintain traffic flow that can accommodate firefighting equipment on those “spoke” arterials that radiate out from the City center, such as East and West Main Street, Cleveland and Akron Roads, and U.S. Route 250 through Norwalk. The construction of access roads and parallel roads to relieve these arterials of significant local traffic will help meet this need.

The most significant expense is not the construction of a fire station, but the cost of staffing it. For this reason, a second fire station or substation may be fiscally impractical if response times can continue to be satisfactory with a single facility.

The Norwalk Fire Department has 18 full-time State certified firefighters, with three shifts of four to five people, as well as administrative and inspection personnel. It serves all of Norwalk, as well as providing fire protection coverage for Norwalk Township and Bronson Township, making a 50 square mile service area. The department maintains a run volume average of 600 incidents per year, providing all fire, rescue, haz-mat, and basic life support services.
North Central EMS serves Norwalk, with a station on Woodlawn Avenue. North Central provides emergency and non-emergency ambulance transport, mobile intensive care transport, special need care transports, and wheelchair van operations. Dispatching is handled in their central facility in Milan, five miles north of Norwalk, with support as needed from other nearby stations.

**Strategies and Recommendations:**

1. The 1912 fire station is not adequate for present day equipment, personnel, and citizen needs. Alternatives should be studied by a consultant and City officials, and considered by a task force of citizens, applying criteria of current and projected response times, staffing impacts, and financial considerations, as well as other factors. Such alternatives include modifying or expanding the current facility, constructing a new facility on the current site, constructing a new station on a new central site, and consideration of more than one facility (which carries considerable financial implications regarding staffing).

   As alternatives are weighed and a decision is made concerning a solution, attention must be given to the measurable standards: response time, staffing per 1,000 residents, and other factors bearing on ISO recommendations and NFPA Standard 1710. The study of alternatives should be complete by 2010.

2. Maintain a schedule of equipment replacement and a fleet of reliable vehicles (ongoing). Within the next ten years, a pumper and aerial truck will need to be replaced.

**4. Education Facilities**

Both the Norwalk City Schools and the Norwalk Catholic Schools have recently committed to major investments in their school facilities. A major enlargement of the St. Paul High School has been completed. Previously, Norwalk constructed a new high school, first utilized for the 2001-2002 school year, and converted a portion of its former high school to the Main Street School serving all of the system’s fifth and sixth graders. This latter plan helped relieve the system’s three elementary schools, which had previously housed fifth graders, as well as
Norwalk Middle School, which included sixth grade. During the late 1990’s St. Paul also completed the construction of a new Convocation Center on their campus.

Norwalk’s school facilities and recent (2005-2006) enrollment figures include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norwalk High School</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>350 Shady Lane Drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwalk Middle School</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>64 Christie Avenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street Intermediate</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>80 E. Main St.</td>
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<tr>
<td>League Elementary</td>
<td>K-4</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>16 E. League St.</td>
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<td>Maplehurst Elementary</td>
<td>K-4</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>195 St. Mary’s St.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pleasant Elementary</td>
<td>K-4</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>16 S. Pleasant St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerken Center</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>120 Shady Lane Drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul High School</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>93 E. Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul Elementary</td>
<td>PreK-8</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>93 E. Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary Elementary</td>
<td>PreK-8</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>77 State St.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the recent improvements described earlier in this section, Norwalk City Schools have also expanded the Main Street School to alleviate potential overcrowding in the fifth and sixth grades, with the addition of five new classrooms. Additionally, Norwalk High School was designed with the capability to easily add new classroom sections at the end of two existing hallways.

**Recommendations:**

1. Maintaining a strong public school system and a strong parochial school system is in the best interest of the City of Norwalk. Adequate facilities are essential for both the public and parochial systems. School systems project slow growth in enrollment, within the capacity of their facilities, for the foreseeable future, after current expansion projects at St. Paul and the Main Street School are completed. Thus, no specific expansion projects are proposed here. Periodic analysis of capacity in light of projected enrollment should be carried out, however, with planning for responsive expansion as necessary.

2. Encourage the attraction of a satellite location of an area college or university to Norwalk, either in a facility of their own or a shared facility within Norwalk. As one option, effort should be expended to utilize existing facilities, such as the Norwalk High School, as a satellite location for existing colleges and universities. Should demand warrant it, a new extension could be constructed onto the high school to accommodate a “lifelong learning center” that would be utilized by a combination of adult education providers, including colleges and universities, community colleges, and other educational institutions. With sufficient demand, an economic analysis could determine whether rents paid by these institutions could finance long-term construction debt and operating costs for a new lifelong learning center. If this is not feasible, coordinated and increased use can be made of the existing facilities at the high school. Options should be considered and the selected alternative implemented within five years (2012).

3. The local district in conjunction with local government should provide facilities to make basic literacy programs available to the City’s undereducated and Hispanic populations to
help them become productive workers and participants in the community. While these activities could be provided along with “lifelong learning” activities at the high school, literacy and ESOL programming may be better attended in a less institutional setting. Such a facility should be sought and developed for use within five years (2012).

5. Norwalk Public Library

The Norwalk Public Library contains over 62,000 books, 4,400 audio items, nearly 50,000 video items, and 182 periodical subscriptions in its facility on West Main Street. The library has given an extended lease to Hill’s Interiors, which occupies the adjacent building on West Main Street. That lease extends until 2010. The Library Board intends to expand the library into the Hill’s Interiors building, but will need to go to the voters to complete renovations of the current 11,000 square foot facility at 46 West Main Street and the Hills Building at 38 West Main Street.

Norwalk Public Library

The library offers a range of materials and programming for children and adults, with special events, Internet training, and several computers available for patrons to conduct research.

Recommendations:

1. Support the planning process being undertaken by the Library Board and leadership to expand into the Hills building. Provide assistance in this planning effort as appropriate, including support for public funding of the improvements. Timing should follow a schedule to be set by the Library Board.

2. Additionally, the library should explore a partnership with Norwalk City Schools to set up a library branch co-located with the media center in Norwalk High School on Shady Lane Drive. Such an additional satellite location can increase accessibility and patronage of the library, and cooperative initiatives between the library and school can be explored.

6. Medical Facilities

Norwalk is fortunate to be home to a progressive and growing independent hospital, which was recently expanded with the construction of the Patient Pavilion (as shown in the picture at the beginning of this chapter). Fisher-Titus has been the catalyst for the development of a 49-acre medical campus housing a variety of medical specialists, as well as other amenities such as a kidney dialysis center. The hospital also owns and operates the Carriage House, located within the
hospital campus and providing assisted living facilities, and the Norwalk Memorial Home, a nursing home that is attached to the hospital.

More than 100 area physicians representing twenty specialties are members of FTMC’s medical staff. The hospital is licensed for 112 beds, and it offers such high tech diagnostic and treatment equipment as PET scanning and Magnetic Resonance Imaging. Other areas of service include family-centered birthing, physical rehabilitation, mammography, oncology, cardiac rehabilitation, and general medicine.

Fisher-Titus updates its strategic plan every two to three years. One trend impacting health care is a longer life expectancy, with a larger older population that will tax the healthcare system. The new Patient Pavilion was a result of past strategic planning, and its completion is followed by planning and implementation of new oncology and therapy facilities. The 2005 strategic plan includes the following goals:

- Expansion of specialty clinical services: cardiac, pulmonary, and vascular care.
- Improvement of clinical care models and standards, and investment in the improvement of the skills of those professionals who provide the care, including specialty nursing.
- Retention and recruitment of qualified individuals in a shrinking skilled labor market.
- Continuing the implementation of a clinical information system that provides for an electronic medical record.
- Improvement of customer relations and communications, including a focus on communicating performance measurement data, ensuring sufficient facility capacities, and improving customer service.

Recommendations:

1. There is a need in the community for an urgent care facility to address the health care needs of those individuals who do not have a primary care physician, or who experience a need for non-emergency medical attention when a physician is not available. Fisher-Titus Medical Center recognizes this, and such a care facility is incorporated within their Phase III improvement. This facility will address minor injuries and routine illnesses, as distinct from the services required of an emergency room. Patients are screened (triage) to ascertain a non-emergency condition.

2. The community should support the ongoing planning of their local hospital, which includes an ongoing upgrade of technology and diagnostic services and equipment, as well as the addition of new areas of specialization that allow patients to receive superior medical attention without having to travel.

3. Fisher-Titus has become Norwalk’s largest employer and it generates significant traffic by patients and visitors. The City should continue to ensure that the local roadway system (particularly Benedict Avenue and Shady Lane), signage, and signalization are adequately handling the ensuing traffic flow.
7. Recreation Facilities

While parkland and park facilities are addressed in the Land Use chapter, this section addresses plans for Norwalk’s buildings and structures related to recreation. The City Park and recreation department operates two community centers. The original center, on Monroe Street, provides limited facilities with a basketball court. Recently, it has housed an active dodge ball league. In the past, it has hosted dances for middle and high school aged teens.

The “crown jewel” of recreation facilities is the Ernsthausen Community Center on Republic Street. This facility, which has been expanded once with the addition of a natatorium, houses a spa area, gymnasium, mini-gym, community meeting room, therapy and competition pools, outdoor pool, exercise room with assorted equipment, cardio room with an array of cardiovascular workout machines, stationary “spinning” bicycles, an indoor track, and racquetball courts. Numerous activities are offered over the course of a year at this building. The makeup of this center is in response to such trends as the aging of baby boomers and the resulting emphasis on long-term fitness.

A number of facilities also exist at the Memorial Lake reservoir as well, including a community meeting building and several shelters. The list and location of Norwalk’s community, neighborhood, and pocket parks are presented in the land use chapter.

The Park and Recreation department has provided a list of plans for the expansion of the Ernsthausen Center to better serve Norwalk’s residents. These plans include: doubling the size of the weight and cardio equipment area, a driving force for use and support of the entire center; addition of a water playground area (a “splash-ground”) for young families with toddlers; a third indoor pool, possibly a wave-action pool, to accommodate more school swimming programs and evening fitness or therapy-related classes; a teen center that could accommodate such activities as laser-tag, video or computer simulated games, and food/beverage concessions; facilities for senior activities and intergenerational activities involving seniors, including a lounge area with card tables, sofas, and a library (and working cooperatively with Senior Enrichment Services); expanding the gymnasium with multi-purpose space, allowing for more “open gym” availability and capacity to provide space for basketball, badminton, volleyball, and indoor soccer courts; a viewing area over the natatorium; and such possible additions as a birthday party room adjacent to the pools, more spacious family changing rooms, a food court, climbing wall, and additional locker rooms.

Plans for Memorial Lake Park include completion of the paved walking trail that will completely encircle one reservoir, and construction of an amphitheater to host musical and other events and presentations.
Recommendations:

1. As noted elsewhere in this Comprehensive Plan, provision must be made for recreation facilities to expand with the growth of the community and its population. To this end, developers of residential subdivisions should be required to set aside areas for recreation or make financial provision for acquisition and development of parks within walking distance of emerging residential areas. Plans must also be established to ensure the long-term maintenance of those facilities.

2. Also discussed elsewhere in this document, the Park Board and Recreation department should be responsive to emerging trends in needs for significant segments of the community, subject, of course, to budgetary constraints. Three specific areas include:
   - The construction of additional soccer fields to accommodate the growing demand and to centralize the city’s soccer facilities.
   - Partnering with the local skateboard association to construct a safe and attractive community skate park.
   - Expanding the capacity of the City to accommodate the growing demand for adult softball. Existing diamonds are fully scheduled and another field or two would help alleviate the overcrowded conditions, particularly at Baines Park.

3. Create a master plan with prioritized needs for the expansion of the Ernsthausen Recreation Center. Components of the plan should be implemented when the need can be demonstrated. The plan should address the weight and cardio fitness facilities and the expansion of the aquatic center. The plan must also include provisions for the long-term maintenance of the facility.

4. Partner with the County’s Senior Enrichment Services to provide expanded senior services at the Ernsthausen Center. These expanded services could include meeting areas and lounge and cooking facilities. Locating a senior center at the recreation center would allow seniors to take full advantage of the health and recreation facilities already available.

Capital Improvements Planning

The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to report on the consensus of opinion regarding Norwalk’s preferred future and the general goals that frame that vision, and to chart the recommendations and steps necessary to achieve that vision. The plan, however, will remain only a vision until the necessary resources are identified and earmarked to fund the recommended projects. Resources, of course, are limited, and it is necessary to prioritize projects and stagger their implementation over time in order to achieve the maximum benefit to the community.

It is recommended that the City initiate citywide capital improvements planning. Many individual departments within the City already prioritize, budget, and schedule major capital improvements projects, but there does not appear to be a “big picture” where all such projects are viewed as a whole.
The basic function of a capital improvements plan (CIP) is to provide a formal mechanism for decision making, a link to long range planning as documented within the Comprehensive Plan, a financial management tool, and a reporting document.

As a financial management tool, the CIP can prioritize current and future needs to fit within the anticipated level of financial resources, considering the operating and maintenance costs that will be incurred along with the construction or replacement of infrastructure. A CIP can also communicate to citizens the City’s capital priorities and plans, as well as expected sources of funding for projects.

In terms of planning, a CIP can ensure that the projects that are selected are the ones that best serve the needs of a majority of citizens. Further, during the CIP process, it is important to coordinate the community’s needs with its ability to pay.

A City-wide CIP will improve inter- and intra-governmental cooperation and communication. Opportunities may exist to schedule projects from different departments in a coordinated manner to ensure an effective use of resources, to reduce duplication of programs between departments and units of government, and to share in joint efforts that could reduce the costs to all residents. The multi-year focus of the CIP process allows for scheduling of phases of projects that can be coordinated to ensure the projects are finished on time. Finally, when capital projects are prioritized and scheduled to fit within expected funding, the planning will reduce the occurrence of dramatic tax increases or user fees to fund capital projects.

Suggested steps in the formalized capital improvements planning process include the following:

1. Establish the administrative structure and identify all participating departments and individuals, as well as a central coordinating office or individual.

2. Establish the policy framework for the CIP (such as a desired level of service).

3. Formulate evaluation criteria to determine capital spending levels and to guide capital project selection. Criteria to evaluate projects should be clearly defined and agreed upon before the selection of capital projects begins. Criteria may include fiscal impact, health and safety effects, community economic effects, and environmental and social effects.

4. Prepare a capital needs assessment, taking into account the maintenance of existing infrastructure as well as the construction of new infrastructure. It is helpful to develop an inventory of assets, including the age, condition, maintenance history and replacement cost of the asset. Also, it is important to identify future needs by reviewing and forecasting demographic information, land use patterns, and other relevant information.

5. Determine the status of previously approved projects and identify new projects.
6. Assess the financial capacity of the City to undertake new capital projects. Look at past, present, and future trends in revenue generation, debt levels and ratios, changing regulations, and shifting demographics, to determine the amount of funds available from existing revenue sources to pay for capital projects.

7. Evaluate funding options. It is important that the City look at all possible financing options.

8. Compile, evaluate and rank project requests and undertake financial programming. This is where project requests are evaluated and prioritized, and projects are ranked. Once the ranking is completed, funding sources are identified and the year the project will be undertaken will be determined.

9. Adopt a capital program and a capital budget.

10. Implement and monitor the capital budget and projects.

11. Evaluate the CIP process.

In general, the CIP process will help City officials in making correct and optimal long term decisions that will benefit the community as a whole, from the perspective of finances as well as service delivery and quality of life.

**Other Recommendations:**

1. In response to input at community forums and focus groups regarding the potential provision of public restrooms in the central business district, the existing public restrooms at the Huron County Courthouse should be utilized rather than constructing new facilities downtown.

2. Municipal and County government should partner to ensure that landfill facilities, specifically the existing transfer station at the former Huron County landfill, are available in the foreseeable future to support business expansion and retention.

3. Maintain a cooperative attitude with County government to maintain a continued presence in Norwalk, specifically in the downtown area.
## Goals:

1. Build upon the successful work of existing City and Township 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.

## Introduction:

Economic development can be described as activity that retains or expands a community’s job opportunities and its tax base. Efforts to increase job generators and tax base usually entail the growth of the physical stock of the community. New economic activity involves
the creation of new industrial and commercial land uses. Inevitably, these new uses produce spin-offs, with the subsequent creation of ancillary businesses, the expansion of existing businesses, and the development of new residential areas to accommodate new employees and their families. Thus economic development is inextricably linked to land use and community growth.

The community forums and focus groups produced a number of comments regarding several aspects of business and economic development. They included the following:

- Expand industrial parks, develop vacant property; develop a use for abandoned properties
- Lack of rail spur sites
- Aggressive pursuit of more industry; obtain sufficient industrial tax base to support local operations; reinvention of the industrial base
- Support existing industry: “take care of what you have”
- Invest with local entities – keep money here
- Provide financial assistance to reduce start-up costs for new business; encourage entrepreneurs
- Need to support families with good wages; competitive wages
- Be ready for jobs to come back to the U.S. (anticipating a “backlash” after the initial shift of manufacturing and other jobs to China, India, and other “low cost” locations); more global view of our marketplace
- Encourage specialized small business, including high tech; protect family-owned local business
- Investigate creation of a Foreign Trade Zone; pursue Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) agreements with Townships
- Professional job opportunities; job security; jobs to keep youth in the community
- Retraining to get better jobs
- Overcome language barrier of some to job opportunities
- Balance growth and preservation; maintain small town feel and quality of life
- Position Norwalk as a destination, focusing on a retail/tourism district and Norwalk Raceway Park
- Building code to guarantee quality; need more formalized process for approvals, using a checklist
- Provide transportation to work
- Find win/win approach with school districts where possibly growth can be encouraged in their district only if tax revenues are shared with the Norwalk School District.

**Norwalk’s Economic Base**

The Census Bureau’s “County Business Patterns” provides information on businesses by employee size and economic sector, broken down by county and zip code. The following table presents information on the makeup of the 601 business establishments counted in the survey.
Table 9-1:
Number of business establishments in 44857 Zip Code by # of employees, 2003

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<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
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<th>1-4 emps</th>
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<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-49</th>
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Source: U.S Census, County Business Patterns, 2003

The above table depicts a fairly diversified local economy, with the community supporting (and supported by) eighteen enterprises employing 100 or more employees, and another nineteen employing 50 to 99 workers. These are the businesses that are most likely to require significant acreage and land devoted to their land use. Of the businesses employing fifty or more, three are involved in construction, sixteen are manufacturers, four are retail businesses, two involve transportation or warehousing, one involves information, two are involved with administration or support, four are involved with health care (with the largest being Fisher-Titus Medical Center), three are accommodations or food services, and two involve some other service.

In terms of the sheer number of establishments, the retail sector leads the way, with 106 establishments, followed by construction (with 78) and “other services” (with 77).

Construction is an unusually large sector in Norwalk, with particular emphasis on highway construction. Norwalk highway contactors conduct business throughout the State of Ohio and in other states as distant as Florida.
The diversity of the local economy is further documented by the variety of manufacturing products created within the 44857 Zip Code, and with no more than three establishments producing any given product. The largest manufacturers in terms of employment include upholstered household furniture, metal coating and engraving, nonwoven fabrics, commercial bakeries, folding paperboard boxes, custom resin compounding, printed circuit board manufacturing, and machine tool (metal cutting) manufacturing.
boards, motor vehicle bodies, and surgical and medical instruments. Indeed, one of the assets of the Norwalk area economy is the diversity of its manufacturing base, and thus its ability to weather volatility in specific manufacturing sectors such as the automotive sector.

Most Norwalk residents who work are employed in Norwalk: according to the 2000 Census, 4,096 of Norwalk’s 7,497 residents (or 54.6 percent) who reported working were employed in the City. Mean travel time to work for a Norwalk resident was 17.0 minutes, as compared to means of 20.2 for all Huron County residents and 22.9 minutes for Ohio residents as a whole.

Table 7 in the demographics chapter highlighted the occupations and employment sectors of Norwalk’s residents. As noted in chapter 2, the largest number of the City’s employed residents (2,372 of 7,677, or 30.9 percent) were employed in production, transportation, and material moving occupations, as compared to 19.0 percent statewide. On the other hand, just 1,762 (or 23.0 percent) were in management, professional, and related occupations, as opposed to 31.0 percent statewide.

The same table presented the number of employees in each sector. The table revealed that of the 7,677 residents counted, 2,338 (or 30.5 percent) were employed in manufacturing (vs. only 20.0 percent statewide). This was followed by 1,279 (16.7%) in educational, health and social services, 906 (11.8%) in retail trade, 658 (8.6%) in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food service, and 527 (6.9%) in construction.

Norwalk Economic Development Corporation

Norwalk’s primary economic development entity is the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation (NEDC), whose mission as a public-private partnership is “to identify and capitalize on opportunities to continuously improve the Norwalk area’s business base.” NEDC’s responsibilities include encouragement of the creation of quality employment, support for the growth of existing businesses and entrepreneurs, pursuit of new business locations through organized promotion and marketing efforts, and working collaboratively with local businesses, institutions, and economic development partners to strengthen Norwalk’s position in the global economy.

Through a participatory process, NEDC developed a strategic economic development plan in 2004, from which the following goal areas emerged:

- Build strong presence of the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation in the community. Means to achieve this goal include newsletters, business testimonials, communication networks, press releases, annual reports, surveys, and reports on measurable results and outcomes.
- Capitalize on tourism opportunities as an economic development growth strategy. Means include support to tourism entrepreneurs, hospitality industry training, community service training for youth, maps to tourist attractions, tourism wayfinding signs, and focus on Route 18 toward Raceway Park as an entertainment “corridor”.
- Retain and expand existing business base in the Norwalk area. Means include the annual business survey and Business Appreciation Week, rapid intervention when requested,
community education on economic development and the reality of the global economy, building a competitive and innovative spirit, and implementation of a regional cluster strategy including information on suppliers and potential targets for attraction.

- Ensure the long-term financial stability of the NEDC. Means include augmenting and expanding the membership base, soliciting other industrial sectors, seeking perpetual funding sources, and investigating other sources of funding.
- Seek entrepreneurial investments in the Norwalk economy. Means include creating a venture capital fund, developing a high-risk pool of funds for borrowing, investigating development of a business incubator, a data base of nearby resources for entrepreneurial counseling and support, creation of a SCORE program (which has been successfully launched), and a one-stop clearinghouse for entrepreneurial resources.

Supplementing the more internal NEDC goals were a series of “community economic development goals”, many of which are reinforced within this document. General topics covered within this portion of the strategy were:

- Infrastructure improvements (including achieving a college presence in the community) and utilities quality and availability (water supply, adequate electricity, sewage treatment plant capacity, and adequacy of Internet and telecommunications infrastructure);
- Readiness for development (feasibility study of City-owned industrial park, recruitment of commercial real estate developers, investigation of adequacy of transportation infrastructure such as air and rail);
- Transportation (including airport access, railroad improvements, and investigation of solutions for improved highway transportation, including a “bypass” solution that may include improvement of existing Township roads);
- Quality of life (including focus on quality growth, quantification of impact of development on quality of life in the Norwalk area, an active community theater, broadening of the leadership base by stressing inclusion and fresh ideas);
- Land use (consideration of directions of expansion into Township, filling empty spaces in Central Business District, quantification of need for building rehabilitation);
- Housing (define and fill need for quality apartments, mid-level homes, and options for families in transition); and
- Downtown and commercial development (including a plan to fill vacancies in downtown Norwalk, meet the needs of retail establishments and ensure that downtown Norwalk is a destination shopping area, continue to maintain the infrastructure, consider other models for emulation, and reframe the image of downtown Norwalk).

**Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce**

The Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce is staffed full-time and housed in the same West Main Street office building as NEDC, Main Street Norwalk, the United Fund, and the Norwalk Community Development Corporation (NCDC). The Chamber provides business services, training opportunities, and a forum for the exchange of ideas to its 450-plus members. Other activities include advocacy for business and showcasing opportunities.
Other Economic Development Entities

There are several partnering organizations that help provide a positive climate for economic and business development in the Norwalk area. Co-located with the Chamber of Commerce is the Norwalk Community Development Corporation (NCDC). NCDC has underwritten projects to stimulate economic activity, including the ownership and development of speculative properties including an industrial building on Republic Street in the Firelands Industrial Park, which is occupied by the Janesville Sackner Group.

The Huron County Development Council coordinates economic development efforts throughout the county, maintains a building and site database that is coordinated with the State’s industrial prospect response system, and partners with NEDC and others on specific projects. WSOS Community Action Commission, Inc., provides technical assistance to projects using some of the City’s incentive programs, such as its business revolving loan fund and the Enterprise Zone tax abatement program.

Direct technical assistance, including business plan development, is available to businesses and entrepreneurs in Norwalk from two active entities. First, a chapter of the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) has become very active within Norwalk, providing pro bono business technical assistance to nearly 150 businesses or entrepreneurs since its inception in October 2004. Second, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) located in Ashland University provides technical business planning and related assistance, with a business counselor visiting Norwalk on a regular schedule.

The Geography of Economic Development in Norwalk

Historically, commercial development in Norwalk was focused on the Central Business District. Norwalk’s Downtown area served a regional market and was accessed by a network of interurban rail lines. The Interurbans departed many decades ago, and Norwalk’s consumer market is dependent almost exclusively on the automobile, which has diminished the importance of the Downtown as a concentrated center for commercial and service activity. As a result, new commercial activity has largely grown along the Route 250 corridor from the Downtown northward. The enlarged Wal-Mart “superstore” on the City’s north side has become a notable anchor for business, at all hours, complemented by a number of shopping centers, automobile dealerships, restaurants, and other businesses, either free-standing or in strip centers. One major investment in infill has been the construction of a Top's Friendly Market supermarket just north of the central business district on Whittlesey Avenue. Other significant investments in the central business district have occurred through the renovation of a number of buildings that house active businesses.

Added to the potential attraction of outside consumer dollars through the above investments and reinvestments by the City’s existing supermarkets and other stores is the location of an eight-screen cinema, also on the north side of the City, just north of the Firelands Industrial Park. The cinema and nearby restaurants, while capitalizing on Norwalk’s position as a county seat and the largest commercial center in Huron County, will also benefit from nearby Erie County’s growth as a regional tourism destination. Some tourism activity will
undoubtedly leak into Norwalk by virtue of the nationally known Norwalk Raceway Park, the cinema, and other recreational attractions.

While commercial enterprise has clustered around the U.S. Route 250 North corridor, Norwalk’s south side has seen commercial disinvestments with the closure of that area’s only supermarket. However, there has been a resurgence of travel-oriented activity along US 250 South with the recent completion of two new fast food enterprises. The largest catalyst for economic growth on the south side has been Fisher-Titus Medical Center, with its ambitious growth strategy, its medical campus, and the clustering of a growing number of medical offices and services on and within close proximity of the Fisher-Titus campus.

Norwalk’s importance as a service and governmental center has been maintained, and recent investments by the County Commissioners in property within the central business district will maintain the importance of the downtown as a center for personal, financial, and business services such as attorneys, title services, surveyors, insurance agencies, and others.

Industrial development in Norwalk has followed the typical pattern of radiating out from close by the City center to more peripheral locations. Industrial activity typically imposes the most significant spillover effects on neighboring land uses, and over time, new industrial activities, as well as Norwalk’s efforts to designate manufacturing zones within the City, have sought more remote locations, with some distance from established residential areas and other sensitive land uses.

The result is a scattering of Norwalk’s more historic industrial uses closer to the City center (including the Mayflower Vehicle Systems plant on Garfield Street, the League/Pleasant area including Maple City Rubber, Durable Corporation, ACMI, and the former Norwalk Furniture property. Also, Fair Publishing, Pinnacle Powder Coating and PIPO, Inc. are located north of East Main Street along Ontario Street), with a number of newer industrial locations largely to the north (notably the Firelands Industrial Park, which is approaching build-out), and to the east along the US 20 and SR 18 corridors. It is expected that, as the Firelands Industrial Park becomes built out, future industrial development will be mostly concentrated to the east. The future development of economic investment and of new industrial and commercial facilities can be guided in Norwalk and its vicinity through careful zoning, as well as through the use of incentive programs such as Ohio Enterprise Zones, Community Reinvestment Areas, and Joint Economic Development Districts.

**Strategies and Recommendations**

The recommendations presented in this chapter have been developed based on discussions at the community forums, at a focus group devoted to economic and business development, and in a series of meetings of an economic and business development resource panel. Nearly every recommendation would involve a team approach undertaken by the NEDC and the Chamber of Commerce. Projects in the downtown area typically involve Main Street Norwalk, and in many cases involving loan fund or grant assistance, additional practitioners such as WSOS Community Action Commission and the Huron County Development Council may take a role. Throughout the following text, the inclusion of these partners will simply be notated as “E.D. Organizations”.
Strategy 1: **Promotion of the business environment**

This strategy is multi-dimensional, incorporating the development and promotion of a variety of building sites, including the reuse of existing building sites and development-ready business parks, while considering the impact on the local school district; encouragement of innovation and entrepreneurship; and ensuring a pro-development, cooperative atmosphere within the public sector, including balanced incentives.

1. **Promote existing industrial parks**, such as Firelands Industrial Park and Commerce Fields. Complete specifications on these prime industrial parks and sites, including available buildings, should be complete, up to date, and available. Important specifications include asking price, acreage and square footage, utility capacity to site (water, sewer, electricity, natural gas), access to roadways and rail, and a site map. Primary entities are E.D. organizations and the real estate brokerage sector. One key channel for this information is through the building and site inventory housed in the Huron County Development Council.

