

2025-2035

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Preserving
our
heritage.

Planning
for
growth.

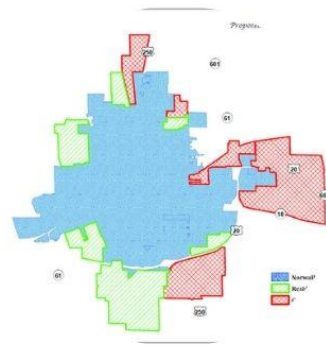


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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

2025-2035

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Preserving our heritage. Planning for growth.

The City of Norwalk is thriving. Our high levels of community pride and civic engagement, paired with the stable financial position of the City, made 2024 the ideal time to undergo a comprehensive planning process.

A robust, year long-process led to the vision you see here. a vision for growth with integrity, in line with Norwalk's identity as safe and family friendly, while positioned for growth. The extensive public input throughout this process gives the administration complete faith that we can execute the goals of this plan.

David W. Light

BUILDING ON OUR ASSETS



AMENITIES



UPTOWN NORWALK



LOCAL HEALTHCARE



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



LOCATION



SUMMIT MOTORSPORTS PARK

PUBLIC INPUT | FOR THE PUBLIC'S PLAN



FOCUS GROUPS
13



SURVEY RESPONSES
858



EXPERT INTERVIEWS
15



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12

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

SMALL COMMUNITY, SAFETY, LOCATION BETWEEN TOLEDO & CLEVELAND, HOSPITAL, DOWNTOWN, LOVE OUR BUSINESSES & LOCAL OWNERSHIP, CONSTRUCTION LEADERSHIP

Weaknesses

RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE, HOUSING, NO LAKE/COMPARED TO SANDUSKY, PROPERTIES OUT OF CONTROL, HARD TO START A BUSINESS, LAND FOR DEVELOPMENT, CLOSED ATTITUDES

Opportunities

MARKETING & PROMOTION - TARGET BUSINESSES, YOUNG PEOPLE, BROADBAND & WIFI, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF GROWTH IN OHIO, TAKE ADVANTAGE OF COST OF LIVING HOUSING, PRESERVATION, RECYCLING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Threats

RETAINING AND ATTRACTING YOUNG PEOPLE & WORKFORCE AGED RESIDENTS, I.REVENUE, DRUG USE, BUSINESS MERGERS

5 Goals:

- Setting standards and processes that drive quality
- Highest and best use of assets
- Planning for growth
- Building and maintaining Norwalk's brand
- Strong fiscal management and planning

VISION

The Norwalk area is a community that is committed to preserving its rich heritage and fulfilling quality of life while fostering planned growth.

MISSION

Our community will create a safe, family friendly environment in which we will preserve our natural resources and our strong neighborhoods, while promoting business growth, intergenerational opportunities, and proactive responses to future challenges, both locally and in a global community

In the 2025-2035 Comprehensive plan, analytical & anecdotal data are provided to view these 5 goals through 6 lenses. Building on that background information, over 140 strategies and tactics are provided to guide the City, residents, and partners over the next 10 years. Read the full plan at norwalkoh.com.

DREAM BIG NORWALK

GOALS IN ACTION



Building
Attractive
Gateways



Embracing
Uptown
Anchors



Facilitating
Infill
Development

MAYOR'S FORWARD

November 1, 2024

Dear Citizens:

As the Mayor of Norwalk, I am proud to present Norwalk's Updated Comprehensive Master Plan. The Plan examines the issues most likely to influence the City's development over the next ten years. This planning document will guide the City's decision-making in a wide range of areas as we grow. It is a valuable document that identifies our needs and defines our future all while maintaining our rich culture.

Over 700 community members helped create the original plan in 2006 which laid a strong foundation for City growth and development. In 2008 and 2010, the "Legacy Committees" met to review, monitor and evaluate the extent to which the plan's recommendations were being followed and provided progress reports on how the city was meeting its goals and objectives. In 2023 the process to update the original plan began. A group of residents, business owners and stakeholders came together once again to update the plan. As a result, this document does not represent only one person's vision, but that of the entire community. This undertaking is a testament to the hard work and dedication of so many community members.

