

## Chapter 4



*Memorial Lake Park*

# Natural Resources

## Goals:

1. Create and enforce regulations and codes that protect and maintain natural resources and reflect a responsible community that is a good steward of its environment, such as tree ordinances and use of an arborist, soil runoff provisions, wetlands provisions, and others.
2. Promote and support public access to and enjoyment of natural resources.
3. Develop sufficient natural and passive parks and recreation facilities for the size of the community, including trails for biking and running.
4. Promote and implement voluntary efforts to clean up blighted, littered, or polluted areas, and solicit outside assistance including grants to help in costly clean-up efforts.
5. Provide a perpetual supply of sufficient water to support the future population and business base.

## Introduction:

A community's natural resources and features are among its most valuable assets. It is important for comprehensive planning to balance planned future development with the preservation of those resources that are valued. While some resources are treasured for their aesthetic beauty, others, such as the supply of drinking water, are important for their contribution to community health and well-being.

During the community forums and focus groups, residents expressed an interest in the preservation of a number of natural resources. Among their comments were the following:

- Additional green space is necessary; green spaces in all developments
- Green space is an important part of small town atmosphere. People look for and expect it. But it is hard to set aside land in a subdivision. It drives up costs per usable acre. Need to use some ratio of land, expecting more for larger subdivisions
- Continuity of greenery; green space in downtown area; greenscaping of Whittlesey Avenue from City Hall to League
- Tree replacement-keep trees; plant additional maple trees; plant trees along U.S. 250 North
- Develop Norwalk Creek as a riverwalk; clean up Norwalk Creek

- Balance growth and preservation
- Beautification projects as you enter the City (gateways)
- Recognize the reservoir as a major community asset

The following narrative describes the physical, natural, and environmental attributes of the City of Norwalk that must be considered within the framework of a comprehensive plan. In some cases, these attributes represent positive aspects of the community that should be preserved for aesthetic value. In other cases, they present barriers to development and construction (such as wetlands, flood plains, or poorly drained soils) that should be heeded.

### Flood Plains

Norwalk Creek and adjacent lands present the only areas of 100-year flooding in Norwalk (designated “Zone A”). Portions of the creek consist of areas between the limits of a 100-year flood and a 500-year flood or areas subject to 100-year flooding with average depths of less than one foot or where the contributing drainage area is less than one square mile (designated “Zone B”). This flood zone corridor extends for virtually the entire length of the City, east to west, from the spillway of the Memorial Reservoir to its farthest point downstream, west of the Sycamore Hills subdivision. Norwalk Creek flooded significantly on July 4, 1969, after a large rainfall caused a breach of the Memorial Reservoir. Today, the creek provides a number of public viewing opportunities, specifically at Bremser Park on Elm Street and at the Jaycees Park and adjacent sledding hill (“Hogan’s Hill”) on Pleasant Street. The demarked flood plain along this riparian corridor ranges from approximately 200 to 800 feet in width.



Norwalk Creek at Jaycees Park

Another “Zone B” exists just inside City limits, north of Washington Street and just east of its intersection with State Street, and extending northwesterly along a corridor parallel to and approximately 700 feet west of Whittlesey Avenue. Areas of minimal flooding (“Zone C”) are noted in several areas within Norwalk: north of the Upper Reservoir in the vicinity of the W&LE railroad tracks; south of Christie Avenue in the vicinity of the high school soccer field; in the westernmost portion of the City north of U.S. 20 (in the vicinity of the Big Lots store); and just west of Cline Street between Glover Avenue (to the north) and Fruen Street (to the south).

### Wetlands

The National Wetlands Inventory of the United States Department of the Interior has identified a number of wetlands within Norwalk, mainly around the relatively undeveloped periphery of the City. They are located, in general, to the west along the eastern Huron River branch, along Norwalk Creek from the reservoir to Elm Street, and within the Norwalk reservoir system itself. None of these wetlands pose any restriction on development, as they are located



Norwalk Creek at Elm St.

in areas that are primarily not capable of or likely to be planned for development.