   In addition, a catalog or database of available sites and buildings should be created and maintained at the City level, and housed within NEDC. This activity is ongoing, requiring constant monitoring and revision to ensure currency and accuracy. A comprehensive database should be in place by 2008.

2. **Identify new development sites** that can accommodate market demand for rail access. Further, while the Norwalk area has a number of sites that can accommodate smaller, traditional industrial ventures, City officials should examine the feasibility of assembling parcels, which can provide rail access and highway frontage for larger-scale projects. Formal procedures for this inventory should be completed over the next five years. Key entities include E.D. organizations, the real estate sector, the land use committee, and Norwalk’s Planning Commission.

3. **After appropriate market studies**, develop speculative buildings with amenities currently in demand (with high speed telecommunications, adequate ceiling height, and other requirements). Speculative building development should be in place, either under the auspices of a community organization such as the Norwalk Community Development Corporation, or by private investors, within the next ten years (by 2017). Key entities include E.D. organizations and the real estate sector.

4. **Create and implement a building demolition and redevelopment plan**. First, the City should develop a priority list of abandoned buildings that need to be demolished. Then, building owners should be encouraged to evaluate the worth of their property and demolish it, if necessary, through financial incentives, tax abatements, or changes in tax classifications. With obsolete structures removed, the remaining sites can be marketed and adapted to new and emerging needs. Key partners include E.D. organizations, City administration officials, the real estate sector, and property owners. Measurable impacts should be reached by 2017 (within ten years).

5. **Create a one-stop shop** for business officials, entrepreneurs, and others to access business support information. This location should become recognized as the single
point of contact for obtaining information on development requirements, incentive programs, municipal regulations impacting business development, and related information. Key entities involved in this step, which should be completed and in place by 2008, include E.D. organizations, City administration officials, and real estate developers.

6. Ensure broadband access in industrial parks and throughout the City. Internet accessibility and broadband support has become increasingly important to business operations and communication, and Norwalk’s targeted industrial development sites should be competitively positioned to deliver such accessibility, which should be implemented over the next five years (by 2012). Key entities include E.D. organizations, the City of Norwalk, utility and telecommunication providers, and realtors.

7. Support the development of incubators for retail and other business, including manufacturing. An incubator is typically a business facility with multiple tenants consisting of newly emerging businesses. In addition to entrepreneurial support programs, the incubator often provides below-market leased space, as well as shared facilities such as office equipment and a receptionist. A number of entities should continue to examine the potential for a business incubator, the market for such a facility in Norwalk, and optimal organizational and ownership models to employ. A business incubator should be in place within five years (2011), and its development will involve Huron County and Norwalk officials, E.D. organizations, Main Street Norwalk (if a downtown location is considered), potential developers interested in the incubator concept, and the real estate community.

8. Promote retail corridors and service/office areas. New business ventures should be guided to these designated target areas in order to promote efficient development patterns. The efficiencies of such orderly development can be realized by the businesses as well as by consumers. This is an ongoing effort, and it would involve E.D. organizations, Realtors, and the Planning Commission.

9. In addition to ongoing efforts to obtain input from the business community within Norwalk, such as the annual survey process, Business Appreciation Week, and ongoing business visitations, NEDC should identify the needs of existing core services and businesses in the Norwalk area such as Fisher-Titus Medical Center, and develop appropriate solutions as needs are identified and defined. These needs should be initially defined by 2008.

10. Secure a perpetual outside source of funding for local economic development programs to balance and complement the commitment of local businesses and political jurisdictions and entities. This source, or combination of sources will involve the efforts of E.D. organizations, the City of Norwalk, and county and State governments.
Strategy 2: **Support for business growth**

Support for the expansion of existing businesses and investment in Norwalk by new businesses can be provided by ensuring 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. Further, the City and local entities can offer and support state-of-the-art business practices and support systems in order to compete globally. Strategies will include providing better access to information and permit approvals through a consolidated, centralized approval process that involves multi-jurisdictional cooperation, and pursuing cutting-edge programs to enhance marketability of the community on a broader scale.

1. Consolidate the many development approval processes (building permits, plumbing, electrical) within Huron County. To the maximum extent feasible, the processes should be streamlined such that approvable, acceptable projects can be implemented with a minimum of delay. This organizational change, which may take up to ten years (2017), would involve City, Township, and county governments, and E.D. organizations.

2. Create a comprehensive checklist of steps required for development in the City of Norwalk, area Townships, and Huron County. While many such steps are necessary and serve a legitimate public purpose, step-by-step guidance should clarify the required processes and present reasonable expectations regarding elapsed time and required documentation in order to achieve approvals. Involved entities include E.D. organizations, City, Township, and county governments; City and county planning commissions; and the real estate sector. This checklist should be able to be developed by 2008.

3. Along the same lines as the above strategies, create a residential and commercial fee package by consolidating permit requirements and streamlining fee structures. This change, to be implemented by 2010, will involve City, Township, and county government officials and planning commissions, with input from the business and development sectors.

4. Make development information available to the public through linked databases stored in high-tech, easy-to-access entities. Outlets for this information may include kiosk units located at City, county, and Chamber buildings, as well as linked web sites with consistently uniform information. Entities helping implement this strategy, which should be completed by 2010, include E.D. organizations, municipal, Township, and county governments, the real estate sector, SCORE, and SBDC.

5. Pursue the creation of a Foreign Trade Sub zone in Norwalk. A Foreign Trade Zone or Sub zone allows for businesses to realize specified financial benefits within a specified facility when conducting international trade, and can provide a competitive advantage for certain businesses. This strategy, which may take three years (2009), would involve E.D. organizations, City government officials, and business officials who could be positively impacted by this incentive.
6. Pursue the designation of Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA's) in the City of Norwalk. CRA's, while based on a survey of housing conditions that indicate a need for incentives to rehabilitate the local housing stock, are commonly used to provide real property tax exemptions for investments in commercial and industrial building and site improvements. For example, CRA's are often used as an incentive for downtown revitalization activities. Implementation of a CRA program, which should take place by 2009, should involve the City administration and City Council, the Planning Commission, and E.D. organizations. See the attached summary for more information on Ohio’s Community Reinvestment Area program.

7. Publicize Norwalk's HUB Zone designation for companies pursuing Federal contracts. This designation, based on distress factors, provides incentives for businesses whose products or services may be solicited by a Federal request for proposals. Publicity and clarification of this incentive, which may be ongoing, would be conducted by E.D. organizations.

8. Ensure that the entire City of Norwalk offers high-speed telecommunications access, ultimately including free wireless high-speed connectivity to the Internet (i.e. "wireless") throughout the City, and access to broadband connections for every resident and business. With continuous improvements and innovation in Internet connectivity, this process will be ongoing and building over the next twenty years. It is important for City officials to be aware of new developments in the field and emerging practical applications for rural communities, in order for Norwalk to position itself to maximize the opportunity for its residents and businesses to benefit from high-speed, broadband connections. Involved entities include E.D. organizations and telecommunications businesses.

9. Acquire a quality control designation for the entire City of Norwalk, so government employees and participating nonprofits are held to recognized, good management and organization standards (e.g. ISO 9000). Such a designation and achievement is unusual for a governmental organization, and would set the City of Norwalk apart as a community of quality. Feasibility of such a designation should be studied, and then a course of action to achieve such designation should be implemented over the next ten years if it is deemed feasible.

10. The City of Norwalk should investigate the practicality and legality of a preferred vendor procurement system that gives reasonable advantage to local product and service providers. This policy would involve the Norwalk Law Director and other City officials, and would be promoted by the Chamber of Commerce and other entities.

11. Develop business incentives and guidelines that consider “quality of the job” criteria, including consideration of wages and benefits offered to employees. Ensure that training is provided to businesses and decision makers during the consideration of incentives. Involve City government officials as well as E.D. organizations.
The Ohio Community Reinvestment Area Program

While Norwalk has an active Enterprise Zone program, where the entire City has been included as one zone, it has not participated in a companion State program, the Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) program. It is recommended that the City consider the creation of one or more Community Reinvestment Areas. New zones must receive confirmation from the Director of the Ohio Department of Development.

A Community Reinvestment Area is a defined area of land in which property owners can receive tax incentives for investing in real property improvements. Specifically, they can receive tax exemptions for increased property tax valuation resulting from renovating existing or constructing new buildings. The program can encourage historic preservation, residential rehabilitation, and/or economic development to encourage commercial and industrial renovation, expansion, or construction.

The City’s legislative authority determines the size and number of areas, as well as the term and extent of real property exemptions. A CRA should be created in an area where investment has been discouraged. The municipality must undertake a Housing Survey of the structures of the area within the proposed CRA. The survey must support a finding that the area is one in which housing facilities are located and that new construction and renovation is discouraged. In fact, the creating legislation must state the area is one in which “housing facilities and structures of historical significance are located and new housing construction and repair of existing facilities or structures are discouraged.”

A housing officer must be designated for the CRA, and property owners meeting requirements of the local legislation can apply to that officer. For a new CRA, residential applications are filed after construction is complete, and commercial or industrial applications are made before the project begins. The exemption percentage and term are negotiated between the property owner and City Council.

The City can determine the type of development to be supported by the CRA program - residential, commercial, and/or industrial - and the City can include an annual review or renewal clause. Similar to the Enterprise Zone program, a Tax Incentive Review Council is created by Council to review performance on all agreements and projects.

For a new Norwalk zone, qualifying real property can be exempted for up to 100 percent. Terms can be up to 10 years for residential remodeling (1 or 2 units, minimum $2,500), up to 12 years for residential of more than 2 units, and for commercial and industrial (minimum $5,000), and up to 15 years for new construction residential, industrial, or commercial. For all commercial and industrial agreements, which are negotiated on a project specific basis, it must be ensured that at least 50% of the taxes estimated that would have been charged on the improvements if the exemption had not taken place are made up by other taxes or payments available to the school district. If notified of a project not meeting this 50% standard, the Board of Education may approve the project. The CRA program has many of the notification and income tax sharing provisions of the Enterprise Zone program.
Strategy 3: **An Effective Mix of Jobs, Workers, and Companies**

This goal involves strategies to ensure the most effective mix of jobs, employees, and business entities, through a focus on the long-term health of the community, brought about by appropriate job creation, retention, and enhancement efforts. A focus should also be placed on the maintenance of a balance of diverse workers, including the retention of homegrown talent.

1. Through the efforts of E.D. organizations and the City, create an awareness campaign concerning how the perception of Norwalk affects economic development efforts to recruit businesses and new residents. The campaign should include customer service training, image building, and public relations. This process may take five years (until 2012) to implement in a systematic and uniform fashion, but the importance of the impression left by any given employee who interacts with the public in contributing to a visitor’s impression of the City cannot be overstated.

2. Develop and implement outreach efforts to recruit the service companies, retail amenities, and restaurants that attract workers of the new economy and capture incoming dollars from visitors to Norwalk. Involve E.D. organizations and the City of Norwalk. This is an ongoing effort.

3. Create partnerships on a regional basis that help Norwalk showcase its assets. Partnerships should also include infrastructure development such as rail and utilities. Involve E.D. organizations and utility providers in this effort, which is an ongoing initiative.

4. Assist local businesses in educating themselves on how to compete in the new economy by understanding current business strategies and customer service. This ongoing effort may include trainings such as those frequently sponsored by the Chamber, but may also include participation by E.D. organizations, the City of Norwalk, and progressive community institutions and businesses.

5. Develop a base of local entrepreneur in targeted industries such as high technology and biotechnology, by utilizing existing resources (e.g. experienced entrepreneur mentors, financial capital, technological capital). Involve E.D. organizations and SCORE in this ongoing effort.

6. Prepare feasibility studies for the creation of a high technology business incubator and possible venture capital fund. This effort will take four years (to 2011) or longer as variables impacting technology change, and will involve E.D. organizations, City and county governments, and resources such as the Ohio Department of Development and venture capital sources.

7. Maximize the use of the existing distance learning centers, such as the Fisher-Titus room located in Norwalk High School, through organized efforts that lead to the establishment of a higher education presence in Huron County. Recruit small colleges looking to grow. Involve E.D. organizations, City and county governments, and education providers. Will take up to six years to fully implement.
8. Endorse efforts to organize a local outreach and support center that meets the needs of the area’s growing Hispanic/Latino community. Involve E.D. organizations, City and county governments, education providers, and service agencies. Develop a coordinated approach to this target group by 2008.

Strategy 4: Attraction of Tourists and Visitors

Under this strategy, Norwalk’s leadership is encouraged to develop a pro-active tourist outreach program and train local customer service providers to welcome visitors.

Key entities in this strategy include the Chamber of Commerce, which is the most likely choice to take a lead role in serving as a de facto “Convention and Visitors’ Bureau”, other E.D. organizations, existing businesses (especially those in the hospitality industry, such as restaurants, hotels, entertainment providers, and bed and breakfasts), and the City and county governments, as well as regional marketing partners and local media.

1. Capitalize on current tourist traffic, inducing “drive by’s” to stop and stay. Promote existing tourist attractions through outreach programs and materials. Encourage businesses to install directional signs to tourist attractions in an ongoing effort.

2. Create and maintain uniform signage policies, with implementation within the next five years (by 2012). Examine the feasibility of enacting a “bed tax” to pay for uniform signage to promote local attractions, as well as other legitimate tourism related expenses. While the adoption of uniformity will aid in marketing and “branding” the community for tourism, local government should simplify the process for private signage to be installed.

3. Identify the location of the designated tourism information and referral center (recommended: Chamber of Commerce office) and advertise its function as a “Visitor Information Center”. This can be implemented immediately.

4. Educate local businesses on the importance of regional tourism as an ongoing effort. Encourage businesses to advertise in printed guides with broad distribution. Also, coordinate a series of display spaces with likely exposure to the traveling public (i.e. fast food and other restaurants, hotels, travel-oriented businesses).
5. Include tourism information and events through linked web sites operated by the City, Chamber, Main Street Norwalk, Dynacal, and possibly others as they emerge. Ensure linkage to regional websites.

6. Offer ongoing capacity-building seminars for organizations that promote events, with emphasis on customer service. Chamber is lead organization.

7. Focus tourism development within existing entertainment districts (including the Norwalk Raceway, central business district, and Route 250 corridor to the north with cinema/dining/shopping). This should be an ongoing effort that is expected to increase in importance as the Erie County year-round destination are continues to develop and grow.

Additional recommendations regarding tourism are provided on the following page.

**Strategy 5: Regional Economic Development Cooperation**

Economic development activity in the Norwalk area today reaches beyond the City’s municipal borders, and as the City’s developable land is built out over time, continued development into surrounding Townships, while it should be orderly and targeted to designated growth areas, is inevitable. Strategies include building upon the successful work of existing local entities through coordinated planning, and providing a sound base for economic and business development emphasizing existing strengths.

1. Create a task force to examine the feasibility and methodology to initiate the formation of Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDD’s) or Cooperative Economic Development Agreements (CEDA’s) with neighboring Townships. Potentially participating local governments should examine alternatives, benefits, options, and potential agreements with interested parties, with creation of a protocol for the formation of such districts and the creation of one or more districts, as deemed needed, within five years (2012). Entities include City officials, Norwalk Township, NEDC, HCDC, and the Chamber. (See next page for an explanation of the JEDD and the CEDA as economic development tools).

2. Support and promote the Huron County Airport as an economic development tool. Ongoing. Involves E.D. organizations, City of Norwalk, Huron County, and the Airport Authority.

3. Encourage and support efforts for the marketing and promotion of the region that includes Norwalk and Huron County. Ongoing effort; involves E.D. organizations and possibly such regional and Statewide organizations as the North Central Ohio Regional Development Association (multi-county; centered in Mansfield), Northwest Ohio Regional Economic Development (multi-county; centered in Toledo), and Ohio Economic Development Association.
Tourism as Economic Development

With the right combination of attractions, tourism can be an excellent strategy for bringing outside dollars into a community and its businesses.

✓ According to the Ohio Department of Development, in 2003, travelers contributed $1.3 billion in direct State taxes and $637 million in direct local taxes, for a total of over $1.9 billion, to Ohio’s governments.
✓ The average overnight traveler in Ohio in 2002 spent $240 per person per trip.
✓ Also in 2002, travelers on day trips spent $72 per person per trip in Ohio.
✓ The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that in 2001, travel and tourism contributes 10.7% to Gross Domestic Product, supporting over 201 million jobs worldwide (8.2% of total employment), and growing to 11% of global GDP and 9.0 percent of employment by 2011.
✓ More locally, data collected from local businesses found that tourism brought in approximately $7.4 billion in the Lake Erie area alone in 1999.

Here are fifteen “rules for successful tourism marketing” as presented by Roger Brooks, CEO of Destination Development, Inc., of Olympia, W.A:

✓ Create a tourism development and marketing plan, including product development, upgrades, and improvements, repositioning and/or branding, attractions and events, visitor amenities and services, marketing and public relations, public/private partnerships, recruitment, funding and budgets, and organizational responsibilities.
✓ Front-line employees should be knowledgeable about your community and should promote other stores, attractions, and amenities to visitors to keep them in the area longer.
✓ There must be several retail and dining establishments within walking distance. Shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is one of the top activities for visitors.
✓ Think creatively on how to turn any known negatives into positives.
✓ To be successful, you must be worth the trip. A visitor must be able to differentiate you from the competition and you must creatively set yourself apart from the others.
✓ Any museum or interpretive center should always tell stories, not just display artifacts. Stories keep visitors in the area longer. Visitors remember stories and tell others…and more people pick destinations by word of mouth than any other method.
✓ People will travel a great distance if you offer something appealing. In general, you should be able to keep visitors busy four times longer than it took them to get there.
✓ Make sure your community is appealing to customers. Product development – and quality – should be a top priority.
✓ Always sell the experience associated with an activity and not the place. Avoid using pictures of scenery. Instead, use images of people laughing and having fun. Viewers remember images that include emotions.
✓ Even at the community level, branding is critical for success in tourism. Branding is more than a logo – it is what sets you apart as a destination. It is your image and your value; do not try to be “all things to all people”.
✓ Nothing sells tourism like great photography, and photos used for tourism purposes should have a “wow” appeal to make the viewer want to go to the place depicted.
✓ If advertising is designed to get people to call and get a brochure, or visit a web site, the brochure and web site must then be good enough to “close the sale”. Remember that in a normal rack, the top three inches is all that is visible to the potential customer.
✓ Publicity is much more important than advertising; it will build brand, improve your image, increase credibility, and provide a greater return on investment than advertising alone.
✓ The Internet is by far the number one resource for planning travel and vacations. Can you be found easily on the web? Is the web site interactive?

Frequency is more important than variety in placing advertising. People viewing your advertisement should develop “Top of Mind Awareness” (TOMA). Finally, an increasingly important segment consists of “experiential” tourists, who want to experience local culture, history, and natural features.
Ohio law provides for the facilitation of cooperative economic development projects between a municipality and one or more adjacent Townships. One option is the **Joint Economic Development District (JEDD)**. JEDDS often help provide for water and sewer, fire and police, street maintenance, trash pickup, and planning and zoning services. JEDDs can pay for the cost of these services by imposing an income tax on non-residential property owners within the district. JEDDs allow for the levying of a district-wide income tax and provision of municipal services in the unincorporated areas. One or more municipalities and one or more Townships may create a JEDD to facilitate economic development. The JEDD must be located within the territory of one or more of the contracting parties and may consist of all of that territory. The territory may not include existing residential areas or areas zoned for residential use.

A public hearing must be held and the public must be able to examine the plan for the JEDD, including a schedule of new services, improvements, and facilities, a schedule for the collection of any income taxes to be levied within the JEDD, and a description of the land to be included within the JEDD. Documents must be filed with the appropriate County Commissioners, who must approve the creation of the JEDD by resolution. Under some conditions, a vote of the electors in each participating Township may be required.

A JEDD is governed by a board of directors, and powers of the JEDD include the power to levy an income tax at a rate not higher than the highest rate being levied by a participating municipality, with an amount set aside for the long-term maintenance of the JEDD; the power to determine the substance and administration of zoning and other land use regulations, building codes, permanent public improvements, and other regulatory matters; the power to limit and control annexation of unincorporated territory within the JEDD; and the power to limit the granting of property tax abatements and other tax incentives within the JEDD.

Another economic development tool is the **Cooperative Economic Development Agreement**, or CEDA. Similar to a JEDD, one or more municipalities and Townships may enter to a CEDA; unlike JEDDs, however, a County, the State, or a State agency may also become parties. Creation of a CEDA requires public notification and a hearing process. A CEDA may have the following powers: provision of joint services and permanent improvements; services and improvements by the municipality in the unincorporated portion of the Township; provision of County or Township services or improvements within the municipality; payment of service fees to a municipality by a Township or County; payment of service fees to a Township or County by a municipality; issuance of bonds and notes by a municipality, County, or Township for public purposes authorized by the CEDA and provision for the allocation of the debt service payments and other costs related to the issuance and servicing of the debt; issuance of industrial development bonds and debt of a municipality to finance projects outside the municipality; limitations on annexation within the CEDA; agreements with landowners or developers concerning provision of public improvements; limitations on the use of tax abatements; and other specified powers.

JEDDs can be more difficult to create because they require participation of property owners, and may require a vote of electors. However, a JEDD can be powerful in generating revenue to pay for the costs of infrastructure improvements and services by imposing an income tax. The CEDA does not create a new or distinct revenue stream, but no approval of affected property owners is required.
Tenants in the Firelands Industrial Park include Amitelli Products, Jiffy Preforma, EPIC Technologies, And the Janesville/Sackner Group.
Chapter 10: Downtown Norwalk

Downtown Norwalk

Goals:
(Taken from economic development goals; used here as applicable to downtown 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. Provide an environment that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, through venture capital, guidance and counseling as needed, and referrals to other community services.
8. Develop a proactive tourist outreach program, with local customer service providers trained to welcome visitors.
9. 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.

Introduction

The central business district or Downtown, referred to as the Uptown district during its revitalization in the 1990’s, is the governmental and service center for the City and, in many respects, for Huron County. It also maintains an important role as a retail center. A major revitalization project in the 1990’s provided a new streetscape for a district extending along Main Street from Case Street at the western end to Foster Street to the east. Streetscape improvements were accompanied by investments in building facades, and the central business district has maintained an attractive and appealing appearance to the present.
Several themes were brought out during the community forums, and in a focus group of central business district stakeholders. Among the more obvious concerns, such as “filling the empty buildings” and “cleaning up storefronts”, were these:

- Find a niche for downtown growth
- First stop for County residents for economic, cultural, and professional activities
- Make Norwalk a destination City; make Downtown a vital destination within the City, with dining and retail uses
- Expand the “Market Days” concept
- More variety and specialization of stores
- Retail businesses most likely to succeed will be specialty stores
- Attract a major retailer to grow the entire retail community
- Attract tourists to stop; bed and breakfast in Uptown
- Provide an incubator and entrepreneur training
- Theme for Downtown: Victorian
- Apartments above storefronts
- Make use of specific attractive buildings with potential; prime example is the old jail
- Downtown should be location for any teen center, with live entertainment and music
- Create a more lively Main Street
- Note: There was no consensus on the existence of a “parking problem”, but many felt that thought should be given to better directional and wayfinding signage

The vision for Main Street that emerges from the several means of community input is that of a mixed-use central business district, retaining its importance as the County seat and a center for government (County and City) and for personal and business service offices, building a mix of specialized retail businesses that attract knowledgeable and curious shoppers, housing, and office-oriented businesses (such as the headquarters of the International Hot Rod Association). Potential also exists to offer attractive dining and entertainment options, and even to provide housing where building space in upper stories lends itself to conversion to apartments and lofts.

The downtown district, which received streetscape improvement assistance and thus is visually identifiable as a continuous district, extends from Seminary Street along Benedict Ave. to the south, along Whittlesey Avenue to Railroad Street to the north, and from Case Street to Foster Street along Main Street. As a collective location for businesses, including nearby strip retail along Whittlesey, the greater central business district can be defined as extending from Case as far east as Milan/Woodlawn, south across the railroad tracks to the Norwood/ Benedict intersection, and north to League Street, incorporating the new Tops plaza and Uptown Shopping Center.

Central Business Districts are, in many respects, the heart of a City. They contain some of its oldest structures and, more than any other area in the community, provide a link to the City’s heritage and past. They also have several assets that provide a competitive advantage as a location for activity. First, they enjoy a centralized location, and are easily accessible from all points in the community. Norwalk’s downtown, like many, is built around the “zero intersection” of U.S Route 250 (Whittlesey/Benedict) and State Route 61 (East/West...
Main). Those highways (especially U.S. 250, which provides access from central and eastern Ohio to the Lake Erie vacation area) bring considerable outside traffic into the downtown.

Second, as noted just above, downtowns contain a unique mix of architectural assets. Norwalk is no exception, with such diverse buildings as the County courthouse and former County jail buildings, the Gardner-Hipp (National City Bank) building, the Towne and Country Theater, a mix of churches bracketed by St. Paul’s Roman Catholic church to the east and St. Paul’s Episcopal Church to the west, and several blocks of diverse commercial structures.
Pictorial Summary of Architectural Assets in the Downtown:
Public Buildings and Space

Governmental Centers: Left: County Office Building (former Citizen’s Bank building). Center: Huron County Courthouse. Right: Norwalk City Hall.

Public Space Downtown: Left: Pohl Park, a pocket park adjacent Gardiner-Hipp Building. Right: Scene from Bresson Park, adjacent to Berry’s Restaurant.

Pictorial Summary of Architectural Assets in the Downtown:
Buildings Housing Private Business

Gathering places: Left: Sheri’s Coffee House. Right: Berry’s Restaurant

Traffic generators: Left: Chamber of Commerce building houses Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk Area United Fund, Norwalk Economic Development Corporation, Main Street Norwalk, and Norwalk Community Development Corporation. Right: the Diamond Collection building at the corner of Main and Whittlesey, a mixed-use building with retail, office, and restaurant uses.

Left: example of commercial property in Downtown, with upper stories presenting development potential. Right: Focal point for Downtown entertainment, the Norwalk Towne and Country Theater.
A third asset is the support and action of a number of local stakeholders. Unlike malls, “big boxes”, or franchise stores, most of Norwalk’s downtown is owned and managed by people who live in and have a stake in the well-being of the City of Norwalk. This confluence of the “enlightened self-interest” of numerous stakeholders results in a dynamic and creative core that can jointly oversee and plan for the future of the downtown area.

The presence of this third asset resulted in the formation of Main Street Norwalk, an organization co-located in the Chamber of Commerce building, with a Board of Directors and hired Manager. As its name implies, Main Street Norwalk follows the national Main Street model for downtown revitalization. The four-point Main Street approach, which focuses on the primary importance of organization, design, promotion, and economic restructuring, is described on page 8.

The Main Street Norwalk organization has developed a vision for Norwalk’s downtown district, and each component of that vision includes one or more goals. Those goals have been incorporated into the recommendations that are included later in this chapter. The following is a listing of the vision and goals developed by the Organization Committee and Board of Main Street Norwalk:

Main Street Norwalk…

- **Is a focal point for civic and cultural activity.**
  - Create reasons to come to Main Street through retail activities, special events, and festivals
  - Cultivate people’s habit of coming to Main Street by using the district as the natural setting for social and civic life

- **Is a vibrant business district with a variety of specialty stores known for quality and excellent customer service.**
  - Provide education for existing businesses on customer service, basic business concepts.
  - Determine what businesses to recruit to the district (clusters) and make a plan to do so.
  - Promote the “uniqueness” of Main Street business – quality and service.
  - Promote the spirit of cooperation by establishing uniform hours.
  - Identify and prioritize customers; identify and meet their needs through enhanced service and business recruitment. Market segments: tourists (heritage); young customers (Sheri’s Coffee House, WIFIs, etc.); older customers (Saturday morning “routines”); nearby communities coming to Wal Mart, theaters, etc.); weekday 9-5 workers in the district.

- **Is safe, secure, well-maintained, and user friendly**
  - Develop plan for maintaining district’s green areas.
  - Enhance wayfinding (see next point).

- **Celebrates its unique history and character.**
  - Integrate Norwalk’s rich heritage into “wayfinding” (e.g. names of parking lots, street signs to parking).
  - Develop walking tours of the business district.

- **Maintains a thriving residential community.**
  - Support residential development of upper floors.

- **Reflects the hometown values of the Norwalk community.**
  - Adopt “Main Street Norwalk…Welcome Home” as district’s tagline.
Trends in Downtown Revitalization

The National Main Street Center releases results of an annual survey of downtowns throughout the country. The most recently reported survey, in 2003, contained the following observations on national trends within commercial areas:

- Most “vital signs” pointed toward continuing progress in commercial districts: increased property values, ground floor occupancy, and increased upper-floor occupancy in 1/3 of the downtowns, increases in retail and restaurants in nearly half, increase in professional offices in more than one-third, increase in housing in nearly one-third, and more than half reporting more businesses with websites than in the last year.
- Thirty-eight percent reported an increase in mom-and-pop businesses, down from the past year, and a corollary increase in the number of districts reporting new franchises.
- One-fourth reported a decrease in crime, with only 8 percent reporting an increase.
- Almost three-fourths reported more people at special events (such as festivals) than in the last year – making five straight years of big increases.
- The Main Street Center noted that many specific community victories involved such items as developing key community properties, rehabilitating historic theaters, or keeping public buildings downtown.
- Top challenges cited included making the transition from start up to long-term funding of Main Street programs (reported by 40 percent of respondents), managing a commercial district during lengthy construction of public improvements, finding new businesses to fill vacant storefronts (particularly independent businesses), and the issue of big-box discount stores that often “leapfrog” into larger spaces, abandoning their smaller stores to deteriorate as they sit vacant.
- On the positive side, more than one-third of survey respondents reported innovative industries in their districts, including such divergent products as game software, gourmet foods, and recorded language training programs.