We now must commit to following the plan to ensure that our vision for Norwalk reflects the aspirations of all its citizens and the vision of Norwalk that our community chose.

Together, we can build a vibrant and prosperous community for generations to come. Thank you for your commitment!

Sincerely,



David W. Light
Mayor

VISION & MISSION

VISION

The Norwalk area is a community that is committed to preserving its rich heritage and fulfilling quality of life while fostering planned growth.

MISSION

Our community will create a safe, family friendly environment in which we will preserve our natural resources and our strong neighborhoods, while promoting business growth, intergenerational opportunities, and proactive responses to future challenges, both locally and in a global community.

BACKGROUND

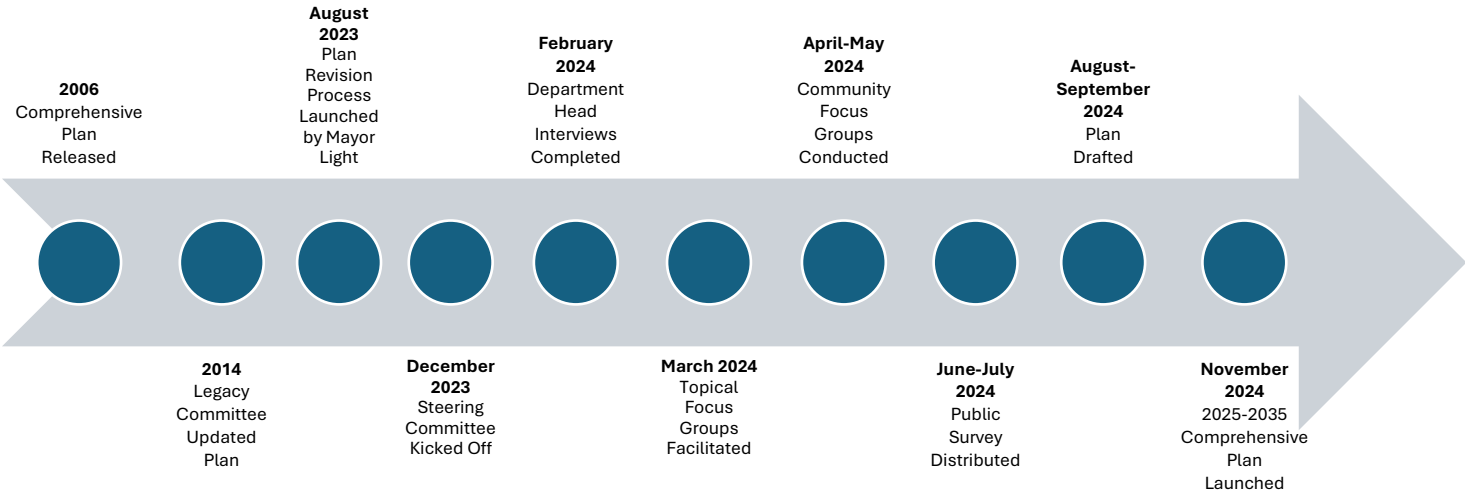
THE PLANNING PROCESS

The last comprehensive plan for the City of Norwalk was completed in 2006. During that time, success in achieving goals and the continued relevance of each goal was reviewed by a Legacy Committee. The last formal review by the Legacy Committee was completed in 2014.

In Fall of 2023, Mayor Dave Light determined that subsequent development, changing priorities, and new directions throughout the community warranted a more complete revision of the plan.

Under Mayor Light’s leadership, a core team of individuals consisting of Mayor David Light, Administrative Assistant Lisa McCoy King, Huron County Growth Partnership Executive Director Sarah Ross and Economic Development Coordinator Kayla Cross, former Mayor Sue Lesch, retired community planner Ben Kenny, and Norwalk Recreation Director Ian Berry began meeting to plan the process.

