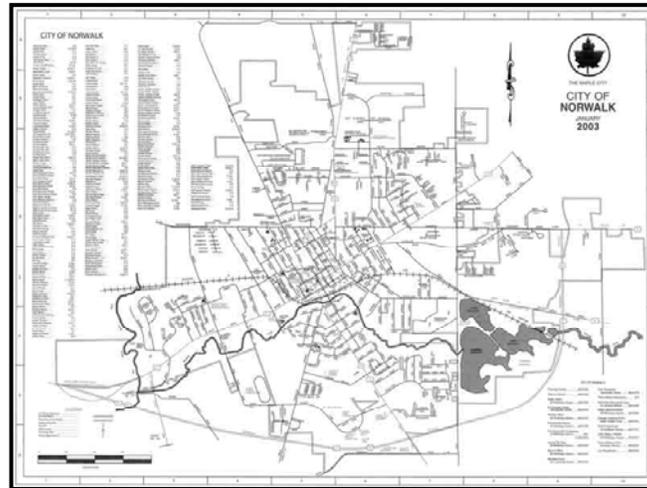


Chapter 13



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 quad-plexes 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 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.

Above: Norwalk Police Station, Huron County Office Building in downtown Norwalk
Below: Huron County Department of Job and Family Services on Shady Lane

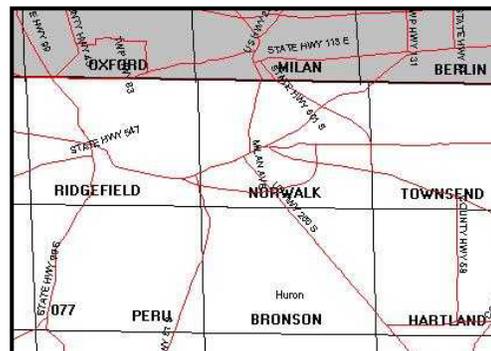


A cluster of governmental and institutional offices has grown along the Shady Lane corridor between Benedict and Norwood Avenues. In addition to the occupants of the older Shady Lane Complex owned by Huron County, this connector street is the address for Fisher-Titus Medical Center's campus and the Carriage 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

the high school. It is noted that development along US 250 will increase when sanitary sewer service is provided there, which may occur as soon as 2007. Industrial development is planned for an area on Hoover Road, which connects to SR 13 northeast of Milan, and which is zoned for industry and which houses the recently expanded Sierra Lobo company. Other businesses are located on one or two sites, such as Precision Machine on Wikel road.

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.