In presenting the above survey results, National Main Street Center director Kennedy Smith presented seven keys to guiding downtown districts through the next decade. These keys have relevance for the City of Norwalk, and indeed some of them support and underscore the goals and recommendations that appear elsewhere in this chapter.

Scene in Bresson Park in Norwalk’s central business district
Many communities, including Norwalk, have adopted the Main Street approach as developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This approach underscores the value of planning comprehensively, and pursuing four major points of revitalization simultaneously:

1. **Organization**, or getting everyone working toward the same goal, with consensus on objectives and cooperation among stakeholders. A voluntary board oversees Downtown activities in Norwalk.

2. **Promotion** involves “selling the image and promise of Main Street to all prospects.” It is important to market the unique and positive characteristics of the downtown district to a number of targets, including shoppers, investors, new businesses, and visitors. The goal of promotion is to forge a positive image through advertising, promotional activity, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out mainly by local volunteers.

3. **Design** involves getting the Downtown into “top physical shape” by capitalizing on its best physical assets, such as historic buildings, traditional downtown layouts, and memorable public spaces.

4. **Economic Restructuring** means “finding a new purpose for Main Street’s enterprises.” This approach encompasses assistance to help existing businesses expand and recruiting new businesses. One goal is to convert unused or underused space into productive property to sharpen the competitiveness of business enterprises.

The Main Street Center of the National Trust lists several important principles or characteristics of the Main Street approach which follow.

1. **Comprehensive**: No single focus will improve the downtown. Revitalization is a complex, multi-faceted issue.

2. **Incremental**: Small, incremental steps and successes will pace the program. Simple activities will lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the process, and help people develop skills to tackle more complex problems and ambitious projects over time.

3. **Self-help**: Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources. Mobilization of local time and money from stakeholders will be the key to success.

4. **Partnerships**: All stakeholders in the public and private sectors contribute time, money, and expertise.

5. **Assets**: Main Street must capitalize on the unique assets it already has, such as distinctive buildings, neighborly shop owners, and “a human scale that can’t be copied elsewhere.”

6. **Quality**: A high standard of quality should be set for every aspect of the commercial district.

7. **Change**: Over time, skeptics will become believers; at first, almost no one believes Main Street can turn around. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite, and essential. Over time, the sum of the small, incremental changes will be noticeable, and even significant.

8. **Implementation**: It is not important to wait until a plan can be followed precisely “by the numbers.” “Main Street’s focus is to simultaneously plan for the future while creating visible change and activity now.”
Seven Keys to Success (source: June/July 2004 “Main Street News”, National Trust)

1. Strengthen planning and land use laws so that “urban” is really urban and “rural” is really rural, and the sprawl between the two is controlled better (or is never built). Elements should include a downtown retail size cap ordinance, a Main Street-friendly comprehensive plan, and financial incentives for Main Street investment. “Smart growth” policies, while preserving land and encouraging efficiencies of compact growth, will also favor the maximum and best use, and the directing of growth to existing centers such as the downtown.

2. Create an environment that cultivates and supports innovative new businesses. This may include training, peer-to-peer mentoring, seed capital, financing, and the market research needed to help independent businesses get established and grow on Main Street.

3. Downtown districts should be “24/7”, with housing, which provides people keeping eyes and ears on what’s happening, and with neighborhood-serving retail businesses to meet basic consumer needs.

4. Think beyond retail. Less than 20 percent of the space in a fully occupied Main Street district is typically actually used for retail businesses. The remainder is employed for housing, offices, government, entertainment, religion, and, increasingly, small-scale industries. These activities give the downtown economic and market diversity, and a base of employees who can patronize community-serving retail businesses.

5. Entertainment needs to be a stronger component of Main Streets, whether it’s a theater, a spontaneous street performance, or a farmers market. People are starved for things to do besides watching television and going shopping.

6. Place greater emphasis on the environment. Each year, the U.S. buries about 33 million tons of wood-related construction and demolition debris in landfills, making up almost half of all the material in solid waste landfills. Alternatively, concentrate on “recycling” and reusing historic buildings.

7. Place greater emphasis on history. Much of America’s history was made on its Main Streets. Americans’ civil rights remain intact on its Main Streets, and not at shopping malls, where case law has concluded that malls are private enterprises and that free speech could be a risk to that enterprise.

An eighth key is recommended to complement the preceding list. While downtown should celebrate history and its primary role in the heritage of the community, proactive steps should be taken to make it a competitive activity center in the future. Currently, such steps may include positioning downtown Norwalk as an attractive location for business within an expanding regional center (with its regional importance jump-started by the “super center” expansion of the north side Wal-Mart, a growing number of grocery supermarkets clearly supporting a regional market, opening of an eight-screen cinema drawing from well beyond Norwalk’s boundaries, and expectations for forthcoming follow-on business from restaurants and retail attracted to this growing center).
Other proactive steps include the potential for creating a wireless, “wi-fi” district downtown, promoting the low cost of locating businesses in the central business district, marketing to Internet-based businesses who can operate there, marketing to other “new economy”, knowledge-based businesses where a more urban location is not important, and quality of life factors can be taken into consideration, and supporting businesses and activities that attract or retain the “creative class” in Norwalk.

Strategies and Recommendations

Recommendations presented in this chapter were developed by a Downtown Resource Panel, with input from a downtown-oriented focus group, and from ongoing communications with the Main Street Norwalk Manager and attendance at monthly meetings of the Main Street Norwalk Board.

Strategy 1: Organizing for Downtown Revitalization

1. Use the Main Street Norwalk (MSN) organization and its Board as the organizational hub for downtown development and revitalization planning. Other entities should maintain close contact with Main Street, in order to present a unified and coordinated effort to improve and maintain Downtown Norwalk. These entities include the Chamber, NEDC, the City administration, and the Business Recruitment and Retention committee of MSN.

2. The entities listed in the previous paragraph should develop a uniform protocol and plan for the recruitment of businesses for the central business district. This would be an ongoing process as specific retail or service voids are discovered or specific business needs are defined.

3. Develop ways to market downtown Norwalk as a single entity with multiple partners and destinations. It is anticipated that a uniform brand and logo for downtown will be developed by the time this plan is adopted. A tagline has been developed for the downtown district, and it should be used individually and collectively by downtown businesses: “Main Street Norwalk…Welcome Home!” Those elements, along with any uniform graphics, should be universally adopted across all actively participating organizations. Those planning advertisements for downtown businesses should be encouraged to adopt or include these branding elements. Further, businesses should be encouraged to work toward uniform hours and cross-promotions.

4. Engage the City and County governments to participate in and be aware of downtown revitalization efforts, as both are major stakeholders – as property owners and employers – in the downtown.

5. Create, by 2008, a Community Resource Center and welcoming committee. Provide uniform information to building and business owners on available incentives and also on regulatory requirements. Put in place a welcoming committee for new businesses, and with follow-through to make sure any issues are resolved as soon as they are identified.
Strategy 2: **Retain Existing Businesses Within the Central Business District**

As with industrial development, it is important to work hard to retain the existing business and service mix. All partnering organizations, including the City, should consistently work to improve the systems and attractive features of the central business district, and to maintain current information on existing businesses and buildings.

1. Maintain and update a database of available space for businesses in the downtown area. Include pertinent data on cost and rent, ownership, available amenities, space and dimensions, and other critical factors. This database would be housed with NEDC, and shared with others (Main Street Norwalk, Chamber, Huron County Development Council), and is an ongoing project requiring constant updating. This information is important for existing businesses to be able to make informed decisions about expansion within the district, and also for the recruitment of prospective businesses.

2. Focus on key properties that have considerable development potential. Also, explore architectural enhancements that would broaden the usefulness of these key downtown properties. For example, one elevator could potentially provide access to upper stories in multiple adjacent buildings with some modifications. The elevator concept should be studied in detail for possible implementation by 2011.

3. Assist in implementation of projects that would create housing in upper stories of appropriate properties in the Downtown. Seek financial assistance for such projects to make them viable uses of space for the property owners and developers. Assistance and guidance could come from MSN, WSOS Community Action, banks and lenders, the Ohio Department of Development, and owners and developers. Housing options should be explored over the following five to ten years (to 2017).

4. By 2011, conduct a professional study of present and future parking needs, current capacity, and demand, and with recommendations for new or revised parking facilities and guidelines (time limits, fees, enforcement procedures, need for new spaces or lots, conversion of old lots, locations, and wayfinding signage). Main Street Norwalk should coordinate this study with the City administration. (Note: This plan includes some recommendations regarding parking later in this chapter).

5. Informational kiosks should be created in the downtown area. Organizations should be able to freely post information concerning upcoming events, services, and new or existing businesses. Lead agencies include MSN, Chamber, and organizations sponsoring or hosting events, with the kiosks in place by 2008.

6. Consider the creation of a Community Reinvestment Area or CRA (see Economic Development chapter for a description) that provides real property tax incentives for building improvements within a specified target area that includes housing. One recommended area is the downtown district, including adjacent residential areas that have evidence of some housing deterioration. This downtown district would be part of an overall effort to develop a series of CRAs strategically located throughout Norwalk, in


place by 2009, with assistance from the City administration, including the Law Director, Planning Commission, Main Street Norwalk, NEDC, and the Chamber of Commerce.

**Strategy 3: Communication and provision of information on resources, incentives, and review and approval processes for prospective and expanding businesses.**

Coordinated and consistent information for business and building owners is of vital importance for a successful revitalization effort. Owners need to know what tools may be available to assist them with their growth plans. They also need to understand the steps involved in any review or approval process. Those processes need to be as business-friendly as possible, while still serving their public function of ensuring the health, safety, and well being of Norwalk’s citizens. Those involved with downtown revitalization should research existing incentives, and work with local resource providers including banks and lenders to develop new ones, and restructure processes and review entities to maximize their benefit to the central business district.

1. **Build on the existing downtown façade improvement fund that is linked to Norwalk’s revolving loan fund, and include pooled funds from lending institutions and other sources when they are identified.** Such funds may be more discretionary, with more latitude in permitted uses, than the current funds derived from the federal Community Development Block Grant program. Funding goals and permitted uses can thus be expanded to respond to known local needs and goals. This expanded, pooled fund should be in place and ready to lend over the next five to seven years, and will involve several entities: MSN, banks and lenders, the City administration, NEDC, and the MSN Business Retention and Recruitment Committee.

2. **Review the purpose, policies, and procedures of the existing Architectural Review Board (ARB).** Maintain its required review function concerning federal incentive funding, but review its procedures to emphasize its role as a technical assistance provider with regard to the value of historic architecture, the desire for planned uniformity of appearance to market downtown as a single entity, and the preservation of historical architecture as a major downtown district asset. Ensure that the Board of Review and any Board of Appeals are in accord with the emerging vision for downtown Norwalk. This will involve the ARB foremost, but also the Mayor and Planning Commission, Law Director, Planning and Zoning Board, MSN, and the Chamber. Policies should be amended and the ARB restructured as needed.

3. **Provide education for existing businesses and their employees on customer service and basic business concepts.** Coordinate and offer this through MSN and the Chamber, using a downtown venue for training. This should be an ongoing effort.

**Strategy 4: Facilitation of job creation and retention in the central business district**

The central business district should be viewed as a mixed-use district generating significant employment and income. The downtown employer base includes City and County government, retail and distribution, restaurant and entertainment, and a variety of business
and personal service establishments including insurance, real estate, legal services, medical services, title agencies, surveying, architectural, and engineering, as well as other entities.

Downtown revitalization entities should work with employers, social service agencies, business organizations, and education providers to ensure that the local labor force meets the needs of the downtown as a significant source for employment, and that it can continue to be an attractive source of new employment.

1. Work with the Job Store, EHOVE Career Center, and BGSU Firelands, as well as other entities as they are identified, to teach prospective employees how to maintain gainful employment and how to appear and present themselves. Many of the jobs located within the downtown district involve close and repeated contact with the public, so interpersonal skills are of high importance in conducting business and retaining clients for one’s employer and the downtown as a destination. Hospitality industry training should be considered for a number of downtown businesses and throughout Norwalk to consider as a joint and comprehensive program. In cases where an individual is not employed, an explanation of why that person is not hired may be a helpful suggestion for finding future employment. This effort should be ongoing, involving the County Department of Job and Family Services, employment agencies, employers in the downtown district, education providers, and local schools. This can be coordinated and combined (by MSN and Chamber) with the customer service training recommended under Strategy 3.

2. Build a coalition between business, education (EHOVE, DECA, Firelands BGSU campus), and social service providers. Work with high schools to plug students into the community as quality workers. Work with the Abigail House, Abby House, and Miriam House to find employment and support for their residents. Consider establishing a “learning zone” for adults to continuously improve their skills, particularly (for purposes of downtown development) in interpersonal relations and retail business operations. This coalition should develop a plan of action by 2012, and involved entities include United Fund, MSN, the City administration, Chamber, NEDC, educational institutions and school systems, and social service agencies such as the Salvation Army and Erie Huron CAC. The plan should be carried out as a long-range activity.

**Strategy 5: Development of tourism and hospitality-based businesses**

One component of the customer base and market for the downtown, while not the primary one, is the tourist and transitory base generated by the growing Lake Erie destination to the immediate north. While a longer-term goal may be for Norwalk to also become a destination for tourists, the City and County need to step up their efforts to attract a larger segment of the travel and tourism market that surrounds them. This can be accomplished through a focused effort to brand and unify the image of the community and the downtown, followed by increased outreach and service to the burgeoning tourism market.

1. Develop a list of methods to capture a portion of the tourist market attracted to Cedar Point, water parks, and other destinations to the north. A linked goal is to further capture the draw from Norwalk Raceway Park as the City’s major attraction. This list
can be developed within one year of this plan’s adoption, with participation from Main Street Norwalk, the Chamber, NEDC, and the City administration, as well as key businesses.

2. Explore the feasibility of the use of a County or City “bed tax” to fund tourism and hospitality-related development in Norwalk. This source is largely a user fee, in that it is borne by customers of local hotels, bed and breakfasts, and other lodging establishments, and not by the residents or businesses within the taxing area. Stepped-up work plans in this arena should be undertaken first by existing entities, which in Norwalk would primarily be the Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Norwalk. Current consensus does not call for the creation of a new entity to address convention and tourism activity and planning. The development of a bed tax should be reviewed by a “blue ribbon committee” which includes representatives of the lodging industry, and if a determination is made to proceed, the bed tax should be implemented by 2010.

3. Develop a uniform brand for the downtown district based on local research. Develop a uniform logo, slogan, and/or other means by which to launch uniform, coordinated promotions involving multiple businesses and entities. Turnpike and other transient traffic should be captured with brochures in rest stops and hotels. Local businesses should be informed of the potential benefits of uniform regional advertising and publicity. Involved entities include MSN, the Chamber, possibly a marketing consultant, and other local stakeholders. A promotional strategy should be in place by 2008.

4. MSN, schools, performing groups, the Firelands Art League, the Chamber, and other entities should collaborate to increase the coordinated involvement of performing and arts organizations and entities in the downtown district, on an ongoing basis.

5. Consider new opportunities for festivals and events throughout the year where the emphasized primary “market” is Norwalk community members. Combine existing activities to create a “critical mass” of activities and raise local interest. This should be an ongoing activity involving MSN and the Chamber and its members, as well as the City administration.

6. Expand the “market days” concept with more visibility, signage, publicity, and participation. This is an expansion of the concept of the farmers market to include other vendors. This ongoing activity should be coordinated by MSN.

7. Improve awareness of the central business district through “gateway” information and identification, new signage providing direction to parking and downtown attractors, a tie-in to the Rails-to-Trails bicycle path, and more links to other attractions such as Norwalk Raceway Park, Eagle Creek and Sycamore Hills golf courses, and tourism traffic generators to the north. Signage should be in place by 2009, with participation from the Chamber, MSN, and City administration.
8. Boost the downtown district’s visibility as “Norwalk’s meeting place”, for formal meetings, informal get-togethers for coffee or food, activity centers, restaurants, meeting venues, and entertainment. A number of venues exist to host meetings and events, including restaurants and a coffee shop, Towne and Country Theater, the Main Street School and St. Paul’s Convocation Center, City and County facilities, and other potential facilities. This perspective should be promoted by the Chamber, MSN, individual participating businesses, and NEDC, with the concept marketed over the long term.

**Strategy 6: Develop new businesses and services in the downtown district**

There is a need to define the desired market for the central business district as well as identifying and recruiting businesses that would ideally serve that market. This falls under the purview of the “economic restructuring” portion of the four-point Main Street approach. Establishing a direction for the downtown’s economic growth is central to the revitalization process, with growth measured in terms of the economic value of commercial activity and real estate. The overall goal is thus to establish a comprehensive strategy to bring about positive change by attracting investment downtown.

To strengthen the downtown district’s existing economic base and then expand it, the National Main Street Center suggests the following typical economic restructuring activities:

- Stabilizing and improving the value of downtown real estate
- Studying local market conditions, identifying areas of opportunity, and designing strategies to build on those opportunities
- Helping existing businesses find better ways to meet their customers’ needs and expand to meet market opportunities
- Recruiting new businesses to complement the downtown’s retail and service mix and boost the downtown’s overall market effectiveness
- Finding new or better uses for underused or vacant downtown buildings
- Developing appropriate incentive programs to stimulate commercial and real estate development
- Repositioning the downtown in the marketplace and effectively promoting it
- Developing long-term economic development strategies for the downtown’s continued evolution

The Main Street Center recommends a number of actions and approaches to develop downtown real estate and catalyze downtown commerce. To enhance real estate: make small but visible improvements early in the revitalization to boost public interest; create financial incentives to stimulate building improvements; balance property improvements with commercial activity (to ensure that rents do not outpace sales and thus affordability); develop a good working relationship between public and private partners – including property owners, renters, real estate agents, lenders, local government officials, and the general public; and develop an inventory of downtown buildings. To boost downtown commerce, involve the following components: the quality of retail and service activity; marketing and promoting downtown business; maintaining existing businesses; recruiting new businesses to meet market opportunities; and reporting on marketing trends and channeling information to downtown business.
1. Support MSN in surveying local consumer demand. Identify the primary market area, and define a desired market area that captures the potential created by the Erie County tourism business and the market attracted by Norwalk’s regional traffic generators (County government functions, a multi-screen movie theater, big box stores, and Norwalk Raceway Park, which demonstrates a potential to bring a sizeable regional market to the Norwalk area for major events). Identify desired product and service lines not currently available in town, with sufficient demand to generate profitable business. Find local businesses that can offer these missing lines, or recruit new businesses to provide them. Input from MSN, Chamber, NEDC, businesses. A survey should be conducted by 2009.

2. Support the creation and growth of a business incubator. This facility can offer space for emerging businesses, and short-term cost savings through shared support staff, equipment, and other operating costs, as well as access to business counseling and financing incentives. A business incubator may be located within or outside the downtown area, and can house retail, service, small manufacturing, and/or other business sectors. Success would be measured through the spin-off of a large number of the “incubated” businesses to their own locations, including other downtown sites for appropriate businesses. Continued feasibility, design, organizational, and financial analysis is needed for an incubator to move forward. An incubator facility should be under development within five to ten years if deemed viable and if a business plan can be adopted. Involved entities would include HCDC, NEDC, SCORE, SBDC, the City and possibly County administrations, the Chamber, and a task force addressing this issue.

3. Support efforts of MSN to expand on Norwalk’s role as the County seat and center for services. Take advantage of the markets created by this role and the existence of significant County services and employees located in the central business district.

4. Promote the gradual development of a downtown “entertainment district”, with restaurants, after-hours locations, and entertainment venues. Publicize new opportunities. This will occur incrementally, with the fuller use of existing venues, and it may take until 2026 to realize a fully functioning critical mass of entertainment-related activities in the downtown. This activity should be overseen by MSN, the Chamber, and individual business owners and developers.

5. Explore a variety of niches or areas of specialization that could set Norwalk apart. Lines of business identified in community forums and focus groups included music stores, sports (including motor sports), entertainment venues, outdoor activities, a banquet hall, clothing, general merchandise, antiques, military surplus, kitchen outlet, an upscale deli, resale shops, and specialty shops. Certainly, these are suggestions offered by a small number of people, but some of them may represent a few of the potential business lines that could potentially succeed in a growing Norwalk central business district. Continued and ongoing research into potential market potential should be provided by MSN, the Chamber, NEDC, and the Business Retention and Recruitment Committee of MSN.
6. Develop activities and destinations for youth and young adults. Research what interests and engages the City’s youth in large numbers by considering a consumer survey. Research what an ideal “teen center” would look like and how a business model for a teen center could be successful from the aspects of financial solvency and security. Determine whether to follow a for-profit or nonprofit model, and consider alternative locations, including existing businesses. Potential partners include MSN, school systems, churches, service organizations, the City administration, and teen task forces. A center or destination should be in place by 2011. See the Quality of Life chapter for more detailed information on this topic.

7. Work toward the development of a lodging facility (small hotel, or bed and breakfast) within the central business district, with an historical theme. Involve the Chamber, NEDC, MSN, and City administration. In business by 2026.

8. Explore the development and publicity of wireless Internet access throughout the downtown district over the next twenty years, using current or emerging technologies and platforms. Recruit businesses that can take advantage of this feature. Within the new Downtown Wireless District, make the expanded library a showcase of the innovative use of wireless technology with public access. Partners in development include MSN, an IT consultant (preferably a local vendor), City administration and Council, Chamber of Commerce, and an IT task force.

9. Support MSN plans for more outside activities and facilities to generate visible activity. This includes more comprehensive and creative use of public spaces, including Pohl and Bresson Parks, as well as sidewalks and private properties of participating businesses. Involve MSN and its Design and Promotion committees, and the Chamber. Research creative use of outdoor space in other communities.

Strategy 7: Improvement to the physical attributes of the downtown district to enhance business and the usefulness and attractiveness of the downtown to business.

Previous recommendations have largely addressed three of the four main points of the Main Street approach: organization, promotion, and economic restructuring. Equally important is the fourth element, design, and the physical improvements and enhanced attractiveness to the central business district that result from design improvements. The following recommendations involve planned and harmonious physical improvements to the public (streetscape, parks, roads and sidewalks, landscaping, signage, parking) and private (building facades, landscaping, and parking on private property) physical attributes of the downtown district and its environs.

1. Make optimal use and maximize the visibility and attractiveness of the downtown’s historically significant properties. For example, find a new use for the former Huron County Jail property (right), possibly as a restaurant, bed and breakfast, or shop. Promote a Victorian theme overall. Extend the boulevard feel and historic feel that extends inward from the
older homes along East and West Main Street. Include significant historical properties in future historic tours, such as the popular tour of West Main Street homes. Partners in these ongoing activities include County officials, the Firelands Historical Society, Firelands Museum located downtown, Architectural Review Board, MSN, and the City administration. Find a use and new owner or tenant for the old jail property by 2012.

2. Maintain the streetscape and its feeling of uniformity and identity within the district. Consider extending the district east to the Milan/Woodlawn intersection with East Main Street. Consider other extensions as well, perhaps tying in retail areas to the north along Whittlesey as far north as League Street. Involve MSN, the City administration, and affected property owners to gauge their interest (including potential participation in an assessment district).

3. Develop gateway signage to indicate the bounds of the Downtown District. Consider gateway locations at (south) Norwalk Creek bridge on Benedict; (north) vicinity of Whittlesey/League intersection; (west) vicinity of Main/Case intersection (west of Industrial Savings), and (east) just east of Milan/Woodlawn/Main intersection. Put in place by 2010; involve MSN, Chamber, and City.

4. Consider specific zoning and land use regulations for the downtown, and separate zoning classifications. Include consideration of a “Downtown Overlay District” where more mixed uses are allowed, such as commercial/service, residential, and light manufacturing. Ensure consistency in the application and enforcement of such a code. Make sure any new regulations seek to eliminate “clutter”, enhance the uniformity of the district and its preservation of historic architecture, and create standards of appropriateness that can be communicated easily to affected property owners. This will involve the City administration, zoning and planning officials and boards, and MSN and its committees and membership, and may benefit from input from consultants such as Downtown Ohio Inc.

5. Pursue greenscaping and uniform streetscaping of Whittlesey Avenue from City Hall north to League Street (through 2009), involving the City, property owners, MSN, and
service organizations. This segment of Whittlesey could be enhanced to provide drivers with a memorable point of entry to the downtown district, providing enough visual information, including wayfinding signage for points of interest, to generate increased interest by through traffic. Develop a plan for maintaining the district’s green areas and plantings to consistently project an image of quality and care of maintenance.

6. Divert truck traffic from the central business district by developing alternate routes. Involve the City administration and Council, Planning Commission, affected businesses, County Engineer, ODOT, and an engineering consultant. See the Transportation chapter for additional information on this recommendation.

7. Ensure that utilities are sufficient for the downtown area, including water and sewer lines and the information infrastructure of telephone lines and cell phone reception. This ongoing activity involves the City, Chamber, MSN, and engineering consultants as needed.

8. Promote the development of key side streets as Main Street property vacancies decrease and the expansion of business opportunities on Seminary and Monroe Streets, where off-street parking is more readily available, as well as connecting side streets linking Seminary, Main, and Monroe. Include side street properties in any downtown overlay zoning change, to allow for flexibility and creativity in the use of such property. Involve property owners, MSN, and the Chamber, with a substantial improvement on these streets by 2014.

9. In line with the emphasis on side streets, encourage attractive rear and side entrances to Main Street and Benedict/Whittlesey businesses, with direct access to available off street parking. Encourage landscaping and beautification of rear facades where they are visible. Promote the combining of parking areas for adjacent properties to maximize available parking and provide for larger scale of design. Involve property owners, MSN, the Chamber, and the City administration, which may be able to provide incentive funding along with other pooled funding. Substantial improvement should be noted by 2012.

10. Inventory available parking and its availability and time limits. Improve directional signage to available lots, and other “wayfinding” signage as deemed necessary and helpful. Downtown wayfinding and related signage should be uniform in appearance, may include an adopted logo or tagline, and should reflect the City’s heritage and historical significance, an acknowledged major asset. Enhance the attractiveness of parking lots and their function within the downtown area. Involve the City administration and planning and zoning personnel and boards, MSN, Chamber, property owners, business owners (who must encourage their employees to park in designated lots rather than on street). Implement any parking improvements by 2010.

11. Investigate the feasibility of providing public restrooms downtown. While it is doubtful that any public entity wishes to construct, maintain, and be responsible for the upkeep and security of such a facility, downtown property and business owners should be aware of existing restroom options for those in need of such a facility, such as restrooms located in the County Courthouse. Involve City and County officials.
Quality of Life

Goals:

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.

Introduction

Quality of life issues surfaced frequently during the course of the October 2004 community forums, and later during focus groups. The Quality of Life resource panel addressed a large number of specific topics that, collectively, contribute much to the overall quality of life in Norwalk. Some of the major topics included under this broad heading are recreation activities (park and rec facilities are covered in more detail in the Community Facilities chapter); shopping, dining, and other activities; establishing a trail system for walking and biking; community activities; cultural events and opportunities for entertainment; and the provision of activities and facilities for youth. Each of these will be addressed individually under the recommendations section of this chapter.

One theme that emerged throughout the discussion of quality of life issues was the need to catalog and communicate the opportunities available in the Norwalk area – opportunities to attend events, join clubs and affinity groups, or volunteer one’s time to a meaningful cause. A large number of opportunities exist in Norwalk, but discovering them often takes great
effort. Thus a need exists to establish an accessible data base of events, organizations, and resources, that can be continuously updated and corrected.

To provide some background and a sense of the public input received, the following list summarizes many of the comments received at the community forums pertaining to quality of life issues.

- Expanded use of parks and recreational facilities
- Specific activities and facilities requested include: Skateboard area, amphitheater, ice skating rink, soccer complex
- Paved trails for bikes, roller blades
- Parties at the Park on weekend evenings
- Expansion of parks in neighborhoods
- Need for more nice family and more formal restaurants. (This was one of the most common comments received during the community forums, and was expressed in terms of needs for families and for businesses.)
- More entertainment and live performances
- More social opportunities for all ages, including intergenerational activities
- More community-wide activities: fireworks, concerts, music and theater support; Maple City festival
- Neighborhood activities: block parties, parade floats
- Promotion of museum and historical sites
- Permanent art gallery
- Community center for adolescents, youth club evening activities
- City bulletin board, publication listing events and opportunities
- Entertainment district
- Banquet facility/venue
- Maintain/increase local “flavor” and perspective of local media
- Maintain leading edge health care, expanded specialization

Additional comments were received from focus groups, including the following:

- Senior Citizen focus group:
  - More local radio coverage
  - Preservation of natural areas, green spaces, and historic sites
  - Transportation, affordable senior housing

- Hispanic focus group:
  - Access to soccer field (many come to Norwalk to play pick-up soccer matches)
  - Creation of a “cultural house” with traditional dances and other customs

- Realtors/developers:
  - Friendly atmosphere should be preserved
  - Organizations, clubs, other opportunities to “rub elbows” are integral to quality of life
Quality of life advantages in Norwalk include: variety of housing, golf courses, reservoir, Uptown

Green space is important; perhaps set up as a ratio of land developed

High school student focus groups:

- Pluses: reservoir, schools, Norwalk Raceway Park, restaurants, theater, Vargo’s, golf courses, Uptown, proximity to Cedar Point and beaches, Sandusky, and Mansfield
- Need these: music (CD) store, pool hall, skate park, more restaurants, dance club, more businesses uptown, more entertainment, nice shopping center, live entertainment and venue for local bands and talent, local theater troupe and community theater, bike trails, karaoke, art museum or gallery
- Other amenities students would like to see: a town square, skating rink, bigger bowling alley or pool hall, game room, uptown place for younger children, bigger selection in library, 50’s-60’s style café, cable coverage of local high school programs, beach at reservoir, teen night life, large amphitheater, more places for teen hangouts, more lively Main Street

The term “quality of life” has broad implications. Most importantly, it relates to the enjoyment a community’s residents experience from living, interacting, and undertaking leisure activities within their home community. “Quality of life” factors can also be important economic development determinants, as prospective businesses and professionals choose new locations. Norwalk is endowed with an abundance of assets that contribute greatly to the community’s positive quality of life. The more commonly mentioned assets each contribute to the richness and breadth of Norwalk’s quality of life, and they include the library, churches, Fisher-Titus Medical Center, the downtown district and its historical attributes, the school systems, the Ernsthausen recreation center and park system, including the reservoir park, the Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center, and a variety of service organizations. Receiving more mentions than any of these physical attributes, however, were two over-riding factors: the people of the community, and Norwalk’s “small town atmosphere”. Any planned improvement to Norwalk’s quality of life will likely enhance or underscore one or both of these factors, either bringing people together for the common good or playing to Norwalk’s strength in projecting a safe, easily negotiable, friendly atmosphere that is an attractive setting for raising a family or carrying on one’s life.