A steering committee was created to provide oversight and informed input throughout the process. The committee members were carefully selected to provide a variety of perspectives and areas of expertise with representatives from the public, private and philanthropic sectors.



STEERING COMMITTEE

The Mayor, planning team, and residents of Norwalk are indebted to each Steering Committee member, who provided his or her unique outlook and drew on their specific knowledge.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS & CONTRIBUTORS		
Aaron Osborn	Jake Cannon	Pat Schwan
Aaron Smith	Jay Ewell	Patty Arlin-Smith
Alex Lendrum	Jeff Hipp	Ralph Seward
Ben Kenny	Kayla Cross	Robb Smithson
Brad Cooley	Kevin Rasnick	Sam Blodgett
Carlos Vasquez	Kristen Cardone	Sam Wilhelm
Carol Wheeler	Laurie Schmul	Sarah Ross
Chip Battles	Lenora Minor	Scott Endsley
Chris Bleile	Lisa Hiler	Scott Mercer
Danny Grine	Lisa Reer	Skip Wilde
Dave Light	Lisa King	Steve Gfell
Deb Lucal	Lynden Ramsey	Steve Beal
Denny Doughty	Mark Smith	Steve Euton
Derek Newell	Mitch Loughton	Sue Lesch
Dina Lukasko	Morgan Tucker	Tanya Morrow
Erin Cannon	Nick Katsaros	Zach Bleile
Frank Van Dresser Jr.	Norb Smith	Zach Jones
Ian Berry	Pat Spettel Jr.	

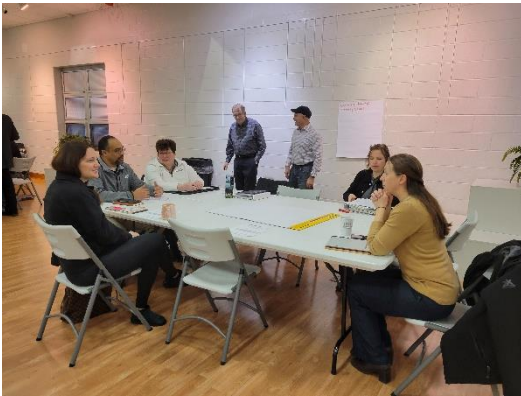


PLAN INPUTS

In a series of monthly meetings between December 2023 and May 2024, the steering committee conducted several exercises and tasks to shape the plan. Key tasks included a visioning exercise, a guided SWOT analysis of the city, a presentation from Eric Wobser, former City Manager for the City of Sandusky, and the formation of six focus groups, which became the lenses through which the plan and its strategies and recommendations are viewed.

