

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

3. Limited services for chronically mentally ill

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.

Strategy 2: Offer continuously 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 Ernsthansen 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.