

## Chapter 3



# Community Character

### Goals:

1. Preserve the rich and progressive history, cultural heritage, and traditional values and morals of the community.
2. Maintain the character of a stable, family-oriented, warm, and welcoming community in which to live, work, and retire.
3. Create an atmosphere of openness to appropriate and positive change that may blend the old and new.
4. Continue to be a supportive community, addressing the unique needs of such groups as seniors, youth, the unemployed, and the disabled.
5. Be open to honest self-evaluation.
6. Continue to value well-maintained, attractive structures, properties, neighborhoods, and public places.

### Introduction:

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

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

- Citizen involvement and volunteerism
- A family-friendly community with a “small town atmosphere”
- Historical attributes, including downtown and West Main Street

- Business involvement, a diverse business base, and an active Chamber of Commerce
- Importance of being a County seat, and a central location
- Diversity of housing stock; well-kept homes
- Solid and progressive institutions: schools, library, churches, hospital, Performing Arts Center and downtown theater, senior services, parks and recreation center

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

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

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

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

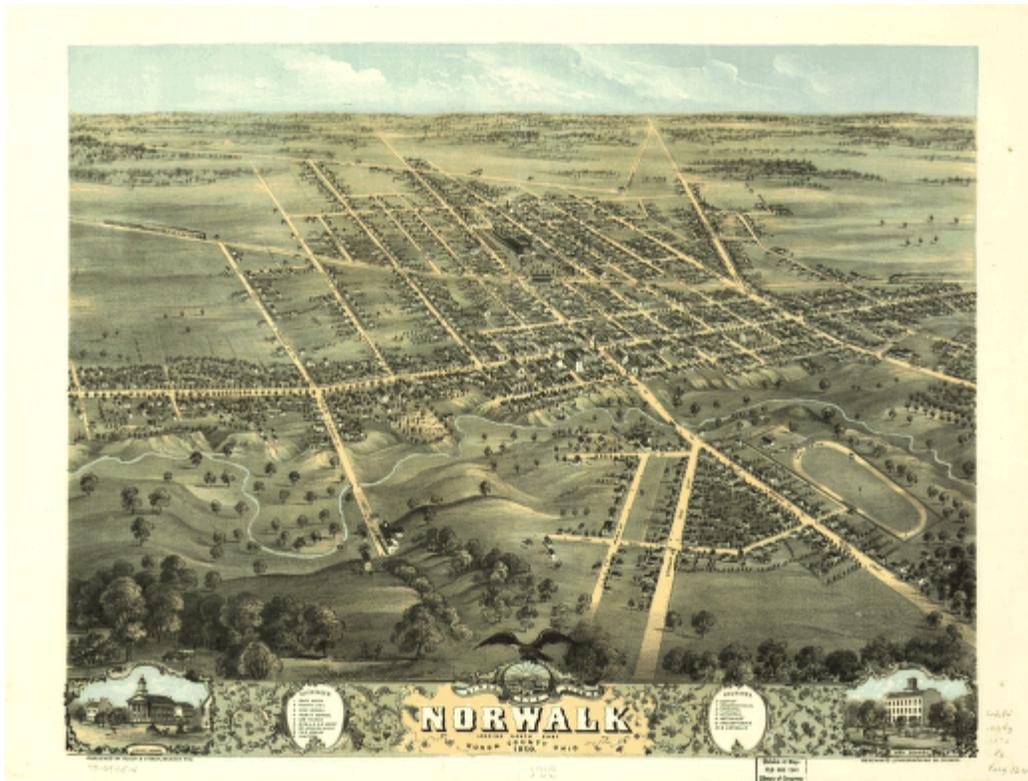
The other pertinent question asked for a listing of the City’s most valuable assets or positive features, and respondents most frequently gave the following responses:

- History/historic district/need to preserve/strong heritage/architecture
- Small town atmosphere
- Community spirit/dedicated citizens/sense of community and concern
- Close-knit community and neighborhoods
- The people of the community