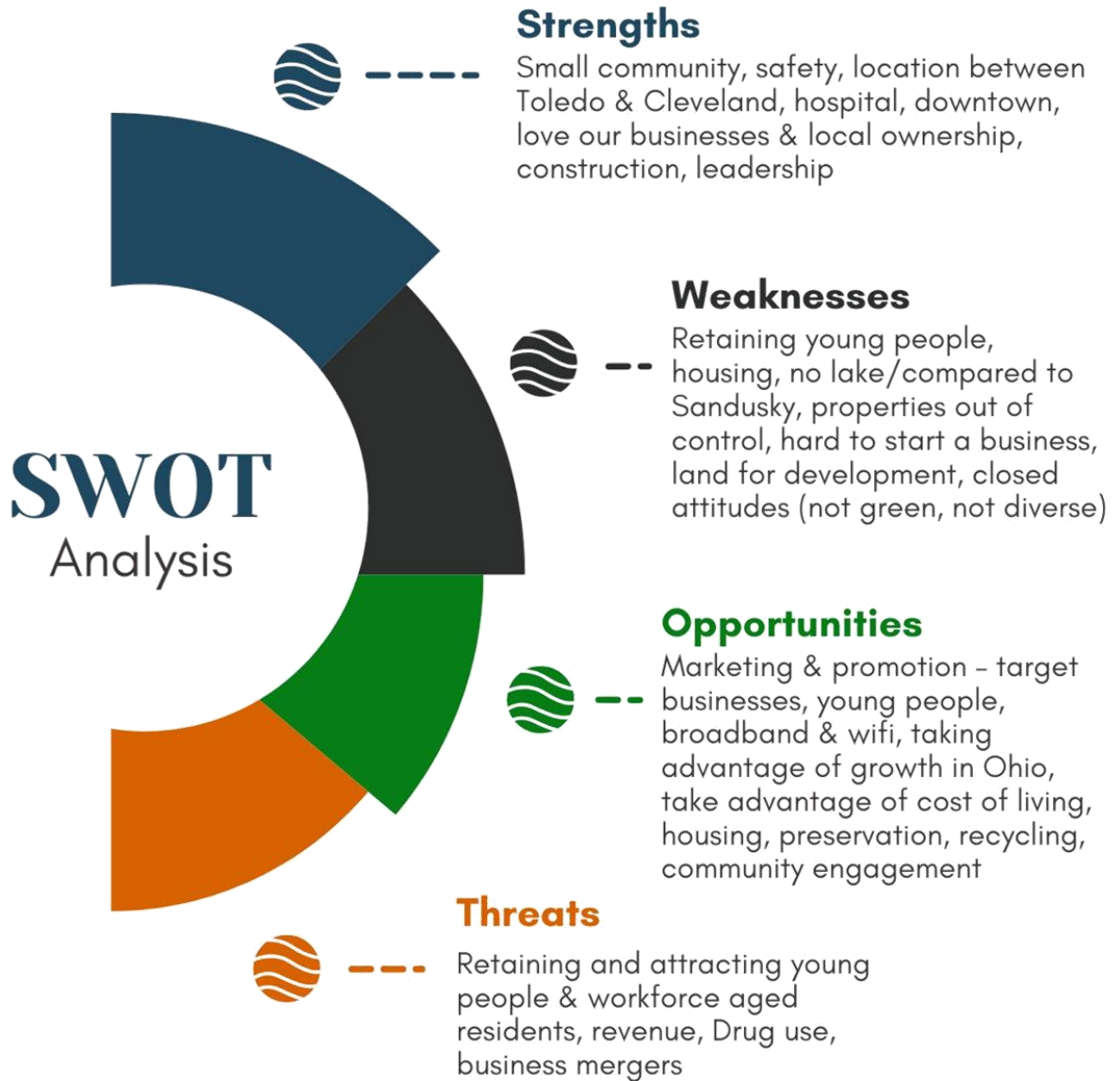
The six lenses through which the plan is presented are:

- Land Use
- Housing
- Natural Resources, Transportation, Utilities, and Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Community Character, Quality of Life, and Downtown Revitalization
- Community Facilities and Community Services



SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT Analysis completed by Steering Committee Input, March 2024:



PUBLIC INPUT

The plan was further informed by key community leaders, underrepresented voices, critical stakeholders, and subject matter experts. This was accomplished through the following series of meetings and focus groups.

Focus Groups

- Norwalk High School Students
- Norwalk St. Paul Students
- Norwalk City School District Leadership, organized by Superintendent Brad Cooley
- Fisher Titus Health System Leadership, organized by President and CEO Brent Burkey, MD
- Leaders within Norwalk's growing Hispanic community, Francisco Carrillo and Jose Savala
- Represented the underrepresented: Lenora Minor, Director of Huron County Department of Job and Family Services; Jessica Hunter, Director of Huron Metro Housing; and Carol Wheeler, Director of Norwalk Area United Fund