**Strategies and Recommendations**

Two topics that directly impact Norwalk’s quality of life, but which are discussed in more detail in other chapters, were discussed and reported within the quality of life resource panel. Because of their direct link to quality of life, they deserve mention in this space.

First, it is recommended that the City establish and follow guidelines for the development and preservation of green areas. As Norwalk grows spatially, so will the need for land set aside for parks, recreation, and more passive green space. Planning and zoning codes should be changed to require the allocation of land for parks in substantial new developments. In cases where land is not specifically allocated within the subdivision, a monetary contribution should be made toward the development of a new neighborhood park within a walkable
distance from the subdivision. To fund new park development and maintenance, the “recreational” fee for new developments should be increased on a per-unit basis. Finally, potential areas for strategically placed new park developments, nature trails, and other amenities should be mapped out to ensure their preservation. While this is an ongoing activity, plans should be made within three years of the adoption of this plan to target a future neighborhood park to the north side of Norwalk, serving the Westwind area and surrounding and emerging future neighborhoods. Green space development will involve the Planning Commission, planning and zoning officials, the City administration, the building and zoning inspector, project engineers, and the Parks and Recreation department and its Director and Board. Park and recreation planning is included in greater detail within the Community Facilities chapter.

Second, it is important that Norwalk continue to offer exemplary safety services. The City, through its administration and City Council, should frequently review staffing levels to ensure that the safety forces (police and fire) are able to ensure the City’s quality of life and security. It is recommended that the City’s police and fire Chiefs and management, as well as administrative positions, review the extent and pattern of growth in the City and any surrounding service area to determine if any staffing changes are needed, based on history and experience, as well as national standards for staffing. Following an official review, at least every five years, recommendations should be made to City Council, and needed new positions should be budgeted. Safety service staffing is discussed in the Community Services chapter.

Strategy 1: Provide more social opportunities and activities for teens.

Currently, the City of Norwalk does not have a place that offers its teenagers social opportunities and activities outside of school events, especially on weekends. After evening sports events, many teens either go to restaurants or their houses for parties and gatherings. Adding a properly planned and managed “teen center” to Norwalk would ensure safety and provide a fun place to hang out and meet new people.

Many factors must be considered: How will a teen center be funded? Who will take primary responsibility for it? How can it be maintained as a safe place for teens? What activities and events will be offered? Where will it be located? A large segment of the community, including significant participation from the teens themselves, need to help in the planning of such a project.

1. The City should support efforts to establish and maintain a center for teens to attend events, take part in activities, and simply hang out. A diverse committee of adults and teens, representing teens and parents, both school systems, the City, and churches, can brainstorm the concept and its many facets. A pro forma budget for the center can be drafted, as well as a report on potential revenue sources including grant funds and dues, and a “business plan.”
Investing in and Retaining Youth in the Community

Considerable time was spent discussing Norwalk’s future with high school students. Four students also served on the plan’s Advisory Committee. A minority of the 105 students predicted they would live in Norwalk in five years, with less in ten. The common perspective was that retention of youth is not a problem for the City, and that many graduates who drift away will eventually resettle in Norwalk. Many students expressed the desire to experience independent living in another location.

When asked what types of job opportunities and businesses would retain and attract younger adults, students mentioned health care, international businesses, forensics, engineering, music and entertainment, hospitality management, and jobs that offer travel opportunities.

Other features that would attract younger adults would include: more entertainment with later hours (theater with live entertainment, restaurants, dance club, pool hall), better selection of clothing, music, book stores, more recreation opportunities (skate park, ice rink, additions to rec center).

Reasons to Attract Youth/Young Adults

The Heartland Institute for Leadership cites thirteen reasons for attracting youth and young families:

1. Young people can have a three to one (3:1) impact on population and out-migration.
2. Young families have children in school, which impacts public funding for education.
3. Young people have long-term business development and career goals.
4. Young families are establishing themselves and buy substantial retail goods.
5. Young families use health care services and often have private insurance.
6. Young people bring new energy, ideas, and leadership to the community.
7. Young people are likely to be IT savvy and can help transform the local economy.
8. By retaining youth a community also retains generational wealth.
9. Young people provide needed labor to current, expanding, and new businesses.
10. Educated youth who move to a rural community potentially earn higher than average wage.
11. Young people who return to a rural community will often respect traditional rural values and fit well into the community.
12. Young families use and support community institutions such as churches and libraries.
13. Young people who have experiences outside the community often bring new skills, attitudes, resources, and contacts to the community when they return.

Strategies for Youth Attraction

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development suggests several strategies to respond to the challenge of retaining and attracting young people and families:

- Target specific young people before they are juniors and seniors in high school – the earlier the better.
- Find out what their aspirations are. Develop personal relationships with adult mentors and use peer networks to connect youths with young adults who have recently made the decision to return to the community.
- Deal at the micro level, not the macro level. Presentations to an entire student body at an assembly has little impact.
- Replace negative attitudes and peer pressure to leave with positive encouragement, tools and resources to help young people create their own careers locally through entrepreneurial enterprise.

It is recommended that youth attraction be based within formal economic development, social service, and educational systems to have a long-lasting and widespread effect. Further, positive attention and attitudes need to be communicated to the youth, rather than resignation to a stagnant future.
A Gathering Place for Youth

The community forums and high school focus groups repeatedly brought forth a need for a place for youth to “hang out”, socialize, and have fun. Necessary components or characteristics of a “teen center” that were mentioned included: policy to deal with misbehavior, alcohol/smoke free, age restrictions, possibly offer one-year “membership” pass, include air hockey, pool, a stage for live music, sound system, individual separate rooms (possibly separating participants by age group), coffee and beverages, concession stand, dance floor, projection screen, couch corner, and security (including cameras).

A committee of students at St. Paul High School identified three major topics: preserving Norwalk’s parks, uptown shopping, and providing a teen “hang-out”. Polling their fellow students, they found that 219 said they would attend a Norwalk hangout, only 20 said they would not, and 23 had no answer. The most popular suggestions were pool tables (145), foosball /ping-pong/air hockey (67), comfortable seating for talking (55), poker tables (26), and movies ant TV (17); also mentioned, Dance Revolution and other video games, and a stage for live music and a dance floor.

The St. Paul recommendation noted that such a hangout would provide a safe and active environment and a place for local bands and others to display their talent, a place to get together and meet new people, and still provide adult supervision. A membership card for entrance could be given to every high school student in town, with opportunity for other guests.

An Internet search of other teen centers reveals other features and possibilities: a recording studio, on-line computers, education partnerships to house classes, fun programs (swing dancing, martial arts, using local businesses), themed dances, oversight by a Board of Directors, organization of service projects, graphic arts capabilities, intergenerational “family nights”, café (such as the nationwide kids’ café program sponsored by ConAgra Corp. and America’s Second Harvest), poetry contests/“slams”.

Maintaining a viable teen center is a difficult task in most scenarios, and the planning steps recommended in this document should be carefully followed. Among the many considerations should be:

- Organization: for profit or non-profit?
- Membership fees: annual or one-time?
- Assistance for low income? Restrict to City/school district residents and guests? Members sign agreement/code of conduct?
- Revenues: local fundraising? Foundation and other grants? Donations?
- Governance: Board of Directors with youth participation?
- Available building with nominal lease?
- Age of participants? Middle school activities one night, high school another night? (It is generally difficult to get older high school students to participate).
- Operating budget: Ongoing revenue stream. Can concessions make a margin? Fees for special events? Operating costs to consider: rent, utilities, insurance, security and any other needed staffing.
- Linkages to other activities and entities: Sell food/beverages from Norwalk businesses; school and library programs; meetings of local clubs/affinity groups.
Other factors to consider include a legal structure for ownership and the creation of an oversight board, alternative sites, design and layout of the center (including desired features such as a stage for small performances) and provision for displaying student artwork. Establish a legal structure for ownership and/or management of the teen center. Involve the City administration, members of the committee, churches and civic organizations, legal, architectural, and other professional entities (possibly pro bono), and other assistance as needed. It is possible that the center could be in place by 2010.

2. A related need in Norwalk is to develop activities and attractions for post-teens and young adults. If Norwalk is to attract younger adults there must be positive assets that appeal to this age group, with leisure and entertainment options as well as attractive jobs and careers. While this plan did not develop strategies regarding this age group, these needs should not be forgotten, and businesses and amenities that market to this age group should be encouraged.

Strategy 2: **Present fine arts as a vital part of the City of Norwalk.**

In preserving the exemplary small town quality of life in Norwalk, the benefit of the “big city” cultural amenities gets overlooked. There is an opportunity for cultural growth in Norwalk that would allow for fine arts to be presented and established as a vital amenity. In order for the arts to become a mindset of the population, there needs to be a way for the City itself to foster the promotion of upcoming events. Promotion and sponsorship are the heart of having a cultural life in Norwalk. Better access to promotional opportunities can work in favor of Norwalk becoming the “destination” point in Huron County.

In planning proper promotion and sponsorship of the arts, the opportunity for high quality, specialized education can occur. This would enable young students of music, art, dance, and theatre to be truly competitive in their applications to colleges and conservatories. Students, their families and schoolteachers would be more exposed to the level of artistry required to become successful in the fine arts world. Having access to a school of fine arts would enable students to achieve their goals in Norwalk. Many students have to drive out of town to find professional musicians, dancers, or artists who can put them in touch with the reality of the fine arts life.

1. Add artistic and cultural events to the City’s bulletin board, as this web-based database becomes more popular. Involve the website administrator, and ensure the web site is continuously updated. Begin this ongoing process within one year (2008).

2. Broaden the bulletin board to include Villages and Cities throughout Huron County. Involve and gather input from City, Village, school district, and County officials, Chambers of Commerce, and local media. Develop this practice within one year (2008).

3. Many not-for-profit groups have lists of contributors for “door prize” fundraisers (e.g. the Lion’s Club Independence Day raffle tickets). Include the arts/culture organizations in the awarding of prizes (such as Firelands Symphony concert tickets). Involve local newspapers and local not-for-profit groups, and begin this practice immediately.
4. Help secure a location to promote and sell tickets to cultural events and concerts. A suggested location is the centrally located Norwalk Chamber of Commerce building, where several community development organizations are co-located. Ideally, the box office needs to have an outgoing telephone line for a credit card machine. Since many events are brought to Norwalk by another group, that organization typically sells tickets as a benefit for itself. Out of town groups do not have a means to sell their own tickets locally and independently, unless they have a contact person doing it privately in Norwalk. Alternative locations can be used as well, including music stores, restaurants and coffee houses, City buildings (such as the recreation center), radio and newspapers, and businesses that become “friends of the symphony” or other appropriate organization. Have a central location and policy in place within two years (2009).

5. Encourage business owners and decision makers to invest in the cultural life of the community and to use their tickets to attend concerts. Usually these are the very people who want the fine arts for their own enjoyment or for their clients. This encouragement should be an ongoing activity.

6. Promote the concept of cultural growth as a mindset and look for opportunities to support it, by attending concerts, donating to fine arts, donating to fine arts organizations, and encouraging owners of old homes or unused building spaces to consider donating a room or two to house a fine arts school in Norwalk. The fine arts school could, if necessary, be co-located with the site of other continuous or lifelong learning activities. Involve Friends of the Symphony and similar supportive organizations, local media, members of the community with an interest in the arts, and the Chamber of Commerce. Input from local music instructors and artists would be helpful. The fine arts school should be initiated within ten years (2016).

Strategy 3: Communication to the community at large of available health care facilities and programming

The comprehensive health facilities and services found in Norwalk are excellent, reflecting the community’s concerns in matters of personal and group health and welfare. Having excellent facilities and competent staff is necessary in the presentation of a “healthy” town. The greater need is to have these important features available to all of Norwalk’s citizens. The first step must be to inform residents of what is available and how to access these services. It is imperative that Norwalk continues to grow all parts of the health delivery system.

Norwalk has exceptional health care facilities. The City has a locally controlled and operated hospital. It has attracted (and continues to add to) a significant group of associated health providers. This health campus in turn not only provides top medical services but is also a crown jewel for the City in encouraging new people and industry. The ability of the City to “billboard” these assets must be a high priority. At the same time many present citizens are not aware of this excellent resource and others that exist in Norwalk.
The Norwalk area has a full array of health related organizations. Many pharmacies, clinics, advisory boards and the like provide information on preventative health measures. The City’s recreation center offers training in fitness, as do several departments at Fisher-Titus Medical Center. As needed, the Services for the Aging, County health board, hospice and drug and alcohol addiction clinics are in place as well.

A more coordinated effort to reference and cross-reference these vital assets is very important to Norwalk’s future. A plan to establish such a body should be developed as soon as possible. Various agencies can be used to bring about better and maximized use of the resources. For emergency service the 911, police department and fire departments, and EMS are available now. For less urgent matters the United Fund, The Ministerial Association and even the Chamber of Commerce might be appropriate.

Input for the following list of recommended actions should be gathered from, minimally, the following providers: FTMC, area pharmacies and homecare agencies, ADAMHS Board, Stein Hospice, Red Cross, County Health Department and board, Lung Association, Heart Association, local health organizations, United Fund, Superintendents of schools (Norwalk, Norwalk Catholic, perhaps outlying districts), school boards, local media, churches, supermarkets, and the Chamber of Commerce.

1. Create a website or page on the community-wide bulletin board described earlier in this chapter, listing all available services. Provide for frequent updating of the website, including posting health-related training and informational events, support group meetings, and other critical dates on a recognized Community Calendar. Link this website to Fisher-Titus Medical Center and other health service web sites. List on the community website all agencies and facilitators and providers of health care within the Norwalk City service area (an ongoing activity).

2. Explore the feasibility of dedicated operators or receptionists who can provide information and referral services in non-urgent matters. This may be feasible within the structure of a hospital. (in place by 2009)

**Strategy 4:** Establish a network of multi-use paths and trails that will enable residents and visitors to travel to many destinations, using personal effort, rather than by automobile.

As the area’s population grows and lifestyles change, the need for readily accessible, healthy exercise facilities increases. The most effective and useful facilities will enable residents to get that exercise more easily in the course of ordinary daily activities. This can be accomplished by connecting people’s homes and neighborhoods, with their destinations, such as schools, the library, downtown, churches, stores, medical facilities, parks, recreation centers, restaurants, and places of work; using walking paths, bike paths, and greenways. Safe routes for children to walk or bike to school are also valuable.

Conversely, there are many benefits to the reduction of motor vehicle travel: lower vehicle operation costs, less crowded streets, lower street maintenance costs, and better air quality.
The following recommendations are summarized in map form following the narrative. It is difficult to place a time frame on the completion of all components presented below. The first step should be completed within a short time frame of one to two years (by 2008). The more comprehensive system should be in place within fifteen years (2022). However, at any given time, efforts should be underway to accomplish the next incremental component.

1. Connect west side with downtown destinations. Extend the North Coast Inland Trail from its terminus at the North West Street intersection and neighborhood, inward toward the downtown, near Railroad Street, by arranging an easement on the Ohio Edison right of way that follows the former Penn Central corridor to Ohio Street.

2. Connect north side with Route 250 North destinations. Develop the abandoned Norfolk and Western rail corridor, already owned by the City, that originates at its intersection with the Wheeling and Lake Erie railroad on the south side of Route 18, midway between Route 61 and Old State Road. From there it extends north, crosses beneath Routes 18, 20, and 61 at the Route 61 split, follows Schauss Avenue and Republic Street, crossing St. Mary’s Street, Williams Street, and Gallup Avenue, adjacent to Bishman Park, (which connects to the Ernsthausen Recreation Center), crossing Route 250 not far from Baines Park, and extends north to Milan where it connects to the Huron River Greenway.

3. Connect west side to north side through downtown district. Identify and develop a route, from vicinity of the Tops store, using streets, Ohio Edison property, private land easements or acquisitions, and Norwalk Schools land near Whitney Field, to connect the North Coast Inland Trail (1) with (2) on the north side of East Main Street near the Schauss Avenue intersection.

4. Connect Memorial Lake Reservoir Park and the east side to the entire north side by development of a short, specialized rail-with-trail route along Route 18 and adjacent to the W&LE line at the Old State Road intersection near the City’s water treatment plant. This would make a connection to items 1, 2 and 3 above.

5. Begin acquisition of right of way and easements for a south side loop that would extend entirely around the south side of the City from the North Coast Inland Trail at North
West Street to Memorial Lake Park. It would cross West Main Street, the Norwalk Creek Greenway, near or through the Huron County Fairgrounds, crossing Norwood Avenue at or near Shady Lane Drive, passing the High School, Sheriff’s office and Jail, Department of Job and Family Services, Shady Lane Park, Carriage House Living Center, Gerken Family and Child Center, and Fisher-Titus Medical Center, across Route 250, extending east through the Executive Drive destinations or Firelands Boulevard area, to cross Old State Road and connect to Memorial Lake Park.

6. Create access to the rural east side North Coast Inland Trail. Acquire right of way and easements to connect from (4) at the Route 18 and Old State Road intersection to the North Coast Inland Trail that commences immediately west of the Route 20 and Townsend Avenue intersection and extends eastward through Collins to Derussey Road in Collins Township.

7. Begin acquisition of right of way and easements for a Norwalk Creek Greenway from Memorial Lake Reservoir into the Uptown and westward toward the present Armory near route 61. (This goal was in the 1964 plan.)

An effort of this magnitude will require the involvement of many City departments and officials, and should perhaps be managed by Parks and Recreation. It should also be coordinated with the North Coast Regional Council of Park Districts, which owns the North Coast Inland Trail. It is also recommended that a citywide volunteer council of some sort be engaged to support this effort. Success will depend in great part upon the acquisition of grant funds for property acquisition and trail construction. The City administration will need to be actively involved in obtaining such grant funds.

Strategy 5: Planning by Norwalk’s Park and Recreation Department to improve residents’ quality of life; coordination with other recreation service providers.

The consideration of recreation occurs elsewhere in this plan. Notably, the provision of park space is included in the Land Use section, and the development of the Ernsthausen Community Center is addressed in the Community Facilities chapter. However, several concepts involving recreation facilities and programming have enough overlap with other topics included in this chapter, and have such a direct bearing on quality of life, that they need to be mentioned here. The following are several basic concepts that should be followed in providing for and monitoring improvements in the quality of life in Norwalk.

1. Support efforts to provide neighborhood parks within safe walking distance of existing and planned residential areas (involve Park and Rec department, contributing residential developers, Planning and Zoning).

2. Maximize the usefulness of the Memorial Lake reservoir and surrounding property. Complete the walking trail (within three years), construct an amphitheater (when resources allow), and plan events and activities as budget allows (ongoing).

3. Maximize the usefulness of the Ernsthausen Center: implement plans to add amenities and space to that facility, as described in the Community Facilities chapter. Major
improvements will require a public relations campaign and possible adjustment of user fees to ensure sufficient revenues. This is a long-range activity that may not be implemented for as many as eight to ten years.

4. Expand sports facilities where demand exceeds available supply of such facilities. For example, it may become feasible to expand the softball diamonds at Baines Park south to Westwind Drive, combining with a neighborhood park serving the expanding residential neighborhood in that vicinity, or elsewhere, based on feasibility analysis. Such expansion may be expected within the next five years (2011).

5. Catalog all community-based recreation, fitness, and sports opportunities, whether fee based or free. The catalog of activities can be printed and also incorporated in a community-wide website, but must be maintained as a current and reliable source of information. Involve the Park and Rec department, the Chamber, private enterprises providing services, and the City administration. In place by 2008.

**Strategy 6:** *Foster the diversity of retail and service businesses and restaurants to broaden consumer choices.*

As Norwalk’s population continues to grow, so does the need for a variety of full-service restaurants. Currently, choices in Norwalk are somewhat limited, and residents of Norwalk often drive to other Cities to dine.

If Norwalk is in the position to offer several full-service restaurant choices, it is likely that this addition would attract customers from not only Norwalk, but also those, from many surrounding communities, who currently drive to Sandusky, Lorain County and Mansfield. In addition, Norwalk would be able to offer owners and management of local businesses the opportunity to entertain their potential clients.

Activities should include marketing to potential restaurants to find out which ones are looking for a new location, surveying the community for preferences, determining potential locations in Norwalk, and conducting market research to pinpoint which restaurants are looking for locations for development and extend invitations. The ideal goal is to bring at least two new full-service dining establishments to Norwalk within the next two to five years.

1. Support efforts to bring new viable restaurant options to the City, including efforts to ascertain the preferences of the Norwalk market and their level of support for these alternatives. Work with economic development organizations to identify and market sites for restaurant development, and facilitate any market research and prospect development. Following this preliminary activity, work with economic development organizations to recruit preferred restaurant entities, with an effort to offer alternatives to the franchise operations already located in Sandusky and Perkins Township, to differentiate Norwalk’s offerings from those in nearby areas.
2. Assist in nurturing local entrepreneurs who wish to begin restaurant operations in the Norwalk area. Use the network of assistance providers (SCORE, SBDC, local sources of financing). This activity, as well as outside recruitment, is ongoing, and both may take two to five years to achieve results.

3. Ease of shopping and obtaining needed services is an important aspect of a community’s quality of life, especially as the cost of travel to other destinations increases. Because Norwalk has adopted the four-point Main Street program for Central Business District development, the most likely entity to approach this goal is the Economic Restructuring initiative of Main Street Norwalk. The following approach is recommended:

With the assistance of economic development organizations, complete and make available (by 2009) an inventory of retail and service businesses located in Norwalk, both consumer oriented and business-to-business. Analyze any apparent gaps in services and products offered locally, where significant business “leaks” to nearby markets and could be profitably captured locally. Residents could be surveyed or sampled to determine desired businesses. In cases where a clear and significant demand is evidenced, or where a gap is readily apparent, the economic development entities should work to either recruit an established business in the desired product or service line to locate in Norwalk, or nurture a qualified local entrepreneur’s efforts to develop that product or service line, utilizing available financing, training or technical assistance, and business coaching incentives. This ongoing effort should occur as specific business lines are identified and specified by consensus of the above business development entities.

3. As a business incubator is developed within Norwalk, utilize the incubator and its available space as a further incentive for emerging new retail or service enterprises. This incentive shall be ongoing once an incubator is established.

Strategy 7: Development of a Community Soccer Complex

Over 400 youth from pre-school to middle school age participate in the intramural soccer league sponsored by the Huron County Youth Soccer Association (HCYSA). The vast majority of these individuals are from Norwalk. In addition, approximately 100 additional youth represent Norwalk when competing in travel leagues sponsored through HCYSA. These teams travel throughout the Cleveland area. Norwalk High School fields men’s varsity and junior varsity soccer and a women’s team. There are also adult Hispanic teams.

Despite the interest in soccer, there is no single outdoor complex. Some travel teams and all of the intramural teams play at the Norwalk Middle School. Other travel teams play at the Ernsthausen Center, Maplehurst Elementary School, St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, and a field on Shady Lane next to the County Jail. Norwalk High School has a game field and practice field on Christie Avenue. Visiting teams have often been confused due to the multiple locations. Also, some of these locations lack restroom facilities.

Some communities such as North Ridgeville have municipal soccer complexes. Others, such as North Royalton, have facilities maintained by the soccer league.
With respect to indoor complexes, the nearest true soccer complex is Gameday Sports located near Oberlin. Gameday has a field turf indoor field. Some of Norwalk’s travel teams have played in the indoor league and others have had team members attend foot skills and goal keeping clinics. The Norwalk Park and Recreation Department sponsors indoor soccer, which is played at the old Rec Center on Monroe Street. This complex, which was initially an armory, is a multi-use facility and the game is played on a gym surface. Travel teams, which play in both the spring and fall, have a difficult time in locating gym space in which to practice during inclement weather.

Creation of a single outdoor complex for youth soccer for both travel and intramural maintained by a partnership between the City and HCYSA would resolve the issue.

An indoor complex would aid in the development of teams and provide additional opportunities for instruction.

1. Explore the use of Bishman Park, located on Republic Avenue just west of the Ernsthausen Recreation Center, as a soccer complex. The park currently has a baseball diamond. A preliminary site layout suggests that most of the City’s demand for soccer playing fields could be satisfied at this location. Situate the goals such that the soccer fields would not interfere with any softball or t-ball activity. Restrooms can then be provided for home or traveling teams at the adjacent Ernsthausen Center. This alternative should be pursued by HCYSA and the City Park and Rec Board within one year, and can be pursued as either a short term or long term solution.

2. If Bishman Park facilities are determined to be unsuitable for the complex, or if these facilities cannot be made available, explore the acquisition by HCYSA of alternate facilities, either within or outside Norwalk’s City limits. A potential alternative site is the property owned by the City of Norwalk located just west of the wastewater treatment plant and just north of Baines Park, which accommodates the City’s softball leagues. The site must meet criteria including ease of access for local and visiting teams, sufficient acreage to site the needed number of fields, level and tillable terrain, satisfactory drainage, sufficient available area for parking, access and egress to an adjacent collector road, and compatibility with adjacent and nearby land uses. Grant funding can be pursued to acquire and develop the acreage.

3. Additionally, explore the inclusion of a field turf surface in the Ernsthausen Center during any significant expansion of that facility. All activities listed under this section will involve the City administration, Park and Rec Board and administrators, and HCYSA officers and membership.
The variety of opportunities to learn, participate, meet with others, and deepen one’s enjoyment of life in Norwalk – from bird watching to square dancing to learning about computers to master gardening - is vast, but there is often no way to learn about those opportunities aside from small print in the newspaper or information from the sponsoring groups themselves. A readily accessible source of inclusive and up-to-date information could help improve the potential for the quality of life for many Norwalk community members.

The decline in American civic participation has been lamented in recent years and documented in Robert Putnam’s book, Bowling Alone. There is often a disconnect between those who want to find ways to be active and contributor to their community, and those organizations and entities that are looking for volunteers. We need to make it easier to connect potential volunteers and participants with the opportunities that exist within Norwalk.

Several special events that contribute to Norwalk’s uniqueness are held every year. These include (but are not limited to) the Huron County Fair, Thunder in the Streets, holiday parades, farmers’ markets, art shows, community church services, and others, and a new community festival scheduled for early fall is being planned. The comprehensive plan does not need to address the planning of these ongoing events. However, publicity of those events can be tied to the other publicity efforts listed above, and if a broad community demand is expressed for a new event (such as a community themed festival), inclusive planning within Norwalk for that event should be encouraged, in order to ensure that it represents Norwalk in the best light possible and maximizes resident enjoyment and (to the extent possible) returns to Norwalk’s business community.

1. Assist in the development of a central clearinghouse of information on upcoming events, classes, learning opportunities, and performances in Norwalk and surrounding communities that are available to the public, affinity groups and special interest groups. The clearinghouse should become Internet based, with access to media (newspapers, radio, cable TV). Seek funding to develop and maintain the clearinghouse, and identify a responsible party to host and maintain the clearinghouse. Involve Chamber, schools, venues and event providers (Towne and Country Theater, fairgrounds, Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center, churches, school systems, cinema, Norwalk Raceway Park, library, Park and Recreation Department, Ohio State University Extension, and numerous others). Clearinghouse to be up and running with established protocol for operation and publicity effort by 2009.

2. Update and expand the database of volunteer participation opportunities. Utilize the United Fund as the primary party providing data on volunteerism opportunities, and link efforts to Senior Enrichment Services’ Ambassador Program. This database could be a community service/civics project for a high school class or scouting group. Coordinate it with knowledgeable sources such as the United Fund and social service task forces,

Strategy 8: Notification to the public of the variety and wealth of opportunities within the City, including a “community catalog” of events, festivals, activities, facilities, opportunities for volunteerism, lifelong learning classes, and other opportunities.
and list opportunities for participation in an initial publication that is distributed to key recipients, and included on the community website. Publicize the website and contact information for all potential providers of input, and for general public interested in opportunities. Involve Chamber, United Fund, City administration (with link to City website), schools, and social service organizations and networks. Up and running by 2009, in coordination with the clearinghouse described in #1 above.
Chapter 12

Community Services

Goals:

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 in 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.
7. Maximize ease of access to local government and its ability to provide timely assistance to the public.
8. 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.
9. Focus on responsiveness to the needs of the citizenry and business.
10. Ensure that services are provided in a cost-effective, efficient manner that earns the respect and support of the community.
11. Undertake action planning to accomplish the broad goals of accessibility, service, responsiveness, and efficiency of operation.
12. 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.

