



Introduction

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

- ✓ 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

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

Land Use and Growth Management

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

Downtown Development

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

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

Housing

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

Natural Resources and Environment

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

Community Character

Martha Shample, Chair
 Lorna Strayer
 Gene Denney
 Marge Harper

**Community Character
(continued)**

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

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

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

Community Facilities

Quality of Life

Tera Thornhill, Chair
Gordon Oney
Leah Schaffer

John Lendrum
Wayne Babcanec
Kirk Pavelich
Ken Leber
Cindy Penza

Community Services

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

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

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