

Chapter 11



Ernsthausen Community Recreation Center

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 Ernsthansen recreation center and park system, including the reservoir park, the Ernsthansen 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.”

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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 them-selves 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 and 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?
- Extent of local government participation? Other partners: private enterprises? Churches? Extension/4-H? Schools? City Recreation Dept.? Individual adult donors or participants?
- 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.



Trailhead of North Coast Inland Trail at N.W. St.

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.



Ohio Edison property east of existing trail.

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 Ernsthansen 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.

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.

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,

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.



Norwalk's Premiere Theatre 8 opened in 2005