Introduction:

“Community services”, for purposes of this document, is a broad term that encompasses the large number of family service agencies and organizations, government and quasi-governmental boards, and public services provided to individuals and households by City and county government, such as police services.

It is recognized that the array of services available within the City are vitally important. A community’s greatest asset is its people, and these services exist to allow those people to live, work, and interact within the City as productively and fruitfully as possible. While services that offer treatment for pathologies and existing conditions are critical, perhaps more important are services that provide prevention and intervention to overcome potential
personal problems and improve the quality of life of Norwalk’s citizenry and productivity of the City’s workforce.

A broad array of community services is provided to citizens within the City of Norwalk. Because Norwalk is a county seat and population center, many county-level services are housed in Norwalk. In addition, there are a number of facilities ranging from Head Start classrooms operated by Erie-Huron CAC, to after school and other programming offered at the Salvation Army, to a Food Bank, employment and training services provided at the Huron County Department of Job and Family Services, and many other services.

Unfortunately, these services and their intake offices are spread throughout the community. Community services frequently involve referrals of participants from one program to another. From a land use perspective, this results in many cross-town trips from county offices to City offices to private or nonprofit organizations. There is no history of consolidating services under one roof, or even in one general area within the City.

Community forums brought out a number of issues worth mentioning. Services, and their related issues, ranged across the board, including:

- Disaster planning
- Safety forces (police, fire)
- Building inspection
- Safety dispatch communications
- Leaf pickup
- Snow removal
- Day care
- Senior centers and programs
- Drug abuse prevention/treatment
- Handicap facilities
- Indigent health care
- Animal control
- Recycling and refuse collection
- Transportation services for seniors
- Health Department services
- Mentoring programs
- Drug free activities for children
- Urgent medical care
- Intergenerational activities
- Renewed Welcome Wagon
- Eldercare
- An ombudsman for senior assistance
- Assistance in overcoming language barriers
- Counseling in budgeting and family finances
- Better location for clothing bank

**Huron County Needs Assessment**

Several entities within Huron County, including the United Fund of Norwalk, Huron County Department of Job and Family Services, Huron County General Health District, and Mercy Hospital of Willard, commissioned an assessment and prioritization of needs throughout the county. Norwalk was one of four targeted geographic areas included in the assessment. Surveys were completed by a series of key informants and key service providers, preceded by a discussion and consensus on the list of issues to be used in all subsequent data gathering efforts by members of a “Community Needs Assessment Steering Committee”. Five critical areas were selected as focal points: education and workforce development,
health and dental care, mental health and substance abuse, public safety, and self-sufficiency and quality of life issues.

Top three priorities were selected by focus groups and by service providers for each of the five critical areas. The results were as follows:

**Education and Workforce Development**

Service providers and focus groups said:
1. Most employment opportunities are in low wage jobs
2. Jobs lost due to relocation, closing, and/or downsizing
3. Potential employees are predominantly low skilled and undereducated

**Health and Dental Care**

Service providers and focus groups said:
1. Affordable and accessible health insurance
2. Affordable medical/dental care
3. Affordable medications

**Mental Health and Substance Abuse**

Service providers said:
1. In home parenting/mentoring for families who deal with mental health issues
2. Medication costs
3. Limited psychiatric availability

Focus groups said:
1. Community ignorance about drug/alcohol abuse
2. Medication costs

**Public Safety: Huron County Overall**

Service providers said:
1. Drug control
2. Tie for second:
   - Communication between public safety officials
   - Staff reductions in public safety forces

Focus groups said:
1. Drug control
2. High-risk behavior by juveniles
3. Increase of physical, sexual and psychological abuse

**Self-Sufficiency and Quality of Life**

Service providers said:
1. Affordable housing
2. Lack of economic opportunities
3. Funding for family emergency needs

Focus groups said:
1. Lack of economic opportunities
2. Lack of prescription drug coverage
3. Affordable and available child care

Steering Committee members believed there was a marked similarity across geographical locations that supported the use of the overall Huron County rankings, depicted above, for purposes of further discussion. Thus, the above listing of priorities represents the perceived needs within the City of Norwalk as well as all of Huron County.
Strategies and Recommendations

General recommendations regarding public services are to maintain the necessary number of professionals and other staff recommended by nationally recognized standards and population ratios.

**Strategy 1:** Recognize the vital importance of adequately staffed, trained, and equipped safety services forces, and house such services in facilities that minimize response times throughout the City and environs.

1. Research and evaluate the feasibility of a new fire department facility (see Community Facilities chapter), and plan for its financing and construction if research leads to the conclusion that a new facility is warranted. This includes the necessary research to determine the need for a central location versus a station and substation. One or more locations need to be carefully planned to minimize response times throughout the City, especially taking into consideration the increased congestion on Norwalk's north side along the U.S. 250 corridor and Westwind Drive. This project may take ten years or more to complete, and will involve traffic studies, land acquisition, design, and construction. The benefits of having two stations (minimized response times) must be balanced with the cost of staffing and equipping two stations, which may be prohibitive.

2. Every five years, conduct a study to establish adequate safety services staffing levels, which will allow for budget planning if adding personnel is deemed necessary. Ensure that safety forces are adequate for the size of the community. As Norwalk grows, budget for the addition of safety forces to, at the least, maintain minimum standards regarding full-time forces.

3. Provide for adequate training and equipment to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of safety forces in carrying out their duties. Safety force leadership needs to keep their employees well trained in order to provide effective and efficient service. Continue Norwalk's current budget process, where equipment needs are identified and discussed, and solutions to those needs are planned. Also, the budget process should be used to secure adequate training money.

4. Focus on the substance abuse problem as a priority in Norwalk, and mobilize resources and partnerships/collaborations in the area of education, public relations, prevention, treatment, monitoring, and enforcement.

5. Actively engage the community in determining what safety force services are necessary and what are desirable, with a strong emphasis on prevention, enforcement, and identified problem areas.

6. Safety force leadership needs to stay informed on technology advancements. Safety force leadership can use the budget process to update technology as needed.
Strategic Offer consistently improved and adapted senior services, facilities, and programming, to respond to the changing needs of the growing elderly sector.

As noted in the population and demographics chapter, the elderly population in Norwalk is expected to expand considerably over the next two decades. With that increase will come a demand for increased services and facilities for the elderly. Senior services and programs will become increasingly important, as will such factors as accessible housing and amenities.

An important goal of senior services is to support and build programs and resources that allow seniors to remain independent as long as they are able. The social cost of supporting a dependent senior is typically significantly greater than providing for the varying needs of the independent elderly. For example, while a nursing home bill may cost $5,000 monthly, the cost for assisted housing, which does not provide medical care but can support a senior with basic amenities and services, may be $1,300 or so monthly.

1. There is a need for a new senior center in Norwalk to serve the north central portion of Huron County, especially including Norwalk’s elderly population. A new center should be developed that has growth potential for increased capacity. The whole community should be involved in the planning process, so the facility is responsive to varying community needs and can support intergenerational activities. The facility should be located on a site that is easily accessible and can provide ample parking.

Services for Aging officials are planning the eventual construction of a new senior center in Norwalk within the Shady Lane area, on land currently owned by Huron County. This location, within close proximity of the current senior center, provides easy access to elderly users throughout Norwalk, and also provides accessibility to others living throughout the Norwalk senior center’s service area throughout the north-central portion of the county. The location is only a few minutes from the intersection of U.S. 250 with the U.S. Route 20 bypass, providing efficient access from all directions. Further, it is close to the Fisher-Titus medical campus and Norwalk High School, making collaborations with those institutions more likely. The new senior center should be in place within six years, by 2013.

In addition to a new center, it is recommended that Services for Aging collaborate when feasible with other organizations, such as Fisher-Titus Medical Center and Norwalk’s Park and Recreation Department, to bring about beneficial programming such as exercise programs for seniors now held at the Ernsthause Center. As the elderly population grows and health and fitness among the elderly grow as an interest, further opportunities for collaboration between the Park and Recreation department and its facilities with Services for Aging should be explored. This is an ongoing activity.

2. Facilitate an increase in the stock of independent, assisted, and other senior housing to meet projected needs. Collaborate with developers, seniors, and Services for Aging. Engage reputable developers with familiarity in the factors involved in building and managing senior housing. This effort should be ongoing as more people enter retirement.
3. Assist in expanding public transportation, especially including options for out-of-county transportation. Different forms of transportation services offered within the area need to be involved and coordinated, including Services for Aging, taxi services, and transportation offered by faith based organizations.

4. Take steps to increase resources for maintenance and home repairs for seniors, including wheelchair accessible ramps. Coordinate with financial institutions for low interest loans, with contractors, and with agencies and organizations interested in participating. Search for government grant opportunities.

5. Foster an increase in the capacity to provide “meals on wheels”. Find an innovative and cost-effective way to enhance the provision of meals for seniors in their homes (2008).

6. Support the position of a locally accessible Senior Ombudsman, possibly housed within Senior Enrichment Services, to respond to residents’ requests, help obtain responses from authorities, and advocate for the needs of area seniors. Such a position currently exists at the regional level through the Mansfield Area Office on Aging (in place by 2010).

Strategy 3: Provide cost-effective and customer-friendly governmental services to Norwalk residents and businesses.

It is important to maximize the ease of access to local government and its ability to provide timely assistance to the public. Goals include responsiveness to the needs of the citizenry and ensuring that services are provided in a cost-effective, efficient manner.

1. Review and revise as necessary the community disaster plan to maintain a continuity of operations, and communicate its major features to all residents and businesses. Maintain the excellent degree of coordination between the Huron County EMA and City safety forces.

2. Provide for improved and more comprehensive communication of community events and available services through the community website, press releases to the local media, and use of available message space.

3. Involve the City in direct delivery of human services only when the service is within a City department’s mission and when the City is the most equitable or effective provider and there are no other qualified providers.

4. Consider restructuring of staffing at City departments as new needs are identified. For example, consider employment of a City engineer, if benefit/cost analysis indicates that it is a cost-effective and time-saving alternative.

5. Examine the City’s recycling program, and take steps to ensure that cost-effectiveness is maximized, as well as the public’s awareness and participation rate.

6. Evaluate the benefit of formalized capital improvements planning for annual capital, buildings, utility, and other major improvements. If it is found to improve
administrative planning and budgeting, prioritization of needs, and allocation of resources, consider adoption of a formal system of capital improvements planning (in place by 2009; see chapter 14).

7. The City should coordinate with community agencies, or through the United Fund office as a central hub for information, to ensure that a resource directory of all service providers is disseminated, possibly in booklet form (such as the directory developed by the ADAMHS Board) and on the Internet, within two years. Include provisions for updating the directory on a frequent basis.

**Strategy 4: Communicate, coordinate, and provide public, social, and nonprofit services**

Enhanced communication is needed to provide effective notification of available services, their benefits, and their eligibility requirements to the public. Further, coordination is needed between the numerous agencies offering services, to minimize duplication and provide a seamless delivery of services.

1. Utilize the existing Huron County Inter-Agency Council meetings to improve communication and coordination among agencies. A central contact agency is the Norwalk United Fund, which serves as an umbrella organization, and which maintains a database of information offered at inter-agency meetings. This database includes agency and agency contact information. Agencies represented range from profit to nonprofit, community services, and government agencies. Open the lines of communication by implementing the first step. In addition, make greater use of conference calls, emails, and other means of communication between the participating parties.

2. Encourage the siting of service agencies’ intake, meeting, activity, and training venues to be in locations that are readily accessible by the public. When possible, encourage, plan, and develop co-locations of multiple agencies and services that serve many of the same client base. Ensure accessibility to all such facilities by the elderly and disabled. In promoting co-location of complementary services, encourage and facilitate broad community participation in the planning and provision of social services. Siting of a public service facility should be based on criteria including specific facility requirements for acreage, transportation and access; land use compatibility; potential social, fiscal, environmental, and traffic impacts; a consideration of alternatives; and fair distribution of public services throughout the City. Foster the expansion of facilities as needs outgrow the capacity of existing physical facilities, and as needs grow with population and societal trends. Such facilities may include the Salvation Army, Gerken Center for Early Childhood Development, and Huron County Health Department.

**Strategy 5: Ensure that the community provides adequate health services that are responsive to the changing needs of the Norwalk area’s population.**

The Norwalk area is fortunate to house a progressive and growing health care community led by the Fisher-Titus Medical Center. The array of facilities, technologies, and medical generalists and specialists has grown considerably, evidenced by the expanded medical campus surrounding the hospital, as well as the “Phase 1” patient pavilion and “Phase 2”
addition of new and upgraded rehabilitation and oncology facilities, with a third phase underway, including cardiology and diagnostic services. Complementing these facilities are a wide number of health care services that help provide preventive, diagnostic, and treatment services to the general public, ensuring that needed services can reach those who cannot afford them under conventional means.

1. Engage the members of the Huron County Inter-Agency Council to collaborate on public and private community health care issues. This should be an ongoing process. Topics of interest are: changing medical technology, the growing senior population, expansion of rehabilitation services, special needs populations, continued growth of less invasive procedures, funding and economics, outreach to the community, medical malpractice costs, the availability of services, pharmacy costs, and accreditation.

2. Assist in the establishment of a local community-based health care needs assessment process to ensure area needs and services are met and to avoid unnecessary duplication of facilities to help reduce costs to the community. Long-term economic impacts should be considered. The process should be in place by 2010.

3. The City should collaborate with FTMC and other health care providers to ensure the best possible provision of health care, including affordable care to low-income residents, and should assist in offering programs, events, and outreach to the community. The development by Fisher-Titus of an “Urgent Care”, off-hours alternative to an emergency room should be supported for those throughout the community who would benefit from such as facility. (In place by 2007)

**Strategy 6: Provide building and premise inspection services that effectively provide for the safety of building occupants while not inhibiting desirable development from taking place.**

As residential, rental, and commercial properties age, they can often become non-compliant with existing building codes, endangering the health and safety of community members. Inspection services need to be in place to ensure that residential, rental, and commercial properties are upgraded to conform to existing codes. The purpose of inspection services is to protect the Norwalk community while not being overly prohibitive to the development of the community and new investments.

1. Further develop the Norwalk Fire Department’s Inspection Unit to keep pace with community growth.

2. Continue to utilize State services for the construction of commercial buildings in the short run. Such services are currently provided from the Richland County inspection office. A countywide effort is underway to study the benefits and costs of alternatives to this arrangement, including subcontracting with another entity or supporting a stand-alone county office. Costs would include the salary and benefits associated with hiring a certified commercial building inspector and being able to inspect all necessary components of commercial construction. Such costs would have to be supported by a sufficient revenue stream generated by inspection fees. If a locally supported commercial inspection office is found to be financially feasible, develop such an office.
within five to seven years; alternatively, achieve a satisfactory solution involving
dedicated staff from another entity within the same timeframe. Input should be
obtained from NEDC, HCDC, builders' associations, and local and county government
officials.

3. Continue to hold collaborative meetings with City departments prior to State approval of
building plans for commercial property, to gather and share all pertinent information of
interest to the varied departments (planning/zoning, fire, police, streets and utilities).

4. Develop and pass needed legislation to shape inspection services to best meet
community needs.

5. Consider best practices from similar communities in developing plans for inspection
services.

6. Research contracting with other government or regional inspection services to provide
such services in Norwalk for residential and rental properties of four or fewer units.
Research should include looking at private enterprise solutions, the workload, and
potential costs.

**Strategy 7:** Ensure that the City provides adequate legal and insurance services for its
residents, businesses, and institutions and organizations.

1. Utilize the Huron County Bar Association to establish a call center, email listserv, and
website to field legal questions that can be answered on a pro bono basis by local
attorneys. The availability of this free service should be scheduled for two hours or so
on a periodic basis, such as once per month, and its availability can be marketed to the
whole community. A website could be used to provide more general information on the
legal system, required steps for certain legal processes, and other information of interest
to the general public. Additionally, establish through the Huron County Bar Association
a “speakers’ bureau” list of attorneys who can be contacted to present general legal
information to local groups and organizations.

2. Re-establish a local agent council of all local insurance representatives. Due to a lack of
knowledge or misunderstanding, community members experience financial and/or
opportunity loss regarding services provided by the insurance industry. Consumer and
service provider education by insurance industry representatives will allow two-way
communication, providing necessary information to the consumer and allowing feedback
to the local insurance industry for service gap analysis. (in place by 2009.) Also, establish
a call center, email listserv, and website for insurance industry questions that will be
answered by insurance representatives. Similar to the legal service described above, this
service should be scheduled for two hours or so at a time on a scheduled basis, perhaps
once a month. The existence of this service, perhaps coupled with the legal service,
should be marketed to the whole community.
Strategy 8: Provide an accessible and coordinated continuum of family services to those who require them or depend upon them for basic needs.

1. Leverage community resources and leaders (on an ongoing basis) to develop a grassroots lobbying effort targeted toward State and Federal level office holders. Topics of concern are:
   - Medicaid and Medicare funding
   - Low wage jobs and job growth
   - Elderly home health care
   - Creating a statewide business and industry-friendly environment
   - State and Federal restrictions on local budgets that inhibit or prohibit local ability to fund or transfer funds into identified governmental services to provide for local needs.

2. Support the monitoring of needs and assessment of staffing levels and budget needs for Adult Protective Services as the aging population grows (an ongoing activity that should be performed on a routine schedule), and at Children’s Services according to workload. A poor economy directly impacts Children’s Services’ workload. (ongoing)

3. Leverage community resources for increased child care services. Work with community partners and providers to maximize the effectiveness and responsiveness of the network of diverse child day care providers, throughout the City, that are affordable, accessible, and of high quality (ongoing).

4. Advocate for and support the development of adequate ESOL classes for the growing Hispanic/Latino population within the Norwalk area. Locate classes at a facility where students will feel welcome and comfortable. Advocate for an identification system, where local banks may accept this means of identification. Consider the cultural and recreational needs of this ethnic group, including access to soccer fields, where Norwalk attracts Hispanic men from a regional area for recreational play. Encourage all services offered within Norwalk to be accessible and understandable to all by removing architectural, cultural, language, communication, locational, and other barriers.
Chapter 13

Land Use

Goals:

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 public safety 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.

Introduction

A wide variety of comments regarding land use were received during the community forums and subsequent focus groups. Those comments address land use by geographic area, as well as the use of regulatory means to guide land use decisions. Because guiding land use is at the heart of any comprehensive plan, many of these comments may overlap topics that are covered in other chapters. The following is a summary of comments received:

Geographic Issues

- Expand the residential growth area southward, with homes, parks, and shopping
- Develop the south side to benefit the Norwalk school district
- Develop the City to the south and east
- Expand the City limits to the south, across the bypass
- Annex the Raceway Park into the City; annex east for industry; annex to the bypass east all of Routes 18 and 20; develop east end utility district – water and sewer for airport and Raceway Park; annex south; develop around Raceway Park
- Expanded industrial park on the east side; manufacturing on the east and north sides
- Annex from Washington Street north for residential development
- Residential on the south and west sides
- Consider changing residential use to permit commercial use along Milan Avenue north of League
- Retail expansion to the south end of town; south side grocery store and restaurants
- Preservation of the core City; Downtown should be destination for businesses, tourists, residents; expand the Downtown.
- Improve Norwalk Creek area

**Growth Issues**

- Plan for space to expand business and industry
- Balance growth with small town atmosphere; quality, measured growth; mix of urban and rural in small town atmosphere
- Preserve historic properties; expand historic district to Benedict; maintain historic sites, green spaces, and parks
- Plan a retail/tourism district; entertainment district; need venues for performing arts and live music; new recreation opportunities, teen center or hangout
- Apartments above storefronts; mixed use

- Increase green space in areas to be developed; more green outdoor space for physical activities to support a health community; Norwalk Creek riverwalk; preservation of natural areas
- Expand housing and school facilities
- Realign school districts
- Preserve farmland
- Plan within regional context

**Regulatory and Process Issues**

- Create retail zones (to accommodate and guide commercial growth)
- Separate residential from industrial uses through zoning
- Consider specific regulations (overlay district, design, zoning) for Downtown, separate zoning classifications; create standards of appropriateness for Downtown area; is Board of Appeals too liberal?
- Support subdivision pre-planning
- Reduce variances for housing
- Norwalk Township should be zoned; work with Township for JEDD agreement
- Youth involvement in planning
- Maintain a consistency in regulations and their enforcement
- Restriction on adult entertainment uses
Land Use in Context: Previous Land Use Planning

The 1964 Norwalk Comprehensive Master Plan (now over forty years old) addressed existing and proposed land use. To provide a sense of perspective, the salient points of that document are summarized here.

At the time of the Plan’s completion, Norwalk’s corporate area comprised 3,343 acres (just over 5 square miles), and about 51 percent of the land area was developed, with half of that being residential. Total developed land amounted to 12.7 acres per 100 population. The use of land broke down to 49 percent vacant, 25 percent residential, 2 percent commercial, 5 percent industry and railroads, 9 percent institutional and public, and 10 percent streets.

Of all developed land in Norwalk, 48 percent was residential, 20 percent streets and alleys, 18 percent public and institutional, 10 percent industry and railroads, and 4 percent commercial.

In 1964, commercial uses extended north from the central business district on Whittlesey Avenue as far as Franklin Avenue, and straddled Main Street from Case to Milan Avenues, extending one to two blocks north and south. Highway service and heavy commercial industry were located along US 20 east of Old State Road (this was before the US 20 bypass was constructed), and north of the City on US 250.

Also in 1964, industrial uses were most predominant to the west and north of downtown, at such locations as North West Street (then Stokely-Van Camp) and Newton Street (the former Norwalk Furniture building).

A map in the 1964 plan delineated vacant and undeveloped land within the City, and the plan stated that, at the time, “Available land requiring little if any conditioning or reclamation is found in almost all sections of the City and in the immediate environs. From the standpoint of both residential and nonresidential development, certain areas to the south and east appear particularly desirable for future development in the light of the contemplated bypass of US 20 and proposed interchange locations. Other attractive areas for future residential development are to the northeast and northwest.” The plan projected the following by land use type:

- Continued gradual lowering of overall residential density, increasing the ratio of land to population;
- Some increase in commercial land influenced by distribution and density of residential development and population growth in the trade area;
- Continued increase in the growth of the industrial economy, with an increase in the industrial land population ratio;
- Railroad facilities to remain at about the present level;
- Increased demand for recreational facilities as leisure time increases;
- Need for institutional land in relation to population to remain at about present proportions;
• Continuation of present proportion of total urban area in streets, with some increase in proportion of vacant land to allow for increased latitude of choice in the development of land.

The plan advocated the development of the remaining vacant land within the corporate limits, which was projected to be of sufficient “holding capacity” to accommodate population increases through 1980.

A section of the 1964 plan was entitled the Land Use Plan, to show “the different land uses throughout the community and principal public facilities recommended under the Master Plan.” Planning concepts to be considered included:

• Minimizing or eliminating inherent conflicts between certain types of land uses and between land uses and public facilities.
• Using the land use plan as a guide in amending the Zoning Map as the demand on certain land use categories increases with the continued growth of the community.
• Using land use planning to determine the size and location of various utilities and extensions, and bringing about appropriate subdivision practices.
• Consolidating new urban uses in certain sections that are successive or contiguous, at least in part, to an already developed area, and remaining within a defined planning area or “urban service area” that is estimated to be fully adequate to accommodate all likely prospective growth over the next twenty years.
• Land should not be annexed prematurely, before a reasonable amount of building development exists and tax revenues can support services provided. The plan recommended annexation, at the time, south and east to the proposed (and now existing) Bypass.
• Land reserved for industrial purposes must be “desirable, not merely suitable. Bare land, accordingly, does not constitute an industrial site.” Generally necessary features include a site that is level, convenient to a railroad or highway, served by all utilities, free of “residential nuisances”, properly drained, and with ample land for future expansion, sound protective zoning, near a labor market, and in or easily accessible to the community.
• Effort should be made to promote development of industrial districts and avoid scattered, individual tracts. The concept of an industrial “district” or, in more contemporary parlance, industrial park, was promoted, for a number of smaller operations wanting to consolidate and enjoy cost and design efficiencies.
• In the Utilities section of the 1964 plan, it is recommended that improvements should be oriented toward serving the growing residential areas then in the south, southeast, and northeast portions of the community, as well as the industrial districts to the northwest and east.

**Land Use in Context: Growth Trends Since 1964**

Norwalk has grown and expanded its perimeter since the 1964 plan, largely following the patterns of development recommended in the plan. The following is a summary of more recent land use trends and major developments over the past twenty years:
Residential

Norwalk has witnessed a number of new subdivisions within the City, including some infill developments (Oakwood, on the east side; new houses along Williams Street and tri- and quadplexes along Ontario Street, and Deerfield located south of Gallup Avenue), as well as new subdivisions along the developing edge of the City (Sycamore Hills to the west, Executive Estates and Fairwood to the south, Deerfield, Woodridge Estates, and Shaker Village condominiums to the east, a subdivision of multi-unit and single unit homes to the northeast, and Hunters Glenn condominiums and single family units along Westwind Drive on the north side. The pattern has thus been an expansion of new housing, typically single family units on quarter acre lots, at the urban edge in areas that are adjacent to existing residential development or compatible land uses.

The primary market being served appears to be the demand for new single-family homes selling for $150,000 to $250,000. The Westwind development and a subdivision extending from Old State in Norwalk’s northeast corner are responding to the lower end of this range, while the higher end has been developed in Executive Estates, Fairwood, an extension of Sycamore Hills, and some smaller subdivisions. The market for more upscale housing has been met through the ongoing development of the Eagle Creek subdivision in Bronson Township, south of Town Line Road 131. This subdivision adjacent to the Eagle Creek golf course, although served by City-provided water, relies on its own septic sewer system. Additional demand for more upscale housing has been satisfied largely through the sale of individual lots along Township roads surrounding Norwalk, particularly to the south in Norwalk and Bronson Townships, and to the north along Whittlesey Avenue and intersecting streets.

Another infill project, located north of US 20 and accessed by Old State Road, named Applewood Village, has provided sites for relatively affordable manufactured housing. Another development just north of the City, Midtown Manor, has offered several hundred sites for manufactured housing on privately maintained roadways, accessed from US 250 just south of Milan.

Condominium housing has seen a significant increase in construction in recent years, with condo projects including Hunter’s Glen accessed from Whittlesey Avenue and Westwind drive, and to the east along Route 20.

Multi-family, rental housing has been developed throughout the City over the past forty years. Many of the newer rental developments consist of subsidized multifamily or elderly housing.
Commercial

Well into the twentieth century, when travel to larger commercial centers such as Mansfield and Sandusky was still more difficult and time-consuming than it is today, Norwalk was an important commercial center, and its downtown boasted hotels, public theaters, and the Glass Block (shown above, right), a 67,500 square foot building deemed “the most complete department store in Ohio” in its day, among many other shopping destinations. The central business district has continued to be a center for commercial concentration, although it is evolving from more general commerce to more specialized and niche businesses ranging from bicycles and interior decorating treatments to musical instruments and embroidery.

Over time, commercial and general businesses including services and offices have radiated out from the central business district. Main Street businesses have been hemmed in by residential land uses beginning at Manahan Avenue to the west and Corwin Street to the east, offering little opportunity to extend downtown businesses in either of those directions.

Highway and travel-oriented businesses, and other commercial, service, and office businesses that require more space than that offered downtown were located along the corridors of U.S. 20 and S.R. 18 eastward from the point where they diverge on Norwalk’s east side. These corridors are the home for a variety of uses ranging from a large beverage distributorship to the new office of an area credit union. Other uses range from medical offices to car and truck repair facilities, and the facilities of Norwalk’s Sunrise Cooperative. The south U.S. 250 corridor extending from the U.S. 20 bypass to Executive Drive has seen recent investment in franchise “fast food” restaurants, and the growth of a local pharmacy, which benefits from proximity to the hospital and medical offices. However, with the closure of the only supermarket on the south side, general retail business south of Main Street is limited, and the pull of new commercial activity has been to the north.

Household commercial businesses and hospitality services (hotels and restaurants) have followed a northward pattern, extending where permitted by zoning along U.S. 250 North. Immediately north of the central business district are two strip shopping centers, the most recent having opened in 2005, anchored by Tops Friendly Market supermarket. Just north of that center, on the west side of Route 250, is the more established Midtown Plaza, which contains Gardner’s supermarket and a number of other retail establishments, including a hardware store and freestanding, newer pharmacy.
Some of Norwalk’s Retail Centers:
Top: Midtown Plaza and Tops Plaza
Left: Norwalk Korners Plaza
Bottom: Super Wal Mart

Farther north, U.S. 250 is flanked by a number of retail businesses and complexes, including a number of multi-tenant plazas mixed with freestanding businesses, the largest of which is a super Wal-Mart of some 250,000 square feet. Other notable business types include a number of franchise restaurants, three motels, a K-Mart, an appliance store, and automotive dealerships.

The growth of the 250 North corridor is further enhanced by the proximity of new housing (in the Midtown Manor development and along Westwind Drive), the proposed Norwalk Commons development that includes a new cinema, senior housing, and new restaurants, and the Firelands Industrial Park with manufacturers along Republic Avenue and connecting cul de sacs.