### **Soils**

Norwalk, like most of Huron County, is on till plains, located in the Central Lowland Physiographic Province, which includes most of the glaciated parts of Ohio. Several glaciers formerly covered Huron County, including the Late Wisconsinian Glacier, which occurred 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. Late Wisconsinian drift covered all the material deposited by previous glaciers, underlain by shale and sandstone. Most of the till plains, including most of Norwalk, are nearly level to gently rolling, and some areas along streams are steeper. Glacial deposits range from less than two feet to more than 150 feet in thickness. Available water supplies occur as reservoirs in coarse grained lenses and stratified layers of sand and gravel.

Norwalk is located at the intersection of three major soil groups that are typical of deep and moderately deep soils of upland till plains and lake plains. These groups include the Bennington-Cardington-Condit association in the southwest portion of the City; the Kibbie-Tuscola association in the eastern portion; and the Chili-Oshtempo-Haskins association to the north.

Predominant soil types in Norwalk and its potential growth areas are listed below. Although many of the general soil types found in Norwalk exhibit “severe constraints” to development, that fact alone does not necessarily preclude such development. Often, mitigating steps such as soil stabilization or drainage must be taken to develop the property safely.

BgA: Bennington; vicinity of fairgrounds, airport, and Norwalk Raceway Park; severe limitations to construction due to wetness.

Cm: Colwood; western edge of Norwalk; severe limitations to construction due to ponding.

CoB: Condit; south of Norwalk, severe limitations to construction due to ponding.

HkA: Haskins; along Route 20 east of the airport; severe limitations due to wetness.

JtA: Jimtown; south side of developed Norwalk, along Benedict Avenue; severe limitations due to wetness.

KbA: Kibbie; north of Norwalk in likely growth areas; severe limitations due to wetness.

OsB: Oshtempo; east side of developed Norwalk; slight limitations to construction.

TuA and TuB: Tuscola; north side of Norwalk and its east side along routes 18 and 20; severe limitations for excavations and dwellings with basements due to wetness; moderate limitations for dwellings without basements and commercial buildings; wetness and shrink-swell characteristics.

### Views/Viewsheds

Because of its level to gently rolling topography, Norwalk does not lend itself to a large number of views and vistas that need to be preserved. The best such views occur primarily along the Norwalk Creek, as one encounters it, and in the preserved scenery of the sprawling Norwalk



*Memorial Lake Park, with resident waterfowl*

Memorial Reservoir and park.

Care should be taken to protect the existing views of the creek and its surrounding vegetation, and of other attractive natural areas, from inappropriate development.

### Tree Canopy/Urban Forestry

Norwalk is known as “The Maple City”, and for good reason, beginning with founder Platt Benedict planting maple trees along Main Street in 1830. The predominance of mature trees lining Norwalk’s streets and thoroughfares contributes to the overall attraction of the community. Norwalk has an active Tree Board that determines which trees pose dangers and require trimming or removal. At the property owner’s request, trees on City property (tree lawns) can be planted with one of several selected species.

The Park and Recreation Department has initiated a successful program where community members can contribute to the planting of trees in parks and public places to commemorate a loved one. This program has proven successful. It is expected that Norwalk’s tree programs, and its status as a “Tree City USA”, will continue.

### Balance Between Development and Protection of the Environment

Participants in the community forums, focus groups, and resource panels repeatedly cited the need to preserve Norwalk’s natural resources that contribute to the small town feel of the community. This includes a need for preservation and, in growth areas, the set-aside of open space and green space. Elsewhere in this plan, methods by which new subdivisions and property owners can contribute to open space are discussed. It is also suggested that developers consider, and the City provide incentives for, methods of development that can lead to designated common space within those developments, achieved through clustering of housing units and other methods of “conservation design”.

The main principles of conservation design consist of: flexibility in site design and lot size; protection and management of natural areas; reduction of impervious surface areas; and sustainable storm water management. Efficient use of conservation design principles can produce significant reductions in construction and infrastructure costs, reduction in the costs

of municipal storm water management, and the creation of connections to existing natural areas, open space, greenways, and trails. Culturally significant properties that should be preserved can be included side by side with those natural areas to be preserved when undertaking conservation design practices. Conservation subdivision design can be employed by following a process that includes identification of significant resources existing on a proposed development site, identifying potential development areas (the “building envelope”) and locating housing sites within the development envelopes, designing a street and trail network to link the homes, and adding lot lines, ensuring that each lot meets minimum lot requirements, but allowing for reduction of standards (such as smaller setbacks) for lots. House lots can be enhanced by designing direct views and access to open space within the subdivision.

Conservation developments usually cluster smaller lots on a tract of land, instead of distributing them over the entire acreage in a traditional style. With smaller lots, these higher-density residential developments tend to be more cost-effective to construct and serve with the necessary infrastructure. Norwalk’s subdivision review process allows for the conception of such a Planned Unit Development. However, the evolution and success of such a design in Norwalk will be dependent largely upon a determination that a significant market exists that will prefer higher density, smaller lots, but access and proximity to open space. Evidence exists in planning literature that buyers appreciate the value of a smaller lot with nearby permanently protected open space.

**Norwalk’s Park System**

The City of Norwalk has developed a Citywide park system that offers a variety of park settings and facilities. This system provides a park within walking distance of much of the City, although some of the newer, peripheral subdivisions are farther removed from the park locations. This challenge will be intensified as the City grows and additional housing is constructed. Existing parks include the following, listed by classification:

Type of Park	Name	Location	Acres	Facilities
Mini Park	Bresson	W. Main St.	0.12	Benches, fountain
Mini-Park	Pohl	E. Main St.	0.12	Benches
Mini-Park	Workers’ Memorial	League St.	0.25	Benches
Neighborhood	Bremser	E. Elm St.	1.13	Ballfield, playground
Neighborhood	Mead Park	Huron St.	1.73	Playground, ball field
Neighborhood	Stokely	Northwest St.	0.68	Playground
Neighborhood	Stoutenberg	Norwood Ave.	1.31	Playground, basketball
Community	Baines	Plank Rd.	14.68	Ballfields, shelter, concessions
Community	Bishman	Republic St.	10.5	Ballfield, playground, shelter
Community	Jaycees/Hogan’s	Elm/Pleasant	5.64	Tennis, playground, shelter, sledding hill

Type of Park	Name	Location	Acres	Facilities
Community	Lais Pond	Elm/Pleasant	--	Ice skating
Community	McGuan	Hester St.	6.86	Ballfields, concessions
Community	St. Mary's	St. Mary's St.	0.37	Skateboarding park (planned)
Regional	Veterans Memorial	Old State Rd.	322.74	Shelters, fishing piers, playgrounds, hiking/walking

Adding the reported acreage, the City has about a half-acre in three mini-parks, 4.85 acres in four neighborhood parks that largely serve nearby residences, 38.05 acres in six community parks or outdoor facilities that provide for Citywide needs, and 322.74 acres at Memorial Lake Park. Additional grounds and facilities are provided by the Norwalk and St. Paul school systems.

The Huron County Youth Soccer Club utilizes a variety of private and school properties for soccer venues, including land owned by Norwalk City Schools (notably the Middle School fields), Fisher-Titus Medical Center, and St. Peter Lutheran Church. An independent baseball program for youth, the Lefty Grove league, also operates within Norwalk, using ball fields on private property behind the VFW Post on Milan Avenue.

While the St. Mary Street Skate Park is listed in the above table, it is currently in disuse while a private nonprofit entity is raising funds to equip and prepare the park. Another specialized, private outdoor facility is a BMX bicycle track that is located south of the Huron County Department of Job and Family Services offices on Shady Lane.

**Strategies and Recommendations:**

**Strategy 1: *Protect and maintain natural resources through creation and enforcement of regulations and codes, and through proper planning.***

1. As discussed elsewhere in this plan, a method must be developed to provide revenues for the acquisition of land for new neighborhood parks and greenways. The existing park system in Norwalk is fairly effective in bringing public park space within walking distance of most neighborhoods and homes. However, as the City's neighborhoods radiate outwards, with such new subdivisions as Executive Estates and Fairwood to the south, and Westwind Drive and Hunters Glen to the north, and Sycamore Hills to the west, the need for new park space toward the City's edges will become increasingly evident. Perhaps the most equitable way to provide financial support for the acquisition of new park space, as well as ongoing operational funding, is through a one-time assessment upon the sale of new residential lots. That assessment has historically been a relatively negligible fifty dollars. In other communities, the assessment may be as much as \$2,000. Current discussion proposes a fee of \$500 to be charged to the developer of new residential housing units, who, in effect, will pass the cost on to the buyer of the new home. It may be possible to make this charge somewhat proportionate to the value of the lot or the house under construction, so as to not unduly inhibit construction of lower cost homes. This charge would be earmarked for new parkland or green space acquisition, development, and maintenance. If sufficient

funds are collected, they could be used for land banking of desirable property for future park and public space development. It is recommended that the City determine whether new park acquisition can be reasonably be accomplished with such a fee structure and, if so, that a new fee structure be implemented within two years (by 2009).

2. In the case of larger planned developments, the administration should work with the developer to determine the feasibility of the designation of land within the development as a park or green space. Such land donation should be considered, when feasible, in lieu of the financial developer fee described in the previous recommendation. Also the conservation design practices described previously should be encouraged in order to increase the attractiveness of park and green space development by residential developers. Examine Norwalk's zoning and subdivision ordinances to ensure that they provide for creative use of conservation practices such as clustering and planned unit developments. The City should examine alternative ways to create incentives for developers to allow for green space. This is an ongoing activity, involving the planning commission, administration, and Council.
3. Ensure the community's awareness of environmentally sensitive areas, including wetlands and flood zones, by controlling development through zoning and other means. Maintain updated maps of flood plains and wetlands for public examination. This is an ongoing activity, involving the zoning and building office, where such maps can be housed.
4. Preserve existing scenery and views in such areas as parks and green space throughout the City.
  - a. Landscaping should be designed and maintained at critical focal points such as "gateway" approaches to the community (as discussed in the "Community Character" chapter). Gateway development should be completed by 2008, and should include elements of "branding" to reinforce the sense of place within Norwalk. Gateways and other highly visible properties should be maintained on negotiated easements or property under municipal ownership. Civic and garden clubs can be encouraged to participate in the development and maintenance of such landscaping.
  - b. Develop a system to reward and recognize best practices by private homeowners and business/commercial property owners, with the awarding of special recognition for items that may include "front yard of the year" or "commercial landscape of the year".
5. Norwalk's current raw water supply derives from the inflow of Norwalk Creek into the City's reservoir system. The quality of this water source is subject to the practices of landowners within the watershed that feeds the reservoir. Especially important are the practices of landowners whose property lies adjacent to the creek. While this watershed is nearly all outside Norwalk's municipal bounds, the City should encourage efforts of County officials, including the Huron Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the County's Emergency Management Agency, to encourage and provide incentives for

“best management practices”, including the planting of filter strips and buffer zones along the riparian corridor, conservation tillage, animal waste management, and other practices. Financial incentive programs exist through the SWCD to encourage such practices by property owners. The City should support and encourage the use of such programs by area property owners. This is an ongoing activity.

6. Ensure the presence of mature trees in Norwalk by undertaking the following ongoing activities:
  - a. Continue the ongoing work of the Tree Board for removal of deteriorated trees and the encouragement and facilitation of a tree replacement program, which typically provides replacement trees on tree lawns in rights-of-way fronting residential properties.
  - b. Publicize the Park Department’s Tree Memorial program, where community members can memorialize a deceased friend or family member by donating a tree to be planted in a City park or public space with a commemorative plaque.
  - c. Encourage best management practices during construction to ensure that trees designated for preservation will survive construction. Encourage site designs that reduce or minimize tree loss.
7. The City of Norwalk and the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation have taken a proactive approach to Brownfields identification, mitigation, and development. Activities have centered on the former Norwalk Foundry property, and an environmental assessment of that property is underway, funded by a grant from the Clean Ohio Assistance Fund. The City’s efforts to identify Brownfields, obtain resources to assess their environmental status, and prepare them for redevelopment should continue. It is recommended that a task force be appointed by the City to assist in the identification and inventorying of additional Brownfield sites within the City, and, with professional assistance, to assess the development potential, environmental status, and feasibility of clean-up measures to bring those sites into productive use. With the receipt of an EPA grant in 2006, the task force should be appointed in the near future, and their work should be considered ongoing for a long term.
8. Develop regulations that require developers to landscape retention ponds. Safety measures, such as fencing in many cases, must still be undertaken, but the visual impact of a retention pond can be positively influenced by the addition of rudimentary landscaping, such as tree plantings or introduction of wildflowers. Implement within one year (2008).

**Strategy 2: *Promote and support public access to and enjoyment of natural resources, including provision of a perpetual supply of water.***

1. Implement steps to complete planned improvements that increase the usefulness of the Memorial Lake Park area, by:
  - a. Planning and constructing an amphitheater within the Memorial Lake Park area as a venue for concerts and other cultural, educational, or other public events. Site the amphitheater with consideration for adequate parking and ingress/egress, and sight lines from the amphitheater seating (i.e. facing the water without sun glare).

- b. Completing the paved walking trail around Memorial Lake.
  - c. Developing additional concepts for the diverse use of the reservoir park, based on public interest.
2. Continue to examine options for the provision of a perpetual supply of water to supplement the collection of surface water from the Norwalk Creek watershed. Over the next two years, alternative sources of raw or, more likely, treated water should be analyzed. Consider the cost of infrastructure to extend outside distribution lines and connect them to Norwalk's system, as well as rate and fee structures of the alternate sources. Known potential sources include Erie County and/or the City of Sandusky, and the Northern Ohio Rural Water Authority. See the Infrastructure chapter for further discussion.
3. Encourage the potential use of land trusts to accept land for preservation through donation or acquisition. This practice is more likely to be followed in rural, agricultural, and undeveloped land outside the City limits. Such organizations as the Firelands Conservancy can be contacted and utilized to facilitate the process. To preserve the public's enjoyment of the reservoir park and its natural areas, a focus should be placed on the preservation of adjacent and nearby properties to the east and south of the reservoir. Such preservation methods, or the possible use of a purchase of development rights, may be a long-term objective, taking ten years or more to accomplish.
4. Encourage the awareness, utilization, and enjoyment of nearby accessible natural areas, such as the Land Lab property owned and maintained by Huron County on South Norwalk Road. This is an ongoing activity.
5. Wherever appropriate, design or implement steps to minimize the environmental effects of a land use upon sensitive neighboring properties. This may include designing parking lot lighting to reduce glare on adjacent properties, planting trees and other vegetation to form natural sound and visual barriers, and taking steps to reduce the noise levels created by certain land uses.

**Strategy 3: *Develop sufficient natural and passive parks and recreation facilities for the size of the community.***

The City's existing park system was described immediately preceding the listing of strategies and recommendations. General consensus is that neighborhood parks are serving existing neighborhoods well, and many community-wide needs are met through the community parks and Memorial Lake Park. Some community needs, however, are bringing the park system to full capacity, including a burgeoning softball schedule involving several leagues. Further, the Huron County Youth Soccer Club is seeking a single site for the development of enough soccer fields at one location to serve the needs of the entire league.

1. The City should set a long-term goal that every neighborhood should have a community park within walking distance. Communication is necessary between the planning commission, those who undertake land acquisition through purchase or gifting, the Park Board, and others in the administration, to determine plans and priorities, especially for

high-density neighborhoods without reasonable walking access to a neighborhood or community park. This should be an ongoing activity, incorporating a definitive study of high-needs areas for park accessibility.

2. The City’s system of “paper” streets and alleyways should be examined in light of the potential for midblock and interior walkways and greenways. It may be possible to connect streets and destinations through a network of well-planned walkways. Where the City does not already own property, easements could be obtained with property owners, subject to financial feasibility. An example of such a system is the informal pathway from Norwalk High School, through the soccer field complex, across Christie Avenue and through the Middle School property, to either Benedict Avenue to the east, or through a mid-block path to Stoutenberg Avenue to the north.
3. As described in more detail in the Quality of Life chapter, connect Norwalk to other communities through trails and greenways, focusing upon connections with Rails to Trails, including a possible connection to Milan by using the abandoned northerly railroad right-of-way now owned by the City, and consider connections with such destinations as Baines Park, the Ernsthausen Community Center, and the reservoir. Link critical areas and destinations, including the central business district, through designated trails. In developing such trails for walking or bicycling, efforts should be expended to connect and network the disparate elements of the emerging trail system. Also, consider the creation of a trail along Norwalk Creek along the segment from the Memorial Lake reservoir to Elm Street. (See Quality of Life chapter for more detailed and phased trail system recommendation).



Jaycee Park