Key Informant Interviews

- City of Norwalk department heads and other key staff, including:
 - Police Chief Scott Dahlgren and Assistant Chief Michael Biller;
 - Fire Chief Dan Strayer;
 - Finance Director Sandi Weltlin;
 - Public Works Director Aaron Osborn and Zoning/Planning Director Mitch Loughton;
 - Water Treatment Plant Superintendent David Ackerman; Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent Brett Duncan;
 - Parks and Recreation Superintendent Lynden Ramsey and Recreation Director Ian Berry; and
 - Sanitation Director Nick Shullick.
- Norwalk Catholic Schools President Martin Linder

Special Interest Group Meetings

- Kristen Cardone, Director of the Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- A meeting with Stacey Church, Director of the Norwalk Public Library.
- A discussion with Dina Lukasko, Board President of the Norwalk Arts Center.

PUBLIC SURVEY

During the summer of 2024, a public opinion survey was distributed as part of the planning process. Development and analysis was conducted by Ian Berry. The survey was accessible through an internet link which was publicized in local media multiple times, and in paper form, with copies available at several public locations throughout the city.

858 survey responses were collected.

Respondents were generally positive about most aspects of the City of Norwalk, citing it as a good place to raise children, work, and retire. In order, respondents found safety, Veteran's Memorial Lake Park (the Reservoir), Fisher-Titus Medical Center to be Norwalk's most important assets. Of the City's services, parks, fire services, and ease of walking in-town are seen as important with overwhelmingly positive ratings. When asked, respondents felt that Norwalk should strive to maintain an emphasis on quality, create business retention and attraction incentives, and ensure adequate utilities for future development within City limits. They also felt that Norwalk should invest in improving and preserving the existing housing stock, provide incentives for developers and homeowners to construct affordable housing, and preserve the historic character of the City.

The complete results of the survey can be found at norwalkoh.com.

Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Norwalk:								
Answer Choices	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know	Total	Weighted Average
Your neighborhood as a place to live	324	335	89	7	4	72	831.0	4.28
Norwalk as a place to raise children	232	427	111	16	8	49	843.0	4.08
Norwalk as a place to work	168	384	201	29	18	46	846.0	3.82
Norwalk as a place to retire	175	332	186	46	15	93	847.0	3.8
Overall quality of life in Norwalk	160	501	156	11	4	15	847.0	3.96

n 850
N 858

THE CITY OF NORWALK
2024 Comprehensive Plan Survey

The results of this survey will be available on the City of Norwalk website in the Fall of 2024 at norwalkoh.com. Should you have questions regarding the survey please call 330-966-0706.

Please select the response that most closely represents your opinion for each question. Your responses are confidential and will be reported in group form only.

1 Which of the following applies to you? (Select all that apply)

2 What is your age?

3 How old are you?

7 The City of Norwalk should strive to _____

8 The City of Norwalk should invest in _____

9 From questions 7 and 8, which do you think is the most important?

10 What three words would you use to describe Norwalk?

11 What is one thing you want to see Norwalk accomplish in the next 10 years?

DATA & DEMOGRAPHICS

The following statistical review of Norwalk is intended to help paint a picture of the city, and to highlight some of its more distinctive characteristics. In many cases, the city statistics are compared with county and state data to present its relative position. Unless indicated otherwise, data is from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 five-year Community Survey, the most recent year for which data are available.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Norwalk's population level has been stable. Its population in 2022 was 17,041, a slight increase from 17,008 residents in 2010. Of its 17,041 residents, 4,066 (23.9%) were under age 18 (US: 22.1%; OH 22.0%) Some 12,451 (73.1%) were over 21 and 3,149 (18.5%) were 65 or over (16.5% US, 17.6% OH). Norwalk's median age (38.7) fell between the US (38.5) and Ohio (39.6) medians.

Norwalk is predominantly white (90.7%), above the US (65.9%) and OH (78.8%) proportions. There were 228 African Americans and 280 of All Other Races; another 1,081 were counted as of two or more races. More impactful than race is ethnicity: There were 1,441 Hispanic or Latