

Chapter 8



Community Facilities

Goals:

1. Build on the strong facilities we have, including our health care, recreational, and educational systems, to draw people and business to the community, and to provide ample social, cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities and an active community life to all.
2. Strive for community facilities to be clean and well maintained, accessible to all, diverse, affordable, and responsive to the differing needs, trends, and desires of all age groups.
3. Require recreational areas to be expanded in proportion to new development, housing, and population.
4. Ensure that facility development is conducted in response to well thought out plans that support the needs of the community.
5. Attract a branch of a college or university, a center for higher education, or other means to bring college level educational opportunities to the community.
6. Maintain and build upon consistent high standards and quality of the public and parochial school systems within the community, providing the highest level of curricular, educational, and training opportunities for learners of all ages to prepare them for success in career and life.
7. Continue to support the progressive core education system with attractive and modern technology, buildings, and extracurricular activities that attract students and their parents to area schools, and that prepare students for success in technical, workforce, and post-graduate endeavors.

Introduction

Many of Norwalk's community facilities, whether owned and operated by local government or nonprofit corporations, are considered among the City's finest and most treasured assets. Many of these facilities are strong and growing institutions with which many residents identify. A number of them have made strong, recent commitments to improve physical plant or construct entirely new buildings, and the combined growth of many of these community facilities have changed the face of Norwalk. The growth of public and private facilities along Shady Lane, from the Fisher-Titus campus to the Norwalk High School, is evidence of the level of civic investment in the community and County.

In several cases, large investments have helped an institution or organization in positioning for future population growth and a resulting increase in demand for services.

Simultaneously, institutions are investing in significant technology upgrades – such as the creation of a totally “wireless” campus at Fisher-Titus Medical Center, and advances in distance learning and computer labs in Norwalk’s schools.

This chapter will review the current location and condition of a number of community facilities, largely concentrating on buildings, then list the recommendations developed for each. For continuity of presentation, information and recommendations will be grouped around each community facility. In some cases, such as police and fire protection and recreation centers, Norwalk’s municipal government has overall control. In other cases, such as medical care, schools, and the public library, the City is an active partner in supporting the facility in serving and improving the quality of life of Norwalk’s community members.

For all community facilities, several general principles should apply, and should be taken into consideration during their planning processes. These general considerations include:

- Will the facility as proposed most effectively enhance Norwalk’s quality of life?
- Will the facility as proposed meet the needs of all age groups?
- Is the facility site accessible to its users, with adequate provision for access by drivers and pedestrians, and parking?
- Is there a stream of revenue to pay for the facility’s construction, as well as its ongoing maintenance and operation?
- Is consideration given to all reasonable alternatives, including the use of existing facilities and space within the community, as well as the construction of new facilities?
- Is facility planning undertaken in coordination with other elements of planning outlined in this comprehensive plan, including provision of utilities and infrastructure, transportation, existing and emerging adjacent and nearby land uses, projected spatial and population growth trends, and environmental compatibility of the proposed site?

Input was sought by the resource panel from leaders representing each of the facilities and institutions described below, and their input is included within the recommendations.

Input from Community Forums

During the October 2004 forums, community members had much to say about the community’s facilities, and many were consistently listed among the City’s greatest assets. Comments pertaining to community facilities included the following:

- Strong library; expand the library
- Expand or construct a new fire station
- Continue growth of Fisher-Titus Medical Center
- Ensure landfill (transfer station) continues as a destination for trash in 20 years
- Expansion of school libraries
- Alternative learning center and classroom availability for lifelong learning, adult learning
- Provide for urgent care needs
- City and County government buildings are important elements in the downtown area.

Community Facilities and Recommendations

1. General Government Facilities

Norwalk’s City Hall houses its administrative offices, including the Finance department, Law Director’s office, Mayor and Safety Service Director’s offices, Clerk of Council’s offices, and the Zoning/Inspection department and Public Works offices. The building is centrally located on Whittlesey Avenue and is in good condition. There are no plans to renovate or expand the building. Should there be a need for expansion, the building could be extended to the east into an existing short-term parking area.



Norwalk City Hall

Huron County has operated a number of offices within the County Administration Building on Milan Avenue. This property has several meeting rooms, extensive off-street parking, and it houses the County Commissioners and their staff, the County’s Education Services Center, the County’s General Health District and clinics, the County election board offices, the County’s Cooperative Extension offices, and the Huron County Development Council offices.



Huron County Office Building



Huron County Courthouse

The County purchased the former Citizens National Bank building (12 E. Main St.) adjacent to the Huron County Courthouse in downtown Norwalk (renamed the County Office Building), and more recently, they purchased the former Outdoorsman Building for future expansion and records maintenance. While the Courthouse now exclusively houses the County’s

juvenile, probate, and common pleas courts, the County Office Building houses the County’s Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder, and Prosecuting Attorney’s offices. The Public Defender is located next door, at 16 E. Main Street. The ownership by the County of virtually the entire block from the Courthouse to the former Outdoorsman building ensures that Huron County should have sufficient office, meeting, and storage space into the foreseeable future.

Other important County offices include the County Engineer’s facility on West Jefferson Street and several offices in the Shady Lane complex and on Shady Lane Drive, including the Department of Job and Family Services, Sheriff’s office and former jail, and Emergency Management office. The older Shady Lane complex houses the license bureau and title office, Services for Aging and its public transportation service, Veteran’s Services, and the

County dog warden. The Shady Lane area is well suited to public purposes requiring public access, as off-street parking can be designed into the planning process, and the location of Shady Lane Drive on Norwalk’s south side, close to Route 250 and the U.S. 20 bypass is accessible from other locations throughout the County. Services for Aging is analyzing alternatives for the construction of a new senior center to serve the Norwalk area and house administrative offices.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that Services for Aging include co-locating at least some of their activities and programming to the Ernsthausen Recreation Center when that facility undertakes an expansion. The potential for intergenerational activities and the potential for increased use of the Ernsthausen facility by a growing elderly population presents a number of opportunities to improve the quality of life for many residents.
2. Consider maximizing the use of existing City and County office buildings, including their potential as venues for meetings.

2. Police Services

Norwalk has a full-time police department with 24 full time officers, six full time dispatchers, a full time clerk and a part time clerk. Assuming a current population of 17,000, Norwalk has 1.41 officers per 1,000 population.



Norwalk’s Police Station

Norwalk’s police station (right) also houses the City’s Municipal Court, which is used as a meeting place by City Council. Constructed in 1997, the building is expected to serve the City’s needs for the next twenty years.

Police response times range from two to five minutes for 911 calls, with some delays in responding to more congested growth areas to the north. According to the police chief, the greatest change in the police department is the increasingly time-consuming nature of police work through changes in the law, liability management, increasing documentation requirements, and meeting citizens’ expectations. Other trends and concerns include an increase in drug activity, mounting traffic concerns, and Internet fraud. The relatively new police station continues to adequately serve the current needs of the City’s law enforcement and justice systems.

Recommendation:

1. Review the need for improvements and upgrades to the City’s police facilities and technology (such as in-car computers) on a regular basis, perhaps every five years.

3. Fire and EMS Services

Norwalk's fire department operates out of a centrally located fire station that was constructed in 1912. While the location is excellent for response time throughout the City and service area, the station itself presents limitations in storage of equipment and space for training and housing personnel.

Clearance for some vehicles is two inches, and the building is not energy efficient. The present building has no facilities for training, restroom facilities are antiquated, and there is no room for loading hose, performing vehicle maintenance, or storage for turnout gear and other firefighting needs.



Norwalk's fire station

Construction of a larger facility (or expansion of the existing one) that would take advantage of the current, central location is possible, but would require clearance of a larger site and a reduction in the size and capacity of adjacent parking lots.

There is a need to study all alternatives in the near future. The current site is beneficial because of its central location and the resulting low response times (the primary locational criterion). An alternative site would need to be within proximity of the current location to continue to produce similar response times to all destinations within the service area. Because of the low-acreage need to support a fire station site, it is hoped that one or more suitable central sites would be possible for consideration.

This plan projects a continued outward pattern of growth, with residential and commercial growth to the north, industrial growth to the east, and residential development continuing to the south. This balance of geographic growth may further indicate the continued need to maintain a geographically central location, but also points to the need to take steps to maintain traffic flow that can accommodate firefighting equipment on those "spoke" arterials that radiate out from the City center, such as East and West Main Street, Cleveland and Akron Roads, and U.S. Route 250 through Norwalk. The construction of access roads and parallel roads to relieve these arterials of significant local traffic will help meet this need.

The most significant expense is not the construction of a fire station, but the cost of staffing it. For this reason, a second fire station or substation may be fiscally impractical if response times can continue to be satisfactory with a single facility.

The Norwalk Fire Department has 18 full-time State certified firefighters, with three shifts of four to five people, as well as administrative and inspection personnel. It serves all of Norwalk, as well as providing fire protection coverage for Norwalk Township and Bronson Township, making a 50 square mile service area. The department maintains a run volume average of 600 incidents per year, providing all fire, rescue, haz-mat, and basic life support services.

North Central EMS serves Norwalk, with a station on Woodlawn Avenue. North Central provides emergency and non-emergency ambulance transport, mobile intensive care transport, special need care transports, and wheelchair van operations. Dispatching is handled in their central facility in Milan, five miles north of Norwalk, with support as needed from other nearby stations.

Strategies and Recommendations:

1. The 1912 fire station is not adequate for present day equipment, personnel, and citizen needs. Alternatives should be studied by a consultant and City officials, and considered by a task force of citizens, applying criteria of current and projected response times, staffing impacts, and financial considerations, as well as other factors. Such alternatives include modifying or expanding the current facility, constructing a new facility on the current site, constructing a new station on a new central site, and consideration of more than one facility (which carries considerable financial implications regarding staffing).

As alternatives are weighed and a decision is made concerning a solution, attention must be given to the measurable standards: response time, staffing per 1,000 residents, and other factors bearing on ISO recommendations and NFPA Standard 1710. The study of alternatives should be complete by 2010.

2. Maintain a schedule of equipment replacement and a fleet of reliable vehicles (ongoing). Within the next ten years, a pumper and aerial truck will need to be replaced.

4. Education Facilities



Above: St. Paul School; Below: Norwalk High School

Both the Norwalk City Schools and the Norwalk Catholic Schools have recently committed to major investments in their school facilities. A major enlargement of the St. Paul High School has been completed. Previously, Norwalk constructed a new high school, first utilized for the 2001-2002 school year, and converted a portion of its former high school to the Main Street School serving all of the system’s fifth and sixth graders. This latter plan helped relieve the system’s three elementary schools, which had previously housed fifth graders, as well as



Norwalk Middle School, which included sixth grade. During the late 1990’s St. Paul also completed the construction of a new Convocation Center on their campus.

Norwalk’s school facilities and recent (2005-2006) enrollment figures include the following:

School	Grades	Enrollment	Location
Norwalk High School	9-12	756	350 Shady Lane Drive
Norwalk Middle School	7-8	447	64 Christie Avenue
Main Street Intermediate	5-6	501	80 E. Main St.
League Elementary	K-4	255	16 E. League St.
Maplehurst Elementary	K-4	540	195 St. Mary’s St.
Pleasant Elementary	K-4	423	16 S. Pleasant St.
Gerken Center	Pre-K	27	120 Shady Lane Drive
St. Paul High School	9-12	268	93 E. Main St.
St. Paul Elementary	PreK-8	515	93 E. Main St.
St. Mary Elementary	PreK-8	187	77 State St.

In addition to the recent improvements described earlier in this section, Norwalk City Schools have also expanded the Main Street School to alleviate potential overcrowding in the fifth and sixth grades, with the addition of five new classrooms. Additionally, Norwalk High School was designed with the capability to easily add new classroom sections at the end of two existing hallways.

Recommendations:

1. Maintaining a strong public school system and a strong parochial school system is in the best interest of the City of Norwalk. Adequate facilities are essential for both the public and parochial systems. School systems project slow growth in enrollment, within the capacity of their facilities, for the foreseeable future, after current expansion projects at St. Paul and the Main Street School are completed. Thus, no specific expansion projects are proposed here. Periodic analysis of capacity in light of projected enrollment should be carried out, however, with planning for responsive expansion as necessary.
2. Encourage the attraction of a satellite location of an area college or university to Norwalk, either in a facility of their own or a shared facility within Norwalk. As one option, effort should be expended to utilize existing facilities, such as the Norwalk High School, as a satellite location for existing colleges and universities. Should demand warrant it, a new extension could be constructed onto the high school to accommodate a “lifelong learning center” that would be utilized by a combination of adult education providers, including colleges and universities, community colleges, and other educational institutions. With sufficient demand, an economic analysis could determine whether rents paid by these institutions could finance long-term construction debt and operating costs for a new lifelong learning center. If this is not feasible, coordinated and increased use can be made of the existing facilities at the high school. Options should be considered and the selected alternative implemented within five years (2012).
3. The local district in conjunction with local government should provide facilities to make basic literacy programs available to the City’s undereducated and Hispanic populations to

help them become productive workers and participants in the community. While these activities could be provided along with “lifelong learning” activities at the high school, literacy and ESOL programming may be better attended in a less institutional setting. Such a facility should be sought and developed for use within five years (2012).

5. *Norwalk Public Library*

The Norwalk Public Library contains over 62,000 books, 4,400 audio items, nearly 50,000 video items, and 182 periodical subscriptions in its facility on West Main Street. The library has given an extended lease to Hill’s Interiors, which occupies the adjacent building on West Main Street. That lease extends until 2010. The Library Board intends to expand the library into the Hill’s Interiors building, but will need to go to the voters to complete renovations of the current 11,000 square foot facility at 46 West Main Street and the Hills Building at 38 West Main Street.



Norwalk Public Library

The library offers a range of materials and programming for children and adults, with special events, Internet training, and several computers available for patrons to conduct research.

Recommendations:

1. Support the planning process being undertaken by the Library Board and leadership to expand into the Hills building. Provide assistance in this planning effort as appropriate, including support for public funding of the improvements. Timing should follow a schedule to be set by the Library Board.
2. Additionally, the library should explore a partnership with Norwalk City Schools to set up a library branch co-located with the media center in Norwalk High School on Shady Lane Drive. Such an additional satellite location can increase accessibility and patronage of the library, and cooperative initiatives between the library and school can be explored.

6. *Medical Facilities*

Norwalk is fortunate to be home to a progressive and growing independent hospital, which was recently expanded with the construction of the Patient Pavilion (as shown in the picture at the beginning of this chapter). Fisher-Titus has been the catalyst for the development of a 49-acre medical campus housing a variety of medical specialists, as well as other amenities such as a kidney dialysis center. The hospital also owns and operates the Carriage House, located within the



View of Medical Park on Fisher-Titus campus

hospital campus and providing assisted living facilities, and the Norwalk Memorial Home, a nursing home that is attached to the hospital.

More than 100 area physicians representing twenty specialties are members of FTMC's medical staff. The hospital is licensed for 112 beds, and it offers such high tech diagnostic and treatment equipment as PET scanning and Magnetic Resonance Imaging. Other areas of service include family-centered birthing, physical rehabilitation, mammography, oncology, cardiac rehabilitation, and general medicine.

Fisher-Titus updates its strategic plan every two to three years. One trend impacting health care is a longer life expectancy, with a larger older population that will tax the healthcare system. The new Patient Pavilion was a result of past strategic planning, and its completion is followed by planning and implementation of new oncology and therapy facilities. The 2005 strategic plan includes the following goals:

- Expansion of specialty clinical services: cardiac, pulmonary, and vascular care.
- Improvement of clinical care models and standards, and investment in the improvement of the skills of those professionals who provide the care, including specialty nursing.
- Retention and recruitment of qualified individuals in a shrinking skilled labor market.
- Continuing the implementation of a clinical information system that provides for an electronic medical record.
- Improvement of customer relations and communications, including a focus on communicating performance measurement data, ensuring sufficient facility capacities, and improving customer service.

Recommendations:

1. There is a need in the community for an urgent care facility to address the health care needs of those individuals who do not have a primary care physician, or who experience a need for non-emergency medical attention when a physician is not available. Fisher-Titus Medical Center recognizes this, and such a care facility is incorporated within their Phase III improvement. This facility will address minor injuries and routine illnesses, as distinct from the services required of an emergency room. Patients are screened (triage) to ascertain a non-emergency condition.
2. The community should support the ongoing planning of their local hospital, which includes an ongoing upgrade of technology and diagnostic services and equipment, as well as the addition of new areas of specialization that allow patients to receive superior medical attention without having to travel.
3. Fisher-Titus has become Norwalk's largest employer and it generates significant traffic by patients and visitors. The City should continue to ensure that the local roadway system (particularly Benedict Avenue and Shady Lane), signage, and signalization are adequately handling the ensuing traffic flow.

7. Recreation Facilities

While parkland and park facilities are addressed in the Land Use chapter, this section addresses plans for Norwalk's buildings and structures related to recreation. The City Park and recreation department operates two community centers. The original center, on Monroe Street, provides limited facilities with a basketball court. Recently, it has housed an active dodge ball league. In the past, it has hosted dances for middle and high school aged teens.



Ernsthausen Recreation Complex

The “crown jewel” of recreation facilities is the Ernsthausen Community Center on Republic Street. This facility, which has been expanded once with the addition of a natatorium, houses a spa area, gymnasium, mini-gym, community meeting room, therapy and competition pools, outdoor pool, exercise room with assorted equipment, cardio room with an array of cardiovascular workout machines, stationary “spinning” bicycles, an indoor track, and racquetball courts. Numerous activities are offered over the course of a year at this building. The makeup of this center is in response to such trends as the aging of baby boomers and the resulting emphasis on long-term fitness.

A number of facilities also exist at the Memorial Lake reservoir as well, including a community meeting building and several shelters. The list and location of Norwalk's community, neighborhood, and pocket parks are presented in the land use chapter.

The Park and Recreation department has provided a list of plans for the expansion of the Ernsthausen Center to better serve Norwalk's residents. These plans include: doubling the size of the weight and cardio equipment area, a driving force for use and support of the entire center; addition of a water playground area (a “splash-ground”) for young families with toddlers; a third indoor pool, possibly a wave-action pool, to accommodate more school swimming programs and evening fitness or therapy-related classes; a teen center that could accommodate such activities as laser-tag, video or computer simulated games, and food/beverage concessions; facilities for senior activities and intergenerational activities involving seniors, including a lounge area with card tables, sofas, and a library (and working cooperatively with Senior Enrichment Services); expanding the gymnasium with multi-purpose space, allowing for more “open gym” availability and capacity to provide space for basketball, badminton, volleyball, and indoor soccer courts; a viewing area over the natatorium; and such possible additions as a birthday party room adjacent to the pools, more spacious family changing rooms, a food court, climbing wall, and additional locker rooms.

Plans for Memorial Lake Park include completion of the paved walking trail that will completely encircle one reservoir, and construction of an amphitheater to host musical and other events and presentations.

Recommendations:

1. As noted elsewhere in this Comprehensive Plan, provision must be made for recreation facilities to expand with the growth of the community and its population. To this end, developers of residential subdivisions should be required to set aside areas for recreation or make financial provision for acquisition and development of parks within walking distance of emerging residential areas. Plans must also be established to ensure the long-term maintenance of those facilities.
2. Also discussed elsewhere in this document, the Park Board and Recreation department should be responsive to emerging trends in needs for significant segments of the community, subject, of course, to budgetary constraints. Three specific areas include:
 - The construction of additional soccer fields to accommodate the growing demand and to centralize the city's soccer facilities.
 - Partnering with the local skateboard association to construct a safe and attractive community skate park.
 - Expanding the capacity of the City to accommodate the growing demand for adult softball. Existing diamonds are fully scheduled and another field or two would help alleviate the overcrowded conditions, particularly at Baines Park.
3. Create a master plan with prioritized needs for the expansion of the Ernsthausem Recreation Center. Components of the plan should be implemented when the need can be demonstrated. The plan should address the weight and cardio fitness facilities and the expansion of the aquatic center. The plan must also include provisions for the long-term maintenance of the facility.
4. Partner with the County's Senior Enrichment Services to provide expanded senior services at the Ernsthausem Center. These expanded services could include meeting areas and lounge and cooking facilities. Locating a senior center at the recreation center would allow seniors to take full advantage of the health and recreation facilities already available.

Capital Improvements Planning

The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to report on the consensus of opinion regarding Norwalk's preferred future and the general goals that frame that vision, and to chart the recommendations and steps necessary to achieve that vision. The plan, however, will remain only a vision until the necessary resources are identified and earmarked to fund the recommended projects. Resources, of course, are limited, and it is necessary to prioritize projects and stagger their implementation over time in order to achieve the maximum benefit to the community.

It is recommended that the City initiate citywide capital improvements planning. Many individual departments within the City already prioritize, budget, and schedule major capital improvements projects, but there does not appear to be a "big picture" where all such projects are viewed as a whole.

The basic function of a capital improvements plan (CIP) is to provide a formal mechanism for decision making, a link to long range planning as documented within the Comprehensive Plan, a financial management tool, and a reporting document.

As a financial management tool, the CIP can prioritize current and future needs to fit within the anticipated level of financial resources, considering the operating and maintenance costs that will be incurred along with the construction or replacement of infrastructure. A CIP can also communicate to citizens the City's capital priorities and plans, as well as expected sources of funding for projects.

In terms of planning, a CIP can ensure that the projects that are selected are the ones that best serve the needs of a majority of citizens. Further, during the CIP process, it is important to coordinate the community's needs with its ability to pay.

A City-wide CIP will improve inter- and intra-governmental cooperation and communication. Opportunities may exist to schedule projects from different departments in a coordinated manner to ensure an effective use of resources, to reduce duplication of programs between departments and units of government, and to share in joint efforts that could reduce the costs to all residents. The multi-year focus of the CIP process allows for scheduling of phases of projects that can be coordinated to ensure the projects are finished on time. Finally, when capital projects are prioritized and scheduled to fit within expected funding, the planning will reduce the occurrence of dramatic tax increases or user fees to fund capital projects.

Suggested steps in the formalized capital improvements planning process include the following:

1. Establish the administrative structure and identify all participating departments and individuals, as well as a central coordinating office or individual.
2. Establish the policy framework for the CIP (such as a desired level of service).
3. Formulate evaluation criteria to determine capital spending levels and to guide capital project selection. Criteria to evaluate projects should be clearly defined and agreed upon before the selection of capital projects begins. Criteria may include fiscal impact, health and safety effects, community economic effects, and environmental and social effects.
4. Prepare a capital needs assessment, taking into account the maintenance of existing infrastructure as well as the construction of new infrastructure. It is helpful to develop an inventory of assets, including the age, condition, maintenance history and replacement cost of the asset. Also, it is important to identify future needs by reviewing and forecasting demographic information, land use patterns, and other relevant information.
5. Determine the status of previously approved projects and identify new projects.

6. Assess the financial capacity of the City to undertake new capital projects. Look at past, present, and future trends in revenue generation, debt levels and ratios, changing regulations, and shifting demographics, to determine the amount of funds available from existing revenue sources to pay for capital projects.
7. Evaluate funding options. It is important that the City look at all possible financing options.
8. Compile, evaluate and rank project requests and undertake financial programming. This is where project requests are evaluated and prioritized, and projects are ranked. Once the ranking is completed, funding sources are identified and the year the project will be undertaken will be determined.
9. Adopt a capital program and a capital budget.
10. Implement and monitor the capital budget and projects.
11. Evaluate the CIP process.

In general, the CIP process will help City officials in making correct and optimal long term decisions that will benefit the community as a whole, from the perspective of finances as well as service delivery and quality of life.

Other Recommendations:

1. In response to input at community forums and focus groups regarding the potential provision of public restrooms in the central business district, the existing public restrooms at the Huron County Courthouse should be utilized rather than constructing new facilities downtown.
2. Municipal and County government should partner to ensure that landfill facilities, specifically the existing transfer station at the former Huron County landfill, are available in the foreseeable future to support business expansion and retention.
3. Maintain a cooperative attitude with County government to maintain a continued presence in Norwalk, specifically in the downtown area.