- Quaintness/appearance/beauty/cleanliness
- Norwalk's downtown
- Schools and education systems
- Park and recreation department/parks/reservoir/Ernsthausen Recreation Center
- Hospital and health care system
- Its location/proximity to larger cities
- Safety
- Leadership, involvement, team spirit, community working together/service organizations
- Beautiful trees and natural features
- Churches
- Performing Arts Center

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

### Community Character Shaped by History



*Depiction of an aerial view of Norwalk from the south, in the late nineteenth century.*

It is clear from the preceding summary of public input that Norwalk's history and its preserved historic buildings and other features are vitally important components in making up the community's character and "sense of place". Obviously, Norwalk owes much of what it is today to historical patterns of physical and cultural development. Norwalk indeed

has a rich history, and several trends should be noted in order to understand the Norwalk of today. Some of those trends and attributes include:

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

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

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

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

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

## Gateways

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



*Welcome to Norwalk! Left: Entering town from U.S. 250 North. Right: Driver's views driving north from U.S. 250 south.*

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

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

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

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

Business Routes 18 and 20 both enter Norwalk from the east, with the notable gateway being where they intersect the Route 20/18 bypass. In both cases, there is a notable change in land use from agricultural,



*Welcome at Cleveland Rd.*

low density residential, and occasional small business use to significantly more intensive land uses. Along SR 18 (Akron Road), the bypass is first followed by the set back Norwalk Furniture manufacturing facility; on U.S. 20 (Cleveland Road), one notices the modern David Price Metals and Maple City Ice facilities, as well as higher density condominiums to the south.

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



*Examples of gateway treatments*

## Corridors

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

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



*Lots of information: Signs along U.S. 250 north*

uniformity or evidence of planning or aesthetic consideration. Opportunity exists to create such a vision.

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



*Seymour, Indiana's "Mayonnaise Mile", before and after changes*

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

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

Family Services; the offices of the County Sheriff, adjoining County jail, and County emergency management office; and the newly completed Norwalk High School with its prominently situated Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center and adjoining sports fields. Nearby vacant or cultivated land south of Shady Lane Drive offers a hint that the potential for future development is great.

## **Focal Points and Activity Centers**

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

- The central business district, “Main Street Norwalk”: The function of downtown Norwalk is evolving from the days when it was reached by three interurban rail lines and housed the Glass Block, arguably “the most complete department store in Ohio”. But while its retail businesses progressively court niche markets rather than the general public, it also retains its importance as a County center of government, financial institutions, insurance and legal services, and dining and entertainment. An active Main Street Norwalk organization, applying the nationally recognized Main Street principles and practices, is working to develop activities and events, as well as incentives for building and business owners, to increase downtown activity. County government is a major downtown employer, and other attractors include the Public Library, Towne and Country Theater, City offices in City Hall and the Municipal Court, Berry’s Restaurant and other eateries, and more recently, Sheri’s Coffee House (which attracts clients including a significant youth segment with live entertainment, meeting facilities, and Internet access).
- The U.S. 250 North corridor attracts considerable retail activity, with such destinations as an expanded Wal-Mart that is purportedly one of the largest in Ohio. The mix of retail, restaurant, and service centers draws considerable activity, and this trend is continuing with the recent development of such additional attractors as a cinema, housing, restaurant, and other mixed uses within the Norwalk Commons development.
- Norwalk’s school facilities (both the Norwalk Catholic Schools and Norwalk City Schools) generate significant activity and, as is common in rural communities, act as community and neighborhood centers in sponsoring school plays, concerts, sports events, “fun fairs”, and other activities that draw students, families, neighbors, and others. Within these school systems, major activity centers include Whitney Field (the shared football and track facility), the Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center co-located at Norwalk High School, and the St. Paul Convocation Center.
- The Ernsthausen Recreation Center is a major activity center drawing those with memberships as well as one-time users with daily passes. With such features as an indoor walking track and both indoor and outdoor pools, this center has seen increased activity over time.

- Other activity centers linked to Norwalk’s park system include Bill Baines Park to the north, which is home to a very active organized softball program, and the Memorial Lake reservoir park, which draws somewhat regionally as an attractive place to fish, picnic, hold gatherings, hike, and enjoy an attractive setting.
- Fisher-Titus Medical Center has grown as a regional medical center, and this trend is expected to continue beyond the major expansion whose second phase is now being completed, as additional new technologies and medical specialists are added. With some 850 employees, Fisher-Titus is also Norwalk’s largest employer.
- Other major employers that are generating significant activity include Norwalk Furniture Corporation, Mayflower Vehicle Systems, New Horizons Baking Co., Maple City Rubber Co., and the numerous occupants of the Firelands Industrial Park straddling the northern extension of Republic Street (Janesville-Sackner, American Coating Specialists, and EPIC Technologies, among others).
- In terms of recreational activity, the importance of Norwalk Raceway Park cannot be overlooked as a generator of activity for tens of thousands of drag racing fans over the course of its racing season. For several extended weekends each summer, NRP serves as the City’s primary attractor of people from outside the Norwalk area, helping fill hotels and restaurants. The existence of NRP and its annual promotion of the “Thunder in the



Streets” event in downtown Norwalk, as well as the corporate offices of the International Hot Rod Association in Norwalk, contribute to the image of Norwalk as a center for motor sports, linking at least psychologically with its status as a location for a number of automotive parts suppliers.

*View of the stands at Norwalk Raceway Park*

## Landmarks

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

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



*Huron County Courthouse*

## Norwalk’s Urban Edge

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

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



*Pushing the Edge: Condominiums and single-family houses near Westwind Drive.*

## Civic and Public Space

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

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

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



*Elm Street’s neighborhood park.*

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



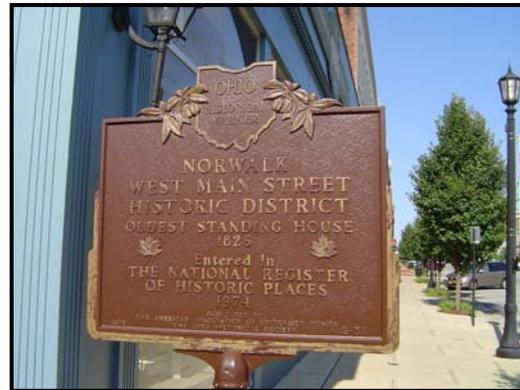
*The Veterans’ Memorial on Shady Lane.*

## Strategies and Recommendations

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

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

1. Investigate the relative benefit of transforming Norwalk's Architectural Review Board into a Norwalk Historic District Commission, charged with promoting Citywide preservation and beautification, and enhancing the City's historic tradition. This review board enforces the architectural standards set forth by City legislation, on a case-by-case basis. Its purpose will be best served by providing guidance prior to and during any proposed project involving alteration of historic properties, rather than as a policing entity after alterations have been made. This Board can also serve a positive purpose by recognizing and rewarding outstanding public and private beautification efforts. Although the Architectural Review Board already has a roster of contributing members, future members may be selected from the City administration or legislature, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Firelands Museum and Historical Society, as well as involving others with historical, architectural, or other community expertise. Develop new structure, goals, and procedures, by 2009.
2. Review and revise Norwalk's Architectural Review Guidelines by researching the feasibility of, and then (if feasible) developing a Historic Area and Building Ordinance that ensures the preservation and enhancement of designated historic areas and properties. This ordinance should cover renovation and construction of buildings, signage, and parking restrictions in historically sensitive areas. Wherever possible, such an ordinance should provide incentives for preservation, rather than prohibitive regulations and penalties. Developing such an ordinance and making it effective will take considerable time and discussion, in order to balance preservation and development forces to reflect Norwalk's true character and commitment to preservation, while maintaining a close watch over the historic integrity of historic properties and areas. Many of the relevant issues, such as the boundaries of a downtown historic district, and the degree to which development should be restricted, are unresolved, and will require further study before a revision to the Guidelines is finalized. Involve the Architectural Review Board and City administration, Main Street Norwalk, and the Chamber, and possibly additional interested parties. Put in place by 2009.
3. Continue to increase the number of historic property designations within the City, with consistent application of criteria for designation, with special consideration to expansion



of historic areas to include significant properties along major corridors. These areas may include East Main Street from the central business district to Old State Road, West Main Street extended to the western City limits, Benedict Avenue from the central business district to Executive Drive, and Whittlesey Avenue north to League Street. Initiate within one year (by 2008) and ongoing. Involve Main Street Norwalk, Historical Society, and City administration.

4. Increase public awareness of historic preservation through special programs of education. Develop annual beautification and preservation awards to recognize projects and properties that have contributed to the City's overall image of preservation. Publicize these awards, which can be given at a public function such as the annual Chamber dinner. Local and area newspapers and other media (radio, public access cable) can recognize and publicize these and other preservation efforts. Initiate within two years (by 2009); present awards annually thereafter.
5. Establish more formalized partnerships with business and community organizations that support preservation efforts, such as the Firelands Museum and the Firelands Historical Society, and area and State historical preservation commissions. This is a continuous activity.
6. Ensure that policies and decisions on community growth and development respect the City's historical heritage and enhance overall community viability. This will be a responsibility of the Planning Commission, as well as other decision makers and entities, and is an ongoing activity.
7. Preservation and recognition of visible signs of Norwalk's heritage should occur on several fronts. First, historic preservation and heritage awareness should become a large component of any tourism effort maintained by the Chamber, Main Street Norwalk, or any future entity focused on tourism. Ensure that historic properties and attributes are featured prominently in any tourism-related publications. Similarly, the City of Norwalk's website should promote *historic* Main Street Norwalk and its historic housing stock, as well as major local industries and area attractions. At Norwalk's gateways, attractive and highly visible City Limits signs of professional quality should promote Norwalk's historic heritage and traditions. These elements should be in place within one year (2008), with the tourism focus in place as a priority by 2009.
8. Encourage expansion and use of the Firelands Museum and the Laning Research Center. This facility, the oldest continuously operating museum in Ohio, has fallen prey to national trends of diminished museum patronage. Undertake efforts to market the museum and link it to the overall interest among City residents in Norwalk's historic preservation. Bring the museum – and its contents – to greater public awareness by using volunteered storefronts as displays of artifacts. Continue the practice of encouraging and facilitating programs that expose and educate children at the museum. The adjacent properties of the Laning Research Center, Firelands Museum, and Norwalk Public Library collectively offer the potential of a significant research “complex”. This can be an ongoing activity involving the mentioned facilities and their organizations.

- Focus on specific historic properties through the increased planning of “old house tours” and inclusion of video tours on public access television. Implement within two years (by 2009).

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

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

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

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



**Strategy 4: *Update the City’s website and maintain the network of linked websites to reflect the City’s character, cherished attributes, and commitment to balancing growth with preservation.***

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

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

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

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

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

**Strategy 5: *Maintain Norwalk’s senior services***

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

Extend invitations for seniors to volunteer at the welcome center. This should be initiated within one year. See the Community Services chapter for more recommendations linked to senior services.

2. Include Senior representation in making recommendations for future programs in the City. Include seniors on City boards or resource panels. This activity should be ongoing.
3. Consistently consider the needs and wants of the growing elderly segment of Norwalk's population, but be mindful of the diversity and varied interests within that 60+ segment. For example, recreation programming should include passive activities and facilities such as walking or biking trails, and intergenerational activities that encourage socialization. The timeframe is ongoing.

#### Strategy 6: *Visible public support of Norwalk's public service programs*

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

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

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

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