While the central business district remains a vital component in Norwalk’s economy and identity, Route 250 North has become the retail nexus of the community in terms of sales generated. It is expected that the corridor will continue to be built out, with access to back properties, such as the new Premiere Theater, via an emerging network of access roads.
Manufacturing

Norwalk has a rich history as a home to manufacturing enterprises, dating from the nineteenth century and including, among others, the initial home of the Fisher Carriage Company, later known as the Fisher Body Company, and the Norwalk Upholstering Company, eventually becoming the Norwalk Furniture Company. In earlier times, when the City was more compact, industries were located more centrally, toward the City center. As a result, there are pockets of industrial activity in the near east and near-west portions of the City, often located in their present site because of rail access, but with little or no room for expansion. Among these areas that are zoned for manufacturing are, from west to east:

- An area zoned MB manufacturing on North West and Pleasant Street that includes PolyOne and the Hen House;
- An adjoining area along Newton Street near the western terminus of League Street, and housing Maple City Rubber, Durable Corporation, Gyrus ACMI, and the former Norwalk Upholstering building;
- An industrial area just east of the preceding, located along the Jefferson Street corridor, most notably housing Mayflower Vehicle Systems, and also including Brooker Brothers Forging and the former Norwalk Foundry property;
- An “MB” district just north of the central business district, west of Whittlesey Avenue, which has lost all manufacturing businesses which, most recently, included a plant operated by Industrial Powder Coatings; and
- An area extending north from East Main Street and located west of Schauss Avenue and Ontario Street, housing Fair Publishing, Pinnacle Powder Coatings, and the former Van Dresser building that now houses a number of businesses.

The above manufacturing districts are landlocked and most are surrounded by residential land uses, offering limited opportunity for expansion. Many of the industrial buildings in these areas are multi-story brick structures, and would not be suitable for new industrial processes. Because of these limitations, a number of new industrial sites and parks have evolved. These include:

- Access to the 250 North corridor: The former Norwalk Airport and adjacent land has been developed over the past thirty years into the Firelands Industrial Park, which is currently the City’s largest geographic concentration of industries. Businesses located in this park include Janesville Sackner Group, IPC Norwalk, EPIC Technologies, a second Mayflower Vehicle Systems plant, Extol of Ohio, R.J. Beck Security Systems, Americraft Carton, Bennett Electric, Amitelli Products, Jiffy Products, American Coating Specialists, Norweco, and Eastern Tools and Equipment.
• Proximity to the U.S. 20 Bypass: Over the past twenty years, a number of manufacturers have located on the eastern edge of the City, in close proximity to U.S. 20. Industries located near and just west of the bypass include the corporate headquarters and local manufacturing plant for Norwalk Furniture Corporation and David Price Metal Services. Others include the occupants of the Commerce Fields Industrial Park on the southwest corner of the intersection of Route 20 and Laylin Road (a second Jiffy plant, the new plant for Norwalk Concrete Industries, and the Tuffman distributorship).

A sampling of Norwalk’s diverse industries: Mayflower Vehicle Systems, Norwalk Furniture Corp., New Horizons Baking Company, Norwalk Concrete Industries, ACMi, and Janesville Sackner Group.

Government/Institutional

City and County government have a firm stake in Norwalk’s central business district. Norwalk’s municipal complex along Whittlesey Avenue at the northern edge of the business district includes City Hall, the fire station, and a justice center that houses the police station and municipal courtroom with offices. A large segment of Huron County government is housed in the Huron County Courthouse and the adjacent Huron County Office Building. The former houses the County’s court system, and the latter now houses the offices of the County Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder, and Prosecutor. Additional County offices are largely located in the Huron County Administration Building on Norwalk’s north side, on Milan Avenue (U.S. 250 North). The acquisition and occupancy of the County Office Building was completed within
The Norwalk, Ohio Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 13: Land Use

the past three years, and with that change, coupled with the further purchase of the former Woolworth’s/Outdoorsman property and site control for the entire block from the courthouse to Linwood Avenue, the County’s plans for office space in the near future are complete.

A cluster of institutional buildings is located at the western edge of the central business district. This includes the Norwalk Library, the Firelands Museum, the Laning Research Center owned by the Firelands Historical Society, and a recreation center.

A cluster of governmental and institutional offices has grown along the Shady Lane corridor between Benedict and Norwood Avenues. In addition to the occupants of the older Shady Lane Complex owned by Huron County, this connector street is the address for Fisher-Titus Medical Center’s campus and the Carriage House senior housing facility, the County Department of Job and Family Services, the Sheriff’s office, County jail, County Emergency Management Agency, and the Norwalk High School. Shady Lane abuts a large tract of undeveloped land, much of which is owned by the County and City School District, and it is expected that this land could be developed for a number of potential mixed uses, including a new senior center. The influence of the growing Fisher-Titus campus on the south end of the community has been (and will continue to be) significant. As the hospital has drawn a larger number of medical specialists to its staff, a number of medical offices have been developed as a “medical campus” along Fisher-Titus Parkway, as well as along nearby Executive Drive.

**Land use in Context: Adjoining Townships**

It is important to think and plan regionally; a single municipality cannot effectively plan without consulting its neighboring jurisdictions. In the course of developing this comprehensive plan, meetings were set up with four nearby Townships that were felt to have the largest impact on Norwalk, and to be most impacted by the City. Those Townships include Ridgefield Township, to Norwalk’s immediate west and surrounding the
village of Monroeville; Norwalk Township, which surrounds Norwalk to the north, east, and immediate south; Bronson Township, which is immediately south of Norwalk Township; and Milan Township in Erie County, to the north of the City and adjacent to Norwalk Township.

In Norwalk Township, growth and development are being noted in all directions. As a rule of thumb, residential development has ensued in any area where utilities are available and, often, where annexation is possible. Examples of residential growth include the White allotment to the east, property developed along the east side of Old State Road to the northeast, the west side of Ferris Road, and an area east of town extending from SR 61 to Gibbs Road. Because Norwalk Township abuts most of Norwalk’s corporate boundary, it is most susceptible to annexation, and annexation agreements have been developed based on a property tax sharing agreement that has been in place for several years.

Past policy has been that there would be no municipal services provided without annexation. However, water can now be provided within the Township by Northern Ohio Rural Water. An agreement has been reached between that provider and the City regarding primary service areas, with a method for compensation to Rural Water when the City plans to provide water outside its previously established service area. While this agreement lays the groundwork for water distribution throughout the Township where needed, the provision of sanitary sewers is more difficult to obtain. Trustees acknowledge a need to eventually bring sewers to the Norwalk Raceway Park and Norwalk-Huron County Airport area.

Industrial development is likely in portions of the existing Township, particularly along the eastern Akron Road/SR 18 and Cleveland Road/US 20 corridors, and along connectors such as Laylin Road. Examples of development over the past few years include David Price Metals, the R&L Transfer truck terminal at SR 601 and 18, and Norwalk Raceway Park. Each of these examples indicates the potential of the aforementioned 18 and 20 corridors.

Trustees note increased traffic on several roads within the Township, including Greenwich-Milan Town Line Road, Plank Road, Laylin Road between Routes 18 and 20, and further south to South Norwalk Road, and South Norwalk Road itself, from Norwood to US 250. Laylin and South Norwalk serve as perimeter roadways around the east and south edges of Norwalk, respectively.

Trustees also note a need for increased partnerships to guarantee orderly development. They express a continued willingness to work with the City, but observed that with inevitable annexation over the coming years, Norwalk Township “may not exist” at some future point.

In Milan Township in Erie County, Trustees note no major residential growth or development, with some in the Twin Oaks subdivision and individual development along SR 13, and down Milan’s South Main Street to Route 601. Typical lot sizes are in the vicinity of 2/3 acres. Trustees note that housing demand in the area is often created by commuters who desire the rural quality of life but value the Township’s ready access to highways such as SR 2 and the Ohio Turnpike. Commercial growth has largely been experienced along the US 250 corridor, as would be expected, with some growth along SR 113 to the east, toward
Trustees feel the Township is “saturated” with water provided by Erie County and by Northern Ohio Rural Water. However, several roadways are seeing increased traffic and are in need of repair. These include US 250 within the Township, and SR 601, which is well traveled by vehicles that are bypassing Norwalk. This results in significant truck traffic in Milan’s town square, traveling along 601, then west from the square to join US 250.

Future residential development is anticipated along SR 113 to the east, toward the high school and Berlin Heights. It is noted that, with the growth of water parks and other tourist destinations to the north, the Township is the site of an increasing number of seasonal houses. As noted above, further commercial growth is expected along the US 250 corridor, and will be enhanced when sanitary sewer lines are constructed in the near future along that corridor. Industrial development will be guided to the above-mentioned target area.

Trustees lament the lack of zoning and the continuity in land use control that would exist with zoning in adjacent Norwalk Township. They feel that Norwalk’s influence was largely created by the emerging commercial corridor extending along US 250, and from increasing activities ranging from housing subdivisions along Old State Road and the mixed-use Norwalk Commons project.

In Ridgefield Township, to the immediate west, new housing development is occurring mainly in the northern portion, with attractive sites along Peru Center and River Road. New housing typically involves single-family homes on two to three acre lots, which are often located on previous five-acre lots that have been subdivided. It is felt that the Monroeville school district is an attractor. Also, the construction of water lines attracts new residential development. The pull to the north for housing is created by shopping and other destinations to the north, in the Sandusky area, as well as highway connections.

Commercial and industrial development in the Township is largely confined to the U.S. 20 corridor. Any new industrial development in the area has largely occurred in the Monroeville Industrial Park on the west side of that village. This growth along Route 20 is in conformity with the local comprehensive plan development for Monroeville and the Township.

Increased vehicular traffic has been experienced on many roads, including Peru Center and Washington Roads, the latter providing a well-used connection between Monroeville and Norwalk. Roadway needs include support for roads that are being used by heavy truck traffic and the need to replace a bridge on Peru Center Road to the north.

Ridgefield Township Trustees are open to the concept of tax sharing in the event of annexation. Currently, an agreement with the City of Norwalk allows for 100 percent of real and personal property taxes on existing property and 45 percent of those taxes on newly
created improvements or development in the target area to be retained by the Township for twelve years.

In Bronson Township, located just south of Norwalk and Norwalk Township, new housing has been developed along the frontage of several roadways, particularly in the northern portion of the Township. The most notable housing subdivision is the Eagle Creek subdivision at the northern edge of the Township, but other upscale housing has been developed along scattered sites where frontage has been sold. Some limited commercial activity is occurring in the Township along the US 250 corridor, and in the unincorporated area of Olena on Route 250. Industrial development has been minimal in Bronson Township.

Several roadway corridors have witnessed increased traffic, including US 250 between Norwalk and Fitchville, but also Old State and New State Roads, and Greenwich Milan Townline Road, especially as it carries summer traffic to Norwalk Raceway Park and northern destinations in Erie County.

Township Trustees note that Northern Ohio Rural Water has increased its activity in the area, and is extending water lines to the west to residences on Ridge Road and in Peru Township. The Trustees have mentioned an increased need to provide drainage in the Township, with a recent project providing drainage along the northern end of roadway 151.

Trustees believe future residential development in their Township will occur mainly in the northern portion of the Township, near the Eagle Creek subdivision, along Zenobia Road to the east, and north of Peru-Olena Road. Any commercial or business development is most likely along US 250, where it is zoned and planned.
Principles of New Urbanism

“New Urbanism”, sometimes referred to as neo-traditionalism, is an increasingly popular planning philosophy that promotes physical attributes that were followed in the past, encouraging such characteristics as interaction with others and reduced reliance on the automobile. Principles of New Urbanism include:

1. **Walkability**: Pedestrian friendly street design (buildings close to the street, tree-lined streets, on street parking, hidden parking lots, sidewalks, narrow and slow speed streets).

2. **Connectivity**: An interconnected street grid network that disperses traffic and eases walking; a high quality pedestrian network and public realm that makes walking pleasurable.

3. **Mixed use and diversity**: a mix of shops, apartments, offices, and homes on a site. Mixed use should be encouraged within neighborhoods, within blocks, and within buildings in many areas such as the Downtown. Also, a diversity of people.

4. **Mixed housing**: A range of types, sizes, and prices in closer proximity.

5. **Quality architecture and urban design**: Emphasis on beauty, aesthetics, human comfort, and creating a sense of place. Special placement of civic uses and sites within the community.

6. **Traditional Neighborhood structure**: A discernable center and edge to the neighborhood, with public space at the center. Importance of quality public realm, public open space designed as civic art. Contains a range of uses and densities within a ten-minute walk. Progressively less density from the center to the edge. Support for nature and natural habitats. The “urban to rural transect” has appropriate building and street types for each area along the continuum.

7. **Increased density**: More buildings, shops, residences, and services closer together for ease of walking, to enable a more efficient use of services and resources, and to create a more convenient, enjoyable place to live.

8. **Smart transportation**: Pedestrian-friendly design that encourages a greater use of bicycles, roller blades, and walking as daily transportation.

9. **Sustainability**: Minimal environmental impact of development and its operations; eco-friendly techniques, respect for ecology and the value of natural systems.

10. **Quality of Life**: Taken together, these add up to a high quality of life and create places that enrich, uplift, and inspire.

Additional principles that are applicable to smaller rural communities such as Norwalk include these: varied shops and offices at the edge of a neighborhood; a small ancillary building is permitted within the backyard of each house; an elementary school is close enough that most children can walk; a variety of pedestrian and vehicular routes to any destination, with streets forming a connected network; streets are relatively narrow and shaded by trees; parking lots and garage doors rarely front the street (parking is relegated to the rear of buildings, usually accessed by alleys); prominent sites at the termination of street vistas or in the neighborhood center are reserved for civic buildings, providing sites for community meetings, education, and religious or cultural activities.
The Land Use Plan: Following Principles of Orderly Growth

A resounding theme in the community forums held at the beginning of the planning process was the overwhelming desire to preserve Norwalk’s special “small town atmosphere”. There are several practices and policies that can be followed to achieve this primary goal, many of which are often considered to fall under the rubric of “new urbanism” or “smart growth”. Some of the basic tenets of New Urbanism are described on the preceding page. Here are some basic principles that are especially applicable to Norwalk’s development over the next twenty years, and a brief discussion of their applicability. These are not specific recommendations, but are provided as guidelines to help guide and shape development throughout the City.

Providing a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

New housing developments should be considered within the context of the City’s overall housing stock. To the greatest feasible extent, new housing should be designed in areas that mitigate the environmental costs of automobile-dependent development, and thus that maximize accessibility to shopping, employment, services, and other common destinations. Further, housing should grow on land that is already served by adequate existing infrastructure. A variety of housing types (multifamily and single family units; rental and owner-occupied; condominium options; variety of housing and lot sizes and densities) should be achieved. Housing is driven by the extent and nature of the local market; this fact helps ensure that a balance exists between the number and types of jobs in the community and the number and price ranges of housing.

Infill housing within the community should be encouraged. Two examples of infill housing are the market based housing developed along Williams Avenue just east of US 250 and the housing sites acquired and developed on Norwalk’s north side by Habitat for Humanity. Developers should be encouraged to assemble and acquire similar sites within the City for residential development. It is also suggested that upper stories of buildings in and near the central business district be considered for residential development.

Research based on new development has shown that well-designed, compact communities that include a variety of housing sizes and types may command a higher market value on a per square foot basis than do those in adjacent conventional suburban developments. City planning officials should examine local land use regulations to ensure that compact design can be achieved, within the context of conservation developments or planned unit development designs. Further, housing should be encouraged in “infill” sites within the City limits, such as undeveloped land in the Republic and Williams Street area.

Create Walkable Communities

Downtown housing is one excellent example of a step toward creating a “walkable” community, where many destinations are within an easy walking distance. In other areas, “walkability” will be enhanced through the construction of sidewalks and pathways along public property. Streetscapes should be designed throughout the community to serve a range of users safely, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles. As fuel costs rise,
optional forms of transportation, especially for short in-town trips, may become much more attractive over the next twenty years. Aside from more walker- and bicycle-friendly common routes, other practices that enhance “walkability” include mixing land uses and building compactly. Conventional land use regulations, which often unnecessarily segregate land uses and thus lengthen trips, should be questioned when the costs of such practices exceed the benefits to the community and its residents. The Norwalk Commons development presents an opportunity to develop multiple destinations (housing, restaurants, a cinema) within close proximity, thus encouraging pedestrians, who may walk from a movie to a meal or other attractions.

The Rails to Trails and related proposals presented in this comprehensive plan add a network of pathways and trails that connect multiple destinations throughout the community.

Walkability and transportation efficiency can be achieved by planning for new roadways that connect existing roads and include sidewalks. Pedestrian (and vehicular) safety can be enhanced through the use of traffic calming methods such as pavement bump-outs or speed bumps. This allows for the planning of new connecting streets without inducing drivers to travel at unsafe speeds.

**Create and Foster a Distinct and Attractive Community with a Strong Sense of Place**

Norwalk residents were adamant in their desire to maintain Norwalk’s character as a safe, small community. Norwalk’s downtown revitalization efforts over the past fifteen years have helped highlight its community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness. The unique combination of physical assets, described elsewhere in this document, that make up a positive and attractive image of the community, help distinguish Norwalk from other communities. It is important to recognize and preserve these assets.

Although it can be challenging in smaller communities, the sense of place for residents can be enhanced when natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks are used to create a sense of defined neighborhoods. Some thought should be given to defining and denoting specific neighborhoods throughout the community.

Obviously, a new housing development or business cannot conform to the architectural style of Norwalk’s nineteenth century downtown and numerous century homes. However, new development proposals should be examined in an effort to maximize their degree of “fit” within the context of the community. For example, infill developments should conform to the higher density of close-in neighborhoods, and new businesses should conform, as much as feasible, to the color, style, and texture of their neighbors.

**Mix Land Uses**

This has been mentioned before, but there is often a great advantage in intentionally mixing land uses. Many downtowns are addressed in zoning codes by overlay districts, where multiple land uses are allowed, parking requirements (for residential uses, for example) are lessened, and historic preservation architectural standards are enforced.
Mixed uses can also coexist farther from the central business district. The US 250 North corridor is an example of a district where proper planning for mixed uses can benefit all land uses in the area. As noted previously, alternatives to driving can become viable when traveling from one use in the district to another. Mixed uses that include housing can provide a stable local commercial base. Having residents within the district can also enhance the perceived security of the area by increasing the number of people “on the street”. Generally, there is increased economic activity in areas where there are more people to shop or utilize provided services.

**Preserve Open Space and Critical Environmental Areas**

The implications of this guideline are twofold. First, any natural assets within the community, such as Norwalk Creek and the area surrounding Memorial Lake Park and its reservoirs, should be preserved. Second, the promotion of infill, compact development, and preferred development or growth in close proximity to existing municipal boundaries will help preserve farmland and open space that exists outside the City limits. In general, preserving open space can boost the local quality of life, maintain desirable community character, and indirectly boost property values.

Steps should be taken to better define the community’s open space goals, including consensus on which specific sites within the community should be preserved as open space, and what adjacent and nearby areas are of critical natural or environmental value. From an environmental standpoint, preserving open space can prevent flood damage by allowing for adequate natural drainage, may help the watershed in channeling sufficient surface water into the City’s reservoir system, and preservation of farmland on prime soils aids in efficiently preserving the agribusiness sector of the regional economy. Other environmental benefits of open space planning include protecting habitat, combating air pollution, attenuating noise, controlling wind, providing erosion control, and even moderating temperatures that can be exacerbated by extensive pavement.

**Strengthen and Direct Development toward the Existing Community**

To the maximum extent practicable, development should be encouraged within and in close proximity to the existing City. It is less costly to develop land that is already served by infrastructure, and to conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe. In many cases, developers and communities are recognizing the opportunities presented by infill development; this is backed by demographic shifts and a growing awareness of the fiscal, environmental, and social costs of development focused disproportionately on the urban fringe and beyond.

Developing available parcels within the bounds of the community makes maximum use of the existing infrastructure within the City. Lower density development at the outskirts increases the water demand required by larger lots (water demand for landscaping, which can be as much as 50 percent of household water demand, is directly related to lot size), increases the chance for leakage and deterioration in infrastructure, and very often decreases the overall return on the City’s water (and other) infrastructure investment.
Zoning and Land Use Control Regulations

The basic legality of zoning as still practiced today nationwide was decided in Ohio in the case of Euclid v. Ambler Realty. The public purposes of zoning have included using land for its most suitable purpose, protecting and maintaining property values, promoting health and safety, protecting the environment, managing traffic, aesthetics, and density, encouraging housing for a variety of lifestyles and economic levels, providing for orderly development, and helping attract business and industry.

Zoning procedures are overseen by the city’s Planning Commission, its Board of zoning Appeals, and a Zoning Inspector, to ensure that zoning is fair and effective in a community. Applications or petitions for change of district boundaries or classifications of property require filing of the application with the Clerk of Council, a hearing, referral of the application by Council to the Planning Commission, which is allowed six weeks for consideration and a report back to Council, and subsequent adoption of a resolution for rezoning by City Council. Zoning regulations typically subdivide a municipality into geographic zones, depicted on a map, where specific uses are permitted. Norwalk’s zoning map allows for the following types of districts: Neighborhood Business (B-1), Downtown Business (B-2), Outlying Business (B-3), General Business (B-4), Manufacturing (M-1, M-2, and MB), and One Family Residential (R-1), One and Two Family Residential (R-2), Multi-Family Residential (R-3), and Residential-Trailer (R-T). Norwalk’s current zoning map, which is a rough guide to existing land uses in Norwalk, is attached.

The Board of Zoning Appeals may authorize a variance (a modification of the strict terms of the zoning regulations where such modification will not be contrary to the public interest and where, owing to conditions peculiar to the property and not a result of the applicant, a literal enforcement of the regulations would result in unnecessary and undue hardship), or a conditional use (a use that is appropriate for a district but which requires a hearing to determine that it will not have adverse effects). A variance will not be granted unless the Board makes a specific finding that the standards and conditions imposed by Norwalk’s zoning code have been met, and variances are not granted in cases that alter the character and use of a zoning district. Special conditions must exist which are peculiar to the land, structure, or building involved and which are not applicable to other lands, structures, or buildings in the same district.

Conditional use permits are granted in cases where a new kind of land use with unique and special characteristics relative to location, design, size, method of operation, circulation or public facilities, needs to be considered individually.

Duties of the Planning Commission with regard to zoning include: recommending the zoning ordinance (including the text and City Zoning Map) to Council for adoption, initiating advisable Zoning Map changes or changes in the text of the zoning ordinance, reviewing all proposed amendments to the text and map and making recommendations to City Council, reviewing all Planned Unit Development applications and making recommendations to Council, continuously reviewing the effectiveness and appropriateness of the zoning ordinance, employing consultants as necessary, and making use of information from appropriate public officials, departments, and agencies.
Duties of the Board of Zoning Appeals include hearing and deciding appeals where it is alleged that there is an error made by the Zoning Inspector, authorizing variances when not contrary to the public interest, and performing other functions as provided by Norwalk’s city charter.

Duties of the Zoning Inspector include enforcing and interpreting the zoning ordinance, taking steps necessary to remedy any condition found in violation by ordering the discontinuance of illegal uses or work in progress, responding to questions concerning applications for amendments to the zoning ordinance, issuing zoning permits and certificates for occupancy, inspecting buildings and uses of land to determine compliance with the zoning ordinance, notifying responsible persons of any violation, maintaining the current status of the City Zoning Map, maintaining records of zoning permits, zoning certificates, and inspections documents (The Clerk of City Council maintains records of all variances, amendments, and conditional uses), and making such records available for the use of City Council, the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, and the public.

Norwalk’s zoning code appears to serve the City and its landowners, residents, and businesses reasonably well. However, it should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it adheres to a number of principles, which include but may not be limited to the following:

- Zoning should be consistent with the proposed Land Use Map within the adopted comprehensive master plan;
- Any rezoning should also be consistent with the policies and principles adopted by the City Council and City Planning Commission;
- Zoning should satisfy a public need and not constitute a grant of special privilege to an individual owner; the request should not result in spot zoning;
- Granting of a request for zoning should result in an equal treatment of similarly-situated properties;
- Zoning should allow for a reasonable use of a property;
- Zoning changes should promote compatibility with adjacent and nearby uses and should not result in detrimental impacts to the neighborhood character;
- Zoning should promote a transition between adjacent and nearby zoning districts, land uses, and development intensities;
- Zoning should promote the policy of locating retail and more intensive zoning near the intersections of arterial roadways or at the intersections of arterials and major collectors;
- The request for zoning should serve to protect and preserve places and areas of historical and cultural significance;
- Zoning should promote clearly identified community goals such as creating employment opportunities or providing for affordable housing;
- A change in conditions in an area may indicate that there is a basis for changing the originally established zoning and/or development restrictions for the property.

Any revision of the City’s zoning code will be of maximum benefit if efforts are expended to make the code user-friendly, by removing any archaic language that may exist, and by updating definitions and land uses to reflect current patterns. Increased flexibility in permitted uses in some areas may be possible by less rigidly defining standards and...
requirements. Optional development procedures (such as planned unit developments and similar concepts) may be most useful if they supplement or replace some of the existing zones.

Strategy 2 in the recommendations section of this chapter addresses zoning further.

**Other Land Use Planning Recommendations**

Several additional guidelines are recommended in planning Norwalk's future growth. These include the following:

- The City could consider developing and adopting a public signage design theme. Directional signs throughout the City could help visitors locate popular destinations, such as schools, parks, sports facilities, parking lots, the library and museum, concert and performance venues, and shopping facilities.

- Care should be taken to transition between differing land uses, such as between commercial areas and residential neighborhoods that may be developed on the north side. This can be accomplished through landscaping and placement of parking lots, sometimes behind buildings rather than in front. A block of mixed-use activities can sometimes help transition from residential to purely commercial activities.

- New roadways that serve growth areas should continue the City's grid system and connect with nearby roads, rather than incorporating unconnected cul de sacs. For example, this plan recommends the eventual development of a new system of interconnected roads north of Washington Street, but tying together the extensions of existing roads such as Westwind, Republic, Pleasant, and North West Street.

- Wherever possible, provide pedestrian and vehicular connections between residential and mixed-use areas, and amenities and destinations such as parks and schools. Assure compatibility of adjacent housing developments. Target higher-density residential development to mixed-use areas. An example is the new senior housing located within the Norwalk Commons development. Encourage a mix of housing densities, even within the same development.

- Distinguish between neighborhood commercial development, which may serve a larger proportion of pedestrians and be located in mixed-use areas with residences, and regional development, which is largely accessed by automobile.

- Be prepared to support attractive office development, in an effort to diversify the local economy and employment base. Office parks typically require more attention to aesthetics and design than industrial parks housing manufacturers. Also, provide a variety of parcel sizes to accommodate a variety of building and business sizes.

- In general, densities should be highest toward the center and downtown portion of the City. Infill development should match the density of adjacent areas and its design should
ensure compatibility and a sense of “seamlessness” with its surroundings. Densities will generally lessen as one moves away from the City center, transitioning to the semi-rural landscape surrounding the City.

An overarching goal is to maintain a balance of land use activities. Sufficient land must be reserved for new employment opportunities, which may be a mix of manufacturing and office/service establishments. Employment generators must then be balanced with housing opportunities for the employees, and with commercial development that will follow and capture any growing local market. Finally, the City and local institutions including the schools and hospital must proactively ensure sufficient space to efficiently grow with the residential population.

**The Conceptual Land Use Plan**

Every chapter of this plan contributes to an overall conceptual plan for the future of the City and its immediate environs. The general concepts underlying the plan are summarized here, and are presented in map form as well. Special attention must be paid to the interconnection of the City’s systems: roadways and transportation, infrastructure (particularly water and sanitary sewer), public facilities and services, and community services. Taken together, these general concepts form a picture of a future Norwalk that incorporates the ideals presented by those who contributed their input to the planning process.

**Residential Development**

Single-family and condominium development is occurring in Norwalk’s northwest quadrant, and will continue to do so. This development should be assisted by new connector roadways, such as the extension of Republic Street to the west of U.S. 250, and a northwest “loop” that connects U.S. 250 to N. Pleasant St.

Residential development of mixed densities is also expected within the mixed-use corridor stretching northward between U.S. 250 and Old State Road. This development begins with the construction of new higher density senior housing in the Norwalk Commons development.

Larger lot development is anticipated south of the City, continuing a trend toward the construction of more “upscale” housing along selected roadway frontage in Norwalk and Bronson Townships. It is likely that water needs will be satisfied by Northern Ohio Rural Water. Sanitary sewerage needs, currently handled through on-site septic systems, will likely call for the eventual construction of sanitary sewer lines that are fed to a collector line on the City’s western edge, traveling north to the City’s wastewater treatment plant. The only alternative would be the construction of a new treatment plant on the south side. This is an unlikely and costly alternative, but future technology may allow such a plant where current stream flows are insufficient to support a plant.

Higher density development is encouraged for vacant properties within the City, including vacant land in the vicinity of Williams and Republic Streets. The extension of South
Pleasant Street further southward to Fair Road would open additional land within the City to residential development.

A limited number of housing units can be developed in upper stories of buildings within and near the central business district. Implementation of overlay district regulations, coupled with tax incentives through the development of a Community Reinvestment Area within the downtown district can help building owners creatively construct new housing and support new ventures in the downtown and neighboring blocks.

Residential neighborhood identity can be enhanced through more thorough designation of “neighborhood” districts within the community.

**Commercial Development**

The recent trend toward commercial development on Norwalk’s north side, specifically along and adjacent to the U.S. 250 North corridor, is expected to continue. This corridor is relatively easily accessible to area residents, with recent investment in two new significant trip generators (the new cinema and the newly expanded super Wal Mart). It is typical for additional businesses to “piggyback” on the new business and potential created by these ventures. For example, the cinema is expected to help draw new restaurants to the Norwalk Commons area. The increased positioning of retail business, restaurants, and tourist and traveler related enterprises, plus the draw of Norwalk Raceway Park as a regional attraction, will continue to create a “synergy” on the north side. In order for City residents to consider these as positive developments, it is imperative that traffic flow be maintained through the channeling of traffic through the existing grid of roadways and the addition of access roadways that separate local from through traffic.

South side development will not take place on the scale of Norwalk’s north edge. However, some commercial development is expected to result from the large and growing number of upscale housing units throughout the south side of Norwalk, the presence and impact of the growing Fisher-Titus Medical Center campus (Norwalk’s largest employer), and transient traffic on U.S. 250 and the U.S. 20 bypass. It is not unreasonable to expect, at minimum, a convenience store or small-scale satellite grocery store in the vicinity of the former Food Town building.

The central business district is one of Norwalk’s premiere treasures and should continue to house a mix of governmental, business and personal service, administrative office, and retail businesses. The creation of a Community Reinvestment Area covering the downtown target area should help stimulate investment in central business district properties. The downtown also presents significant potential as a restaurant and entertainment area, as it houses several entertainment venues, including the Towne and Country Theater, the Main Street School, restaurants, a coffee house with meeting rooms, and outdoor parks and open space. There is potential to capture the demand for a “teen center” or meeting place, including space for live entertainment, within the downtown.
Industrial Development

Norwalk’s largest industrial park, Firelands Industrial Park, will likely be built out within five to ten years, and existing sites in that park would not support a large industrial project. Sites within Firelands Industrial Park range from 4.5 to forty acres. The only other industrial park in the City is the Commerce Fields Industrial Park, with 65 acres of available space.

Given the needs of modern industrial processes for horizontal expansion, larger footprints to accommodate single-story buildings, and an increased awareness of the needs for adequate site sizes for buffering, storm drainage, employee parking, and aesthetic considerations, there is a need to make larger sites available to potential developers on short notice. The comprehensive plan thus recommends the development of an eastern industrial district extending along and between the U.S. 20 and S.R. 18 corridors eastward to S.R. 601. Larger sites can be assembled in this area, and its attractiveness will be enhanced through the eventual construction of water and sanitary sewer lines that can accommodate industrial needs. The location of the Norwalk-Huron County Airport may entice certain air transport-dependent businesses to the area, and the presence of the Norwalk Raceway Park may draw businesses linked to the motor sports industry – either additional entertainment venues or specialized manufacturers.

In the event that an even larger property needs to be assembled, with access to rail, it is possible that agricultural property to the west, between U.S. 20 and Washington Road, may be considered for potential development, although its value as prime farmland is significant. There is also potential for transportation-driven manufacturing and distribution land uses to the north of the City, toward the Ohio Turnpike and S.R. 2, with access to U.S. 250.

Suitable industrial property within the City, aside from those sites in the aforementioned industrial parks, still exists in limited supply. Smaller scale machine shops and facilities should be encouraged to locate within the City’s limits within suitable sites. However, industrial property within the City should be reserved, when appropriate, for the expansion of adjacent businesses. An example is the Mayflower Vehicle Systems plant on Garfield Street, which has undergone a number of expansions, one of which entailed the re-routing of Jefferson Street. Thus, while the development of infill property for industry (such as the land just north of the Mayflower plant, north of the relocated Jefferson Street) should be encouraged, care should be taken to consider existing and potential expansion plans of adjacent businesses.

Additional properties with a potential for the future development of light industry include the former Norwalk Foundry “Brownfield” site, and property in the vicinity of the Stokely facility on North West Street and the former Van Dresser building on Ontario Street.

Public and Institutional Facility Development

While Norwalk is fortunate to have a number of attractive and modern public and institutional facilities that have been recently constructed or under construction, several new or improved facilities and land uses are expected within the twenty-year timeframe of this
comprehensive plan. They are depicted on the accompanying map, and include the following:

- A new fire station to replace the existing one. The new station is recommended to maintain a central location to minimize response times in all directions. A location within a half-mile radius of the existing Whittlesey Avenue property is recommended. It is recognized that it may be difficult to locate a suitable site with immediate access to a major arterial (preferably U.S. 250) and adequate acreage to accommodate vehicular movement and storage, as well as the floor plan for a modern fire station with adequate storage, training, and housing for firefighters and equipment.

- An expanded Norwalk Public Library and media center, utilizing the adjacent Hills building and incorporating current technology. The use of the Hills building will provide improved accessibility for all, as well as new meeting, research, and study space. A satellite library is recommended for the south side of the City, in the Shady Lane vicinity. It is likely that the most reasonable site would involve co-location with the Norwalk High School media center, in order to capitalize on and coordinate the assets of both.

- A new Senior Center on Norwalk’s south side, within close proximity of the current senior center on Shady Lane. A south side location maximizes access for those from south of the City, as well as providing easy east-west access via the U.S. 20 Bypass.

- An expanded Ernsthausen Recreation Center. Consideration must be given primarily to the needs and wants of Norwalk residents and institutions, with the greater market area as a secondary consideration. Further, in serving a public purpose, Rec Center planning must not lead to unfair competition with private enterprises already offering similar services and amenities. Despite these considerations, it is anticipated that a number of new features can be developed, including expanded swimming opportunities, multigenerational activity centers that also include space that is welcoming for seniors, and additional facilities for team and individual activities as demanded by membership.

- The land surrounding the Ernsthausen Center may be redeveloped to better serve the community’s needs. Land behind the center can be developed into sports fields, such as soccer fields. This is also possible for the land across Republic Street in Bishman Park, which could also be laid out for soccer play. An alternative way to serve the growing need for soccer fields is to develop the land immediately west of the City’s wastewater treatment plant, and north of the baseball and softball fields at Baines Park. Significant acreage exists under City ownership that could be improved to accommodate soccer fields. Practical alternatives for consolidating Norwalk’s soccer facilities should be studied in the very near future.

- As noted in the quality of life chapter, there is a need for new neighborhood parks to accommodate growing residential subdivisions and growth areas. Subsequently, in order to provide a neighborhood park within walking distance of virtually every City residence, there is a need to develop neighborhood parks on the west side of the City (serving Sycamore Hills and environs), on the south side (serving Executive Estates and Firelands
Boulevard areas and closer-in neighborhoods), and, increasingly, on the north end (near the Westwind development, possibly adjacent to Baines Park and west of Wal Mart).

- Related to parks, this plan includes recommendations for a system of trails and walkways, which would be routed along City rights-of-way and other properties. Development of such a system will involve City ownership and maintenance of a series of linear properties that parallel roadways, railroad tracks, and waterways.

- Fortunately, Norwalk's school systems do not currently need new locations for new facilities. However, the St. Paul school campus has undergone a recent expansion of facilities, the existing St. Mary's school has been reconfigured as a result of the merging of that school with the Norwalk Catholic Schools system, and Norwalk's Main Street School has been expanded to accommodate expected enrollment. The plan also calls for the expanded use of Norwalk High School, hosting a “lifelong learning center”, possibly in a new wing dedicated to that use, and other community activities.

- This plan bears the assumption that the Norwalk-Huron County Airport will remain in its current location. However, the airport may require some expansion to accommodate runway extensions, and the possible addition of a crosswind runway. This will in turn require the acquisition of additional property within the area that houses it, from SR 601 westward to Laylin Road.
Strategies and Recommendations

Strategy 1: Managing Growth

Continued growth is inevitable, and it is preferable to plan proactively for orderly growth, resulting in compatible adjacent uses, efficiencies in allowing residents, employees, and patrons to reach their destinations safely and efficiently, and to group complementary land uses together when it is advantageous. This can result in similar uses in some areas, and mixed uses in others. Care should be taken to ensure that the historical zoning tools that isolate single uses within specified districts offer enough flexibility to accommodate the development of new housing, businesses, and common uses of land that can collectively contribute to an improved quality of life for the residents and businesses.

Those conducting planning and project development should be mindful of targeted areas for industry, housing, and commercial and traffic-oriented land uses. Planning land uses should also involve consideration of needed infrastructure and utilities, roadway capacities, public facilities, and public service delivery.

Growth can best be managed in a smaller community such as Norwalk by gaining consensus on general growth areas within and near the City, and the preferred land uses for those areas. This will help guide development toward the preferred future. A parallel goal can be to strengthen the local schools' tax base by guiding development within the schools' taxing district, or by seeking agreements that share tax revenues. Further, the City and its regulatory bodies (especially including the Planning Commission) should provide enough regulatory flexibility to entertain new development designs, mixed uses, and varying densities and setbacks to respond to resident, business, and reasonable developer demands.

1. Work toward targeting City growth in areas that enhance the tax base for Norwalk City Schools. While changing school district boundaries is virtually impossible, the City administration may be able to negotiate new terms with outlying and adjacent school districts where the City may request a provision for the sharing of taxes between that school district and the Norwalk City Schools, in return for the City actively targeting development within their district. A longer-term goal would be to change school district boundaries to more accurately reflect the City of Norwalk and its land uses as a unified geographic and economic area, where revenues should be pooled to support City-wide services, including education. A sharing agreement should be developed over the next ten years. These efforts will involve the Norwalk City administration and Norwalk City Schools, as well as outlying school districts (especially Berlin-Milan but also including Western Reserve and Monroeville).

2. Develop the capacity to assemble large (50 to 100 acres or more) industrial parcels, served by necessary infrastructure and utilities, and by rail. Likeliest sites for these criteria may be directly west or east of the City. Entities involved in this goal, to be achieved by 2016, include economic development organizations, landowners, the City administration, rail authorities and State rail grant funding agencies. Options on such land may be held by a local Community Improvement Corporation under Ohio law. The vehicle for such a CIC may be through the county's HCDC or a Norwalk entity.
3. One method to minimize sprawl and maintain efficiencies in traveling between City destinations is to promote and assist in the development of vacant land and vacant and under-utilized buildings within the City, a practice known as “infill”. Further actions to maximize the usefulness of the existing City include allowing mixed uses in certain developments (such as the senior housing blended with restaurants and a cinema in Norwalk Commons), traditional neighborhood development on relatively small lots, further development of the central business district to bolster new residential options downtown, and measures to improve pedestrian access or “walkability” throughout the community. These ongoing activities involve landowners, the planning commission, developers, and the City administration.

4. Research and implement new incentive programs that can help guide desired development. This may likely include adoption of Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA’s) in the City. Incentives could be used to spur downtown residential units in upper stories, for example. Income taxes can be reviewed as potential sources of incentives, if taxes can be partially waived to incentivize new development. This activity involves the City administration, Planning Commission, and economic development organizations, and should be examined with recommendations by 2010.

5. Concentrate on the development of Norwalk's south side and land south of the U.S. 20 Bypass, with emphasis on housing, limited retail development, and office/research facilities, some of which may be spurred by the growth of the Fisher-Titus Medical Center campus. As the south side grows, it will be necessary to provide needed infrastructure, including the provision of sanitary sewer access south of U.S. 20. While preliminary analysis indicates that a second wastewater treatment plant may not be feasible, alternatives including such a plant using state of the art technology, but also including a new trunk line reaching from southern growth areas through the west side of the City to a new trunk in the vicinity of Washington Street should be considered, as demand requires. The development of the south side, over the next twenty years, should involve the City administration and planning commission, Township trustees, hospital and health care officials, economic development organizations, the Norwalk School District, and private developers and landowners.

6. Plan for long-range industrial development on Norwalk's east side and in current Norwalk Township property, along the Route 20 and 18 corridors as far east as State Route 601, with necessary infrastructure development. Develop a means to support infrastructure costs through projected users' fees. Uses should be recruited that complement Norwalk Raceway Park, including tourism and motor sports oriented business. The proximity of the Norwalk-Huron County Airport should also be factored in determining ideal land uses. The City administration and planning commission, NEDC, Chamber, and HCDC, as well as Norwalk Township Trustees, Raceway Park officials, and private developers and landowners should be involved in this effort, to be undertaken over the next twenty years. As an adjunct to the concentration on this growth area, consider the implementation of an East End Utility District, including water and sanitary sewer for the airport and Norwalk Raceway Park areas. This effort,
involving City, Township, and county officials, should be completed within ten years (by 2016).

7. Plan for the mixed-use development of Norwalk's north side, which presents the greatest potential for near-term significant growth for several land uses. This area may extend from Old State Road at the eastern edge to Whittlesey Avenue and undeveloped land west of Whittlesey, to the west. Commercial and travel-oriented business is likely to continue to grow along the U.S. 250 corridor, with need for access to adjacent land via a system of access roads or driveways. Further, there is a potential for new manufacturing or distribution businesses on Norwalk’s north side due largely to the proximity of the Ohio Turnpike (I-80-90) to the north. Further, the north side has been the location of significant housing developments, most notably including the Hunters Glen condominium project, which has accounted for a large portion of Norwalk's overall number of housing starts in recent years. Further development of the north side over the next fifteen to twenty years will involve coordination and planning among a number of entities, including the City administration, planning commission, Township trustees, private developers and landowners, NEDC and HCDC, the Chamber, and contractors and developers.

8. Create an inventory of sites that document their existing infrastructure availability and development readiness status. City officials, NEDC, HCDC, utilities, nearby Townships, and the Planning Commission can have this information ready within one year.

**Strategy 2: Zoning and Regulations**

Zoning and other regulations should be used to achieve a balance between varying land uses, and to minimize the negative impact (real or potential) of a land use upon neighboring uses, while maximizing the usefulness of each land use to the City's residents, businesses, employees, and consumers. Officials should explore the revision of zoning guidelines to better direct development and enhance the community. In doing so, city officials should seek a balance between the public benefits of regulation and the potentially negative impact upon the ability of developers, businesses, and landowners to achieve their goals. Multiple goals should be addressed, including personal health and safety, maximized property values, efficiency of systems (such as transportation and utilities), and minimized land use conflicts.

City officials can begin to achieve these goals by continuing to balance the City's positive reputation as an easy place in which to conduct business and develop property with an approach that guides development toward the City's preferred future. City officials should maintain the positive attitude and continue to build good relationships between City officials, other local and county government entities, businesses and developers, and State agencies. Further, they should seek ways to increase communications between all these entities, while continuing to design and develop efficiencies in the planning and review process.

1. Explore the benefits of the development and adoption of a zoning code for Norwalk Township that is compatible with the City of Norwalk's zoning. Action steps would include the creation of a draft code with assistance from the County Planning Commission and the County Prosecutor's office, presentation at public meetings,
education of the Township's residents on the benefits of Township zoning and myths surrounding any perceived problems, campaigning for zoning adoption, and movement toward adoption of zoning. This process, which may take five years, involves Township Trustees, the Prosecutor's office and any provider of assistance in drafting a zoning code, a citizens' committee which should be used to gather and solicit support, and developers and others who can positively influence the citizenry.

2. Ensure that the Planning Commission and other decision-making entities determine that planned developments concur in land use, scope, and physical attributes with the comprehensive plan and its targeted growth areas. This ongoing effort involves the Planning Commission, City Council, and the administration.

3. Work with Main Street Norwalk to determine how regulations can be best designed to achieve the goals of that entity through organization, design, promotions, and economic restructuring. Consider separate zoning classifications and requirements, and the possible creation of a new or revised overlay district, to address the unique needs of downtown. This activity involves Main Street Norwalk and the Chamber, as well as the City's administration and Planning Commission, and should be achievable by 2016.

Create new standards of appropriateness for downtown development. Balance the collective benefits of uniformity of design and appearance and the historical assets of Downtown architecture with the needs of local property and business owners to maintain profitability and attract their customer base. The Architectural Review Board should re-examine their guidelines and review their processes to meet the dual needs of historic preservation and business attraction and retention, with a revised set of standards by 2009.

4. Identify and help develop new retail and commercial land use zones or requirements as the characteristics of desired development change over the next twenty years. These areas are already zoned for retail and commercial uses, but development patterns and plans may change over the long term, with an accompanying need for revised zoning regulations. Consider such in-town areas as Milan Avenue from League Street north, and Hester Street north to League. Involve the Planning Commission, City administration, and private sector entities and developers, with new zones considered and added, if feasible, by 2012.

5. Examine the feasibility of developing a retail/tourism/entertainment district in a section of Norwalk's central business district. This district would be an outgrowth of the expanding Lake Erie tourism market, coupled with trends toward increased demand for restaurants and entertainment venues. The district could be planned and implemented within ten years, with involvement from the Planning Commission and administration, Main Street Norwalk, the Chamber, and NEDC.

6. Develop zoning and related language to regulate the future development of “big-box” stores in Norwalk. Factors to consider include impact on the community and on neighboring land uses, impacts on the existing balance of retail business, location within a planned growth area, conformity to the community’s vision of the future, potential to
adapt existing retail sites, design compatibility with neighboring businesses and signage (architecturally integrated designs), impact on traffic flow and area “walkability”, and storm drainage. Big-box retailers are capable of providing alternatives to their standard architectural design, and often do so in response to market demand in upscale neighborhoods. Regulations may address square footage limitations, parking, signage, landscaping, outdoor storage areas, pedestrian and bicycle access, traffic control improvements, and provisions for demolishing or redevelop the building and site should it become vacated. Such regulations should involve City officials, economic development organizations, and the input of developers and Realtors, and should be completed by 2010.

**Strategy 3: Open Space Planning**

The City should provide for Norwalk's acknowledged need for commonly used open space and green space within easy access of all Norwalk residents. As the City grows, so shall its need for open space. There is a growing demand for space to accommodate passive recreational activities, such as walking, bicycling, or just enjoying the outdoors. Thus, as new housing developments are constructed, provision should be made for new open space in proportion to the developed acreage. A method for acquiring useful open space should be devised that does not financially impede developers' plans or consumers' ability to afford new housing.

The City can accomplish this goal by developing a revenue source from new residential property sales that can be pooled to pay for new property acquisition for open/green space, and for its ongoing maintenance. Open space potential should be examined in each new subdivision proposal on a case-by-case basis, as site layouts may contain land that cannot be developed due to slope or other features, and would provide green space at no loss to the developer. Existing natural areas within the City and adjacent land should be preserved, and efforts should be made to establish “greenways” within the City when neighborhoods can be linked by linear systems of green walkways, such as the system of walkways that extend from Norwalk High School south to Stoutenberg Drive.

1. Advocate for and implement a means to pay for development of open space that does not inhibit development. This may involve increasing the per lot fee associated with park and open space development from the current $50 to a larger fee, such as $500. Alternatively, the fee could be on a sliding scale, as a proportion of the cost of the lot.

   This goal also may involve the utilization of Planned Unit Developments and developer incentives such as smaller lots, smaller setbacks, and other means such that open space will be reserved and gross acreage per unit remains viable to developers. Additional sources of revenues to develop open space, green space, and greenways should be researched as well. A plan for open space revenues should be developed by the planning commission, recreation department, City council, and administration, within two years.

2. Develop guidelines governing minimum thresholds for mandatory open space provisions. This involves the planning commission and developers. It should also be
coordinated with the park and facility development plans of the city Park and Recreation Department, and it should be completed by 2009.

3. As Norwalk expands its residential neighborhoods to the north and south, set aside appropriate green space in those areas to accommodate the growing residential population in those areas. Over the next twenty years, involve the recreation department and its long-range planning, the planning commission, conservation groups, and the City administration and council.

4. Preserve existing natural areas within the City and maximize their use as green space or greenways. A specific project mentioned several times in this plan involves researching the feasibility of developing all or portions of Norwalk Creek as a greenway with linking paths – a “riverwalk” (such as from the Elm Street Park to the Reservoir). Additionally, research other such “corridors” that may exist within the City, including natural features and utility and railroad rights-of-way. These activities can be ongoing over the next twenty years, and will involve the planning commission, recreation department, administration and council, affected landowners, Rails to Trails and other interest groups, and interested citizens, possibly incorporating a citizen task force.

5. Consolidate existing data sources and/or conduct surveys to assess potential areas for open space and green space. Create a database of developed park space, undeveloped green space, and undevelopable green space. Determine how to designate retention areas. Involve the Planning Commission, recreation department, and City administration, over the next year (by 2008).

**Strategy 4: Public Administration and Public Infrastructure Impacting land Use**

The actions and strategic directions of City Hall have multiple impacts on land use and development. The programming of capital improvements, from new water and sewer lines to an eventual location of one or more new fire stations, will impact and lead growth and development. One area where the community’s investment makes a great impact is at the City’s busiest “gateways”, where travelers realize they are entering the City and form a “first impression”.

A second impact is made by the administration of the City’s varied permitting, inspection, and regulatory processes. Efforts should be made to ensure that these administrative functions are carried out in an efficient, customer-friendly, and consistent manner.

The City has regulations and guidelines on the books that impact the shape and scope of development in several areas. These include such topics as mandatory sidewalk construction, signage (size, placement, type, number), and in the central business district, architecture. Future capital improvements and utility improvements should be prioritized in line with this comprehensive plan, and extensions of utilities and services should be planned with preferred growth areas and land uses in mind. The current City practices in permitting and inspection are generally supported, and should continue, serving both the common good and the plans of builders and developers, in conformity with the comprehensive plan.
1. Construct sidewalks along corridors where pedestrian traffic is generated. A target area is the growing commercial corridor along U.S. 250 North, where hotel, restaurant, and retail uses are co-located, where growing residential areas are within walking distance, and where new commercial growth is likely to attract additional pedestrians. This target area should be served with sidewalks by 2009, with assistance from the Planning Commission, zoning officer, public works coordinator, and affected landowners.

2. Examine, adjust, and enforce regulations governing signage along commercial and gateway corridors to balance business marketing and awareness goals with concerns for an attractive and enticing, relatively uniform City image. Propose code changes if new needs are discovered regarding aesthetics, uniformity, need for clarity, potential new overlay districts such as Main Street, or growth corridors. This topic should be reviewed with recommended changes that reflect community desires adopted over the course of the next twenty years. This will involve the planning commission, zoning officer and public works coordinator, City Council, and should include input from private sector landowners.

3. Ensure that the City’s zoning code allows for mixed-use developments, and does not unnecessarily segregate land uses in areas that can benefit from a mix. For example, convenience retail should be allowed within walking distance of residential areas. The code and land use map should be reviewed to ensure that beneficial land use mixes are allowable within three years (by 2010); this process should involve the planning commission and zoning officer, administration and Council, and may benefit from the use of a Blue Ribbon committee that includes members of the Planning Commission to help review the code.

**Strategy 5: Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Mapping**

GIS capabilities offer an excellent planning tool. Norwalk and Huron County are just beginning to benefit from the potential offered by geographic information system technology. A first step is the use of GIS tools and data to provide useful maps for this comprehensive plan. Beyond this plan, it is important that the City and County, as well as other local governments in and around Huron County, use compatible GIS platforms and products, to allow for the sharing and building of information.

A specified set of maps have been prepared for this plan based on a consensus among the Land Use and Steering/Advisory Committees. More important is the design and development of an ongoing, interactive GIS system that allows the City, County, and other subdivisions and entities to share a common platform, to the greatest extent possible, and build upon the base of maps as needs and potential uses are defined.

1. Develop the appropriate digital orthos that can help plan the future land use of Norwalk and surrounding geography. This includes plotting of existing infrastructure, including water and sanitary and storm sewer lines. This project will involve GIS personnel and the county and possibly City level, and should be completed by 2008.

2. Identify a centralized GIS office and official, at the City or county level, wherever it is most efficient and capable of meeting needs. Monitor the effectiveness of the GIS
system in meeting citizen, development, planning, City and county departmental, and customer needs. This effort, which should result in a centralized office by 2011, should involve the input of City and county GIS officials, the County Auditor, City Public Works and Zoning departments and other City and county offices that can benefit from GIS interactivity, City and county administrative leadership, and possibly a “blue chip” committee of experts and practitioners. The GIS office should be in place and active by 2011.

3. Maintain the GIS database and make it accessible to the public and potential benefiting users through accessible terminals and a web presence. This should be achieved simultaneously with the development of the GIS office over the long term, and will involve City and county officials, with possible outside expert assistance.
Summary and Implementation

Plans are nothing; planning is everything. –Dwight Eisenhower

The above quote is not included here to denigrate the value of this planning document, but to highlight the important value of an active planning process. The development of this comprehensive master plan provided a context in which a large number of people, committees, and panels considered Norwalk’s future and recorded their consensus on what it should look like, and how to achieve that emerging vision. Just as their planning was of vital importance, perhaps more important is how a large number of people, committees, and panels achieve the implementation of this plan from this point forward.

After its approval by the Steering and Advisory Committees, the plan will be approved by the Norwalk City Planning Commission, and then adopted by resolution of City Council. Copies will then be made available to municipal officials and other decision-makers throughout the community. It will also be made available to everyone via the Internet, by posting it on the City’s website. This chapter can be circulated as a brief summary of the recommendations resulting from the planning process.

Monitoring and Evaluation

No matter how closely the community attempts to follow this plan, it is inevitable that reality will diverge from the plan on a number of fronts, and probably within a few years. This does not mean that the plan, or the process, has failed, but it does signal that the process needs to continue and throughout the next twenty years.

It is recommended that the Steering Committee be maintained as a live committee, or succeeded by a new committee with a somewhat different purpose. The two major goals of this ongoing committee are:

- To review, monitor, and evaluate the extent to which the plan's recommendations are being followed, and to propose steps that can be taken to bring Norwalk's future development into alignment with the plan; and
To propose new recommendations that reflect more accurately the reality within which the community is currently operating. New recommendations may be helpful in overcoming physical and organizational changes.

A review and revision committee (Findlay, Ohio's committee established for this purpose is called the “Legacy Committee”) certainly does not need to meet at the frequency at which the current Steering committee has convened, but a set schedule should be developed at the outset. It is recommended that the Committee meet every one to two years, using this chapter’s table of recommendations as a checklist to determine those areas where the plan is being adhered to, and those areas where a correction to the plan is necessary to guide the community toward its desired future, taking into account any intervening changes.

Summary of Plan Recommendations

The following pages present in table form the recommendations that have been developed by resource panels, steering and advisory committee members, and plan facilitators, for each topic covered in chapters 3 through 13. Recommendations have been abbreviated, and the table includes a general timeframe as determined by the resource panels, to indicate a target goal for completion of an activity. Many of the recommendations, of course, are more continuous or “ongoing” in nature, and are indicated as such. The reader is advised to consult the pertinent chapter for further information and context considering any specific recommendation.

To keep time frames more general, the timing for implementation of each task is depicted as having one of four expected deadlines:

S (Short term)
M (Medium term)
L (Long term)
O (Ongoing activities, continuously being implemented)
## Chapter 3: Community Character

### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1 Architectural Review Board becomes Historic District Commission; provide guidance for projects in historic zones</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2 Historic Area and Building Ordinance covering renovation and construction in historically sensitive areas</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3 Identify historic properties and add Historic Property designations</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4 Public programs on preservation topics, develop beautification and preservation awards</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.5 Establish partnerships with business and community organizations supporting preservation efforts</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.6 Ensure that policies and decisions on growth and development respect the City's heritage and enhance overall livability</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1.7 Incorporate heritage awareness in tourism efforts; feature historic properties in publications and websites; New gateways should promote heritage</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.8 Publicize and grow the Firelands Museum and Laning Research Center</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1.9 Plan increased “old house tours” and video tours</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Grow the “Welcome Wagon” type program initiated by Fisher-Titus Medical Center</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Develop a “welcome center” and information center within the Chamber of Commerce office</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Update the City's website and maintain a network of linked websites</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Inventory of services and facilities focusing on the area's elderly population; information available at Chamber “welcome center” and on City website</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Include Seniors on City boards and resource panels to gather their input and recommendations</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3 Consistently consider needs and wants of the City's growing elderly segment</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1 Ensure that the City supports and publicizes programs for special needs groups: United Fund, Chamber information center, and City website should provide data</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.6.2 Ensure that service facility locations are compatible with neighboring land uses, and co-located for efficiency and ease of access by participants and clients</td>
<td>O</td>
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</table>

### Chapter 4: Natural Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 Assess developers a per-lot fee that provides sufficient revenues for acquisition and maintenance of green space and open space, and neighborhood parks where needed.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2 Provide design incentives for developers to contribute open and green space within their developments; consider alternative incentives</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.3 Maintain maps of environmentally sensitive areas, and control development within such areas through zoning and other land use controls</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.4 Preserve existing scenery and views:</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Landscaping at gateways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reward best practices in private landscaping with awards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.5 Encourage efforts to preserve water quality in the watershed supplying water to Norwalk's reservoir system</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.6 Ensure the presence of mature trees in Norwalk by continuing the work of the Tree</td>
<td>O</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board, publicizing the Tree Memorial program, and encouraging construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practices that preserve trees</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1.7 Form task force to identify and guide redevelopment of Brownfields and</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensitive sites that have development potential within Norwalk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.8 Develop regulations requiring developers to landscape retention ponds</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Complete improvements at the Norwalk Reservoir and Memorial Lake Park,</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including amphitheater, walking trail, and additional improvements as developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Continue to examine options for a perpetual supply of water for Norwalk,</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including purchase of finished water from adjacent suppliers (Erie County, NORWA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2.3 Encourage use of land trusts to accept lands for preservation through</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>donation or acquisition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2.4 Encourage awareness, utilization, and enjoyment of nearby natural areas</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.5 Take steps to minimize environmental effects of land uses on neighboring</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>properties</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Study needs for neighborhood parks and areas where such a park is not</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within walking distance of neighborhoods</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Examine conversion of “paper” streets and alleyways to internal (within</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blocks) walkways/bike paths</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Connect Norwalk to other communities through trails and greenways,</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorporating the work of Huron County Rails to Trails (see Quality of Life</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>for more detailed steps)</td>
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</table>

### Chapter 5: Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1 Encourage planned development of lower-cost (“affordable”) housing</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2 Assist in developing homes planned and sponsored by Habitat for Humanity</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.3 Encourage and facilitate development of housing in upper stories downtown</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.4 Convene an affordable housing committee</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.5 Mobilize resources to develop affordable housing</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.6 Stimulate development and rehabilitation/repair of central City housing</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.7 Support efforts to provide “continuum of care” and services associated</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>with affordable housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.8 Ensure a stock of safe, attractive rental housing responding to market</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.9 Implement remaining strategies of the 2005 Norwalk Community Housing</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 Monitor City's plan review processes to ensure they are efficient and</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timely</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Provide adequate public infrastructure to existing housing stock;</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research and implement methods to pay for infrastructure in new developments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up front with reimbursement over time by developers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2.3 Target appropriate areas meeting development criteria (utilities,</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roadway access, and adjacent use compatibility) on the urban fringe as</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>residential growth areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2.4 Encourage housing development within the Norwalk City School District</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2.5 Allow for appropriate innovative housing development design providing</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alternatives to traditional housing: PUD's, conservation development, and other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>means</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

| 5.2.6  | Facilitate development of executive housing subdivisions | L  |
| 5.2.7  | Encourage development of upper stories in downtown buildings | L  |
| 5.3.1  | Make information available to elderly and disabled households on programs and resources | O  |
| 5.3.2  | Provide information on programs and services to help elderly remain within housing of their own, and “age in place” | O  |
| 5.3.3  | Facilitate new housing developments targeted to the elderly and/or disabled | O  |
| 5.3.4  | Assist in advocacy for additional housing for the disabled as needs are documented | O  |
| 5.4.1  | Use Federal and State resource programs to rehab and repair the housing stock | O  |
| 5.4.2  | Provide incentives for the historic preservation of older, architecturally significant properties | L  |
| 5.4.3  | Delineate and recognize specific neighborhoods in Norwalk. Pilot with one neighborhood | M  |
| 5.4.4  | Stabilize and improve declining neighborhoods through more uniform enforcement of property maintenance codes; Consider a rental property maintenance code | S  |
| 5.4.5  | Research feasibility, cost effectiveness, and alternative models for carrying out inspection of new or renovated housing in Norwalk | L  |

### Chapter 6: Transportation

| 6.1.1  | Utilize better access management, especially on major thoroughfares: limit number of driveway permits, install medians or other means to prohibit left turns, provide turning lanes, ensure clear views (limit signage), plan shared access to multiple sites through one access roadway, regulate minimum distance between access points • Corridor plan for U.S. 250 North corridor, including access road to service businesses to the west. (Possibly to the east as well, as they develop) | O  |
| 6.1.2  | Define and improve truck routes to better move through and around town | L  |
| 6.1.3  | Use best available technology to manage traffic lights and improve flow | M  |
| 6.1.4  | Improve gateways to the City at U.S. 250, U.S. 20, S.R. 18, and S.R. 61, design and construct uniform gateways that help “brand” Norwalk | M  |
| 6.1.5  | Consider turn lanes along busy segments with frequent turning movements: Benedict at Elm, Christie; Christie and Norwood; Fair Road and Norwood | M  |
| 6.1.6  | Consider temporary one-way traffic patterns during special events that close Main Street or other thoroughfares | S  |
| 6.2.1  | Consider and, if financially feasible, construct the following, many of which have been recommended previously: • Extend N. West Street northward to connect with an extended Westwind Drive • Extend Republic St. westward to Plank Road and further to Whittlesey Ave. • Extend Pleasant St. south to Fair Road • Extend Industrial Parkway (or Slower Lane) east to SR 601 or Perrin Rd. • Extend Ohio Avenue west to North west Street • Consider widening of main thoroughfares such as Benedict Ave. and East Main St. to the City limits | L  |
| 6.2.2  | Improve intersections at U.S. 20 and Old State Rd., E. Main St. and Old State Rd., Old State Rd. and Townsend Ave., Williams and Willard Avenues and Milan Ave. | M  |
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Implementation Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1 Improve parking condition(s) through attractive “wayfinding” signage to indicate locations of parking lots and their proximity; Enforce employee parking off-street. Include realistic parking requirements in downtown overlay zoning district.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2 Consider a more pedestrian friendly downtown, with pedestrian only areas, well marked crosswalks, prohibition of skateboards and bicycles on downtown sidewalks.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3 Expand the City's sidewalk repair and installation program; Install sidewalks where current conditions are unsafe: Northwest St. accessing fairgrounds, pedestrian routes to the Ernsthausen Center on Republic St., and high traffic or critical areas such as the U.S. 250 North corridor, the vicinity of the reservoir along Old State Road, and near Republic Street and Route 250.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.4 Work with Huron County Rails to Trails to expand bicycle/walking trails throughout the City. See Quality of Life chapter; Signage at trailheads directing bicyclists to the downtown commercial area.</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.5 Explore potential of developing Norwalk Creek corridor as a “river walk.”</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4.1 Improve traffic control devices to provide for more efficient flow.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.2 Enforce traffic ordinances on the books; target problem areas regarding speed limits and safety.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4.3 Be consistent in new street development and improvement.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.5.1 Support and help implement the goals and objectives of the new Huron County – Norwalk Airport Comprehensive Plan.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6.1 Build a stronger alliance with Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad to foster growth in rail activity.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6.2 Explore industry interest in expanded rail service.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6.3 Identify and inventory potential sites for rail service and analyze site development opportunities.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6.4 Explore innovative uses of rail not requiring an actual industry siting next to a spur.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.7.1 Explore ways to partner with the County in delivering public transportation that is responsive to Norwalk residents’ needs.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.7.2 Collaborate with businesses to enhance transportation options and serve business needs.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.7.3 Establish a shuttle service from Norwalk Raceway Park into the City.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7.4 Investigate/promote options that provide out-of-County service for area residents; preliminary assessment.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 7: Utilities and Infrastructure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Implementation Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1 Continue to be accommodating to new businesses and others in providing cost-feasible infrastructure.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.2 Research reasons why businesses and others choose not to locate in Norwalk, and note any gaps in the provision of infrastructure.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.3 Maintain contact with public utilities; keep them involved as growth is anticipated.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.1.4 Continue sewer separation program and replacement of deteriorated water and wastewater pipes; provide in budgeting for replacement of existing as well as construction of new facilities.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1</td>
<td>Initiate Citywide capital improvements planning</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2</td>
<td>Identify an entity or method to coordinate efforts to apply for and receive funding for infrastructure projects, and to manage construction</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.3</td>
<td>Explore options for cost sharing of projects between developers and City; Implement procedures if a satisfactory one is developed</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.4</td>
<td>Partner with Township and County officials, as well as NORWA and other utility providers as appropriate, in cases where it is advantageous to provide utilities outside the City's corporate limits; Develop framework for JEDD or CEDA arrangements</td>
<td>S and O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5</td>
<td>Consider new alternatives for spread of Citywide broadband Internet service, as an income source for the City</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3.1</td>
<td>Survey City businesses and others to determine infrastructure needs and projections</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3.2</td>
<td>Plan community forums to supplement the survey</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1</td>
<td>Inventory existing and proposed infrastructure in a computerized database</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.4.2</td>
<td>Develop a plan for maintenance and replacement of infrastructure over the next twenty years</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.3</td>
<td>Monitor needed funds for all planned action items and develop a budget to set aside and revise, as necessary, the needed funds for the planned maintenance and replacement program</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.1</td>
<td>Maintain a responsive system to research funding options for all planned expansions of infrastructure</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.5.2</td>
<td>Complete planned improvements to “front end” of wastewater treatment plant</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.5.3</td>
<td>Plan for future expansion of wastewater treatment plant, including new methods for the biological treatment process (new secondary and possibly tertiary processes); and acquisition of necessary land to the north to allow for expansion</td>
<td>S and O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.4</td>
<td>Coordinate infrastructure development with other elements of this plan, including new Eastern Utility Area (US 20, SR 601, SR 18) including Norwalk Raceway Park and Norwalk-Huron County Airport; coordinated study of likely water and sewer system demands; costing of water and sewer extensions; and budgeting of expenses</td>
<td>O; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.5</td>
<td>Involve utility companies in planning for growth</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.5.6</td>
<td>Continue to coordinate with NORWA, building on agreement reached in 2005</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.6.1</td>
<td>Develop a master plan for development of communications technology in Norwalk. Consider voice, video, and data transmission; Plan should include capital improvement costs and revenue and cost projections</td>
<td>M; O thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.1</td>
<td>Achieve a connection with a raw or treated water provider on the Lake Erie grid; Consider use of the City-owned right-of-way extending to Milan</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.2</td>
<td>Plan to increase water storage or treatment as required to meet future water quality standards and fire code benchmarks</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.3</td>
<td>Assess benefits and costs of the City's role in treating and distributing water; Consider alternatives and relative cost to consumers</td>
<td>L</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 8: Community Facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1</td>
<td>While Services for Aging plans include construction of a new senior center on Norwalk's south side, near the current center. the agency should also consider co-</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>locating some of their activities and programming in the Ernsthausen Community Center, to provide for intergenerational programming</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.1.2 Consider ways to maximize the usefulness of City and County office buildings within Norwalk, including their potential as venues for meetings</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.2.1 Periodically consider needs of Police Department for upgrades to facilities, equipment, technology</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.3.1 Commission a study of alternatives for the replacement or enhancement of Norwalk’s current fire station</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.3.2 Maintain a schedule of equipment replacement to maintain a fleet of reliable vehicles. Include in overall capital improvement planning</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.4.1 Undertake periodic review of capacity of school facilities in light of current and projected student populations and projections of need</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.4.2 Attract a satellite facility of one or more area college or university, either in a facility of their own, or in a shared “lifelong learning center” which could be constructed as an extension to the Norwalk High School, which could house college-level classrooms as well as housing GED, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and enrichment classes of interest to Norwalk citizens</strong></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.4.3 Make basic literacy programs available to the underprivileged and Hispanic populations at an established public facility dedicated to these programs; Use high school (see 8.4.2) or alternative site</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.5.1 Support the efforts of the Library Board and leadership to expand their facility into the Hills building to the east, and to develop a plan to obtain necessary revenues to undertake the project</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.5.2 Explore partnership with Norwalk City Schools to develop a satellite branch of the library, co-located at the high school media center; Explore opportunities for cooperative ventures and use of technology</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.6.1 Develop an urgent care facility for Norwalk within Fisher-Titus campus</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.6.2 Support ongoing planning of Fisher-Titus Medical Center, including upgrade of technology and diagnostic equipment, and addition of new areas of specialization</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.6.3 Ensure that the local road system supports the needs of the Fisher-Titus campus and related facilities</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.7.1 Expand recreation facilities to accommodate a growing and changing population</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Acquire sufficient property (possibly considering the land west of the wastewater treatment plant and adjacent to Baines Park) to accommodate the growing Norwalk youth soccer league</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Construct a skateboard park that is safe and adequate for local needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Explore options for additional facilities to accommodate growing adult softball program</td>
<td>O M S S</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.7.2 Create a master plan for the expansion of the Ernsthausen Community Center. Include a determination of facilities and their primary audiences; Components of the plan should be implemented when need and sufficient revenue streams can be demonstrated</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8.7.3 Provide expanded senior services at the Ernsthausen Center (See 8.1.1)</strong></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 9: Economic Development**

| **9.1.1 Promote existing industrial parks; maintain data base of specs on facilities** | S |
| 9.1.2 | Identify development sites that can accommodate rail access (See 6.6.3) | M |
| 9.1.3 | Develop spec buildings with amenities that are in demand | L |
| 9.1.4 | Implement a demolition and redevelopment plan for abandoned/dilapidated buildings | L |
| 9.1.5 | Create a one-stop shop for businesses, entrepreneurs, and others | S |
| 9.1.6 | Ensure broadband Internet access in industrial parks and other critical sites | M |
| 9.1.7 | Support the development of incubators for retail and other business | M |
| 9.1.8 | Promote retail corridors and office/service areas; Guide new ventures to these designated target areas | O |
| 9.1.9 | Identify needs of core services and institutions such as Fisher-Titus Medical Center | S |
| 9.1.10 | Secure a perpetual outside source of funding for local economic development programs | L |
| 9.2.1 | Consolidate various development approval processes throughout Huron County | L |
| 9.2.2 | Create comprehensive checklist of steps required for development in Norwalk, Townships, and the County (include permitting, inspections, approvals, etc.) | S |
| 9.2.3 | Consolidate/streamline residential and commercial development permitting/fees | M |
| 9.2.4 | Make development information available in linked databases accessible to the public | S |
| 9.2.5 | Pursue creation of a Foreign Trade Subzone in Norwalk | S |
| 9.2.6 | Pursue designation of Community Reinvestment Areas in Norwalk | S |
| 9.2.7 | Publicize Norwalk’s HUB Zone designation | O |
| 9.2.8 | Ensure the entire City of Norwalk offers high-speed telecommunications access | L |
| 9.2.9 | Acquire a quality control designation for the entire City of Norwalk | L |
| 9.2.10 | Implement a preferred vendor procurement system that gives reasonable advantage to local product and service providers | S |
| 9.2.11 | Include quality of jobs in criteria for eligibility for city economic development incentives | S |
| 9.3.1 | Create community awareness program addressing how perception of Norwalk affects efforts to recruit businesses and new residences | M |
| 9.3.2 | Develop outreach efforts to recruit service, retail, restaurant businesses attracting workers of the new economy and capture incoming dollars | O |
| 9.3.3 | Create regional partnerships to help Norwalk showcase its assets | O |
| 9.3.4 | Help educate local businesses on how to compete in the new economy by understanding current business strategies and customer service | O |
| 9.3.5 | Develop a base of local entrepreneurs in targeted industries to help develop new entrepreneurs | O |
| 9.3.6 | Prepare feasibility study for creation of a high technology business incubator | L |
| 9.3.7 | Maximize use of distance learning centers and other means to bring higher education presence to Norwalk (see 8.4.2) | M |
| 9.3.8 | Endorse efforts to create an outreach/support center for the Hispanic population | S |
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

| 9.4.1 | Capitalize on tourist traffic; promote tourism attractions | O |
| 9.4.2 | Develop uniform signage to promote local attractions | M |
| 9.4.3 | Locate and designate a tourism information and referral center | S |
| 9.4.4 | Educate business leaders on the value of regional tourism to the area; market the area to tourists. | O |
| 9.4.5 | Include tourism information and events on linked web sites | O |
| 9.4.6 | Offer capacity-building seminars for organizations that promote events | O |
| 9.4.7 | Focus tourism on existing entertainment districts (Raceway, downtown, US 250 North) | O |
| 9.5.1 | Create task force to examine feasibility and methodology to initiate formation of Joint Economic Development Districts or Cooperative Economic Development Agreements | M |
| 9.5.2 | Support and promote Huron County Airport as an economic development tool | O |
| 9.5.3 | Encourage and support regional marketing and promotion efforts | O |

### Chapter 10: Downtown Norwalk

| 10.1.1 | Use Main Street Norwalk and its Board as the organizational hub for downtown development | O |
| 10.1.2 | Develop a uniform method to recruit businesses to downtown Norwalk. | O |
| 10.1.3 | Market downtown Norwalk as a single entity with multiple partners and destinations; make use of a uniform tag line | O |
| 10.1.4 | Engage City and County governments – stakeholders – to participate in revitalization efforts. | O |
| 10.1.5 | Create a community resource center and welcoming committee | S |
| 10.2.1 | Maintain database of available space for businesses in the downtown | O |
| 10.2.2 | Explore architectural enhancements that would broaden usefulness of downtown properties. (Example: an elevator providing access to several buildings.) | M |
| 10.2.3 | Implement projects to create housing in upper floors of appropriate properties | L |
| 10.2.4 | Conduct professional study of parking needs, capacity and demand | M |
| 10.2.5 | Construct and use informational kiosks downtown | S |
| 10.2.6 | Consider creation of a downtown Community Reinvestment Area (see 9.2.6) | S |
| 10.3.1 | Build on façade improvement fund by pooling additional resources | M |
| 10.3.2 | Review purpose and operation of Architectural Review Board in light of vision and goals of Main Street Norwalk. (See 3.1.1, 3.1.2) | S |
| 10.3.4 | Provide education for existing businesses and their employees on customer service and basic business concepts (Use downtown venue for training) | O |
| 10.4.1 | Teach prospective employees how to maintain gainful employment, in service and hospitality industries especially | O |
| 10.4.2 | Build a coalition between business, education, and social service agencies to assist lead to employment of disadvantaged persons within Norwalk | L |
| 10.5.1 | Develop list of methods to capture tourist market. including Norwalk Raceway Park | O |
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.5.2 Explore feasibility of a City or County “bed tax” to fund tourism</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5.3 Develop uniform brand for downtown district based on local research</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5.4 Coordinate the involvement of performing and arts organizations for downtown events and displays, etc.</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5.5 Consider new opportunities for festivals and events throughout the year focusing on Norwalk community members</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5.6 Expand the “Market Days” concept</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5.7 Improve awareness of downtown through gateway information and identification</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5.8 Boost downtown district’s visibility as “Norwalk’s meeting place”</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.1 Identify product and service lines not now available that could capture markets</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.2 Support creation and growth of a business incubator (See 9.1.7)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6.3 Expand Norwalk’s role as the County seat and center for services</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6.4 Explore the creation of a downtown Norwalk “Entertainment District”</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.5 Explore/Identify a variety of niche businesses that could set Norwalk apart</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.6 Develop activities and destinations for youth and young adults</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.7 Develop a lodging facility (small hotel, bed and breakfast) in the downtown</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.8 Develop and publicize wireless Internet access throughout the downtown</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.6.9 Plan and help businesses plan more outside activities in the downtown</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.1 Make optimal use of downtown’s historic properties (example: the old County jail)</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.2 Maintain and consider extending the downtown streetscape</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.3 Develop gateway signage upon entry to the downtown</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7.4 Consider specific or overlay zoning and land use regulations downtown</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7.5 Pursue greenscaping and uniform streetscaping of Whittlesey north to League St.</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.6 Divert truck traffic from the central business district</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.7 Ensure sufficient utilities for the downtown area and its needs</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.8 Develop key side streets and expand business opportunities along those streets</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7.9 Encourage and develop attractive rear and side entrances to Main St., Benedict, and Whittlesey Ave. properties</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7.10 Inventory available parking and install directional “wayfinding” signs</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.7.11 Investigate feasibility of providing public restrooms downtown; Publicize availability</td>
<td>O</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 11: Quality of Life

|  |
| --- | --- |
| 11.1.1 **Teen Center**: Form committee to brainstorm and develop plan for a teen center: Develop operating budget for a center, establish legal structure, locate a site for the center, plan site and building layout, apply for funding through grants and other sources, and open teen center | M |
| 11.2.1 **Arts and Culture**: Add artistic and cultural events to the City’s bulletin board (web- | S |
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

| 11.2.2 | Broaden bulletin board to include villages and cities within Huron County | S |
| 11.2.3 | Include arts/culture organizations in awarding door prizes at nonprofit fundraisers | O |
| 11.2.4 | Secure central location (such as the Chamber building) to promote and sell tickets to cultural events and concerts | S |
| 11.2.5 | Encourage business owners and others to invest in cultural life of the community | O |
| 11.2.6 | Look for opportunities to support cultural growth; Initiate a fine arts school in Norwalk | L |
| 11.3.1 | Health Care: Create a comprehensive list of health care agencies and providers in Norwalk for public information with contact information | O |
| 11.3.2 | Explore feasibility of hosting operators or receptionists who can provide information and referral on non-urgent matters | S |
| 11.4.1 | Bike Trails: Connect the existing bicycle trail on the west side to downtown Norwalk | M |
| 11.4.2 | Connect north side with Route 250 North destinations – develop abandoned Norfolk and Western corridor | L |
| 11.4.3 | Connect west side to north side through downtown | L |
| 11.4.4 | Connect the reservoir area and the east side to the north side | L |
| 11.4.5 | Begin acquisition of right of way and easements for a south side loop | L |
| 11.4.6 | Create access to the rural east side North Coast Inland Trail | L |
| 11.4.7 | Begin acquisition of right of way and easements for Norwalk Creek Greenway | L |
| 11.5.1 | Park and Recreation: Support efforts to provide neighborhood parks within safe walking distance of existing and planned residential areas | O |
| 11.5.2 | Complete reservoir walking trail, construct amphitheater, plan events. | L |
| 11.5.3 | Develop and implement plans to add amenities and space to Ernsthausen Community Recreation Center | L |
| 11.5.4 | Expand sports facilities where demand exceeds available supply. Expand softball facilities at Baines Park by expanding to the south, west of Wal Mart | M |
| 11.5.5 | Catalog all community-based recreation, fitness, and sports opportunities | S |
| 11.6.1 | Restaurant and retail development: Determine market demand for restaurants and types, map potential sites, conduct market research, and recruit preferred entities and franchises. | S and O |
| 11.6.2 | Assist local entrepreneurs who wish to begin restaurant operations in Norwalk | O |
| 11.6.3 | Complete an accessible inventory of retail and service businesses in Norwalk, both consumer oriented and business-to-business; Analyze gaps in services and products (business leakage); Survey or sample residents regarding desired businesses, possibly through local media; Recruit outside business or nurture local start-ups when clear demand for a line of retail or service business, or a notable gap in a product or service, is established. | O |
| 11.6.4 | Utilize business incubator, once established, for emerging new retail or service business | O |
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.7.1</td>
<td><strong>Community Soccer Complex:</strong> Explore use of Bishman Park for soccer fields. If Bishman is determined to be unsuitable, consider alternatives (i.e. near wastewater treatment plant). Explore field turf surface in the Ernsthausen Center during any expansion of that facility.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.8.1</td>
<td><strong>Notice to Community on Opportunities:</strong> Develop a central clearinghouse on events, classes, performances; seek funding to develop and maintain it; and identify a responsible party to house the clearinghouse.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.8.2</td>
<td>Update the database of volunteer participation opportunities: List participation opportunities in an initial publication, and distribute it; develop easily updated website or page with current information on participation opportunities; publicize the website and contact information.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Chapter 12: Community Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.1.1</td>
<td>Research, fund, and build new fire department facility. (See 8.3.1)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1.2</td>
<td>Conduct periodic staffing study (every five years) of safety forces (fire, police).</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1.3</td>
<td>Provide adequate training/equipment to ensure effectiveness of safety forces.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1.4</td>
<td>Focus on substance abuse as a priority problem; mobilize resources.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1.5</td>
<td>Engage the community (education and input) in determining and prioritizing what safety force service are necessary.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1.6</td>
<td>Continue Norwalk's budget process; evolve a Citywide capital improvements procedure (see pages 2-4 of this chapter).</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1.7</td>
<td>Stay informed on technology advancements for safety forces.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2.1</td>
<td>Develop a new Senior Center to serve north-central Huron County; plan senior activities at sites such as the Ernsthausen Rec Center.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2.2</td>
<td>Increase stock of senior housing to meet projected needs for a variety of housing and related services.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2.3</td>
<td>Expand public transportation to meet market needs, with a focus on inter-County; Ensure that affordable and available public transportation is provided within Norwalk and to other destinations.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2.4</td>
<td>Increase resources for maintenance and home repairs for seniors.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2.5</td>
<td>Increase capacity to provide “meals on wheels”.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2.6</td>
<td>Support the position of a local senior ombudsman.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.1</td>
<td>Review and revise (as necessary) community disaster plan to maintain continuity of operations.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.2</td>
<td>Provide for more improved and comprehensive communication of community events and services through the community website (11.8.1-7).</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.3</td>
<td>Involve City in service delivery when service is within City department's mission.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.4</td>
<td>Consider re-staffing of City departments as new needs are identified (example: consider City Engineer).</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.5</td>
<td>Ensure cost-effectiveness in City's recycling program.</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.6</td>
<td>Evaluate benefit of formal capital improvements planning and implement a citywide capital improvements planning process as appropriate.</td>
<td>S</td>
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</table>
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.3.7</td>
<td>Coordinate with community agencies or through United Fund office to ensure a resource directory is disseminated</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4.1</td>
<td>Use Huron County interagency meetings to improve communications</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4.2</td>
<td>Encourage service agencies to be in accessible locations; encourage co-locations; Foster expansion of facilities as needs outgrow capacity of existing facilities</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5.1</td>
<td>Inter-agency group should collaborate on community health care issues</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5.2</td>
<td>Establish a local community-based health care needs assessment process</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5.3</td>
<td>Explore implementing (by FTMC) of Urgent Care facility</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6.1</td>
<td>Further develop Norwalk Fire Department's Inspection Unit</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6.2</td>
<td>Explore alternatives in Countywide commercial building/construction inspection program. Implement the alternative chosen (County department, dedicated staff within regional inspection unit)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6.3</td>
<td>Continue collaborative meetings with City departments prior to State approval of building plans for commercial property, to gather and share information</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6.4</td>
<td>Develop and pass legislation to shape inspection services to best meet community needs</td>
<td>O as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6.5</td>
<td>Consider best practices from other communities in planning inspection services</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6.6</td>
<td>Research contracting with other government or regional inspection office for inspection of residential/rental properties of under 4 units</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7.1</td>
<td>Use Huron County Bar Association for call center, listserv, website to answer legal questions; Establish a speakers' bureau through the Bar Association</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7.2</td>
<td>Re-establish a local agent council of local insurance representatives to better inform citizens of services of the insurance industry; Establish a call center, listserv, and website for insurance industry questions</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.8.1</td>
<td>Leverage community resources and leaders to provide grassroots lobbying effort on behalf of Norwalk and its concerns</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.8.2</td>
<td>Assess staffing levels and budget needs for Adult Protective Services and for Children’s Services</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.8.3</td>
<td>Leverage resources for increased child care services; Maximize effectiveness of the network of childcare providers that are affordable, accessible, and of high quality</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.8.4</td>
<td>Provide English for Speakers of Other language classes for Hispanic/Latino population; Advocate for an identification program; Consider Hispanic cultural and recreational needs</td>
<td>O</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 13: Land Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.1.1</td>
<td>Target and encourage growth areas within Norwalk City School district; develop tax base sharing agreement with other school districts</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1.2</td>
<td>Develop ability to assemble industrial parcels of 100 acres or more and served by rail, and to hold such property by option, using a CIC or other entity</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1.3</td>
<td>Encourage the development of infill property within the City, and other practices of traditional neighborhood development</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1.4</td>
<td>Research and implement new incentive programs; specifically, develop a Community Reinvestment Area program within Norwalk that reduces property taxes on new and renovated/expanded real property within specific areas of the City</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Norwalk Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.1.5 Encourage growth of Norwalk's south side and land south of the US 20 bypass, for housing, limited retail, and office/research uses; Consider servicing of this area with a new sanitary sewer trunk line once deemed economically feasible</td>
<td>O; trunk line: L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1.6 Plan for long-range industrial development of Norwalk's east side and a district that includes the U.S. 20 and S.R. 18 corridors easterly to S.R. 601; Develop a means to support the cost of infrastructure to service this district. Ensure compatibility and coordination with Norwalk Raceway Park and the Norwalk-Huron County Airport</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1.7 Plan for mixed-use development on Norwalk's north side, including a commercial and service corridor along US 25 and parallel access roads, and residential uses within the area</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1.8 Create an inventory of sites that includes their infrastructure capacity and development readiness status</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2.1 Advocate adoption of a compatible zoning code for Norwalk Township</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2.2 Ensure concurrence of planning commission decisions with this comprehensive plan</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2.3 Consider creation of a downtown zoning overlay district that allows for desired mixed-use growth, including commercial and service, as well as upper-floor housing</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2.4 Identify and help develop new retail and commercial land use zones, serving emerging mixed-use areas such as the US 250 north corridor</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2.5 Examine feasibility of an entertainment district in Norwalk's downtown</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2.6 Develop regulations to guide the development of “big-box” stores in Norwalk.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3.1 Advocate for/Implement means to pay for development of open space that does not inhibit development; Possible $500 per lot fee (See 4.1.2)</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3.2 Develop guidelines governing minimum thresholds (Subdivision size) for invoking mandatory open space provisions</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3.3 Set aside appropriate green space as residential neighborhoods expand and are created</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3.4 Preserve existing natural areas and maximize their use as green space or greenways (Example: develop a greenway along Norwalk Creek); Research other corridors</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3.5 Consolidate existing data sources and conduct surveys to assess potential areas for green space; develop database of developed park space, undeveloped green space, and undevelopable green space</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.4.1 Construct sidewalks along corridors where pedestrian traffic is generated; Example: US 250 North corridor</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.4.2 Examine, adjust, enforce regulations governing signage along commercial and gateway corridors to improve attractiveness</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.4.3 Ensure the zoning code allows for mixed-use developments and does not unnecessarily segregate land uses; Appoint and use a blue ribbon committee to review the code</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.5.1 Develop base of useful digital orthos to plan the future land use of Norwalk and surrounding areas</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.5.2 Identify a centralized GIS office or official at City or County level</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.5.3 Maintain GIS database and make it accessible to the public and potential users through accessible terminals and a web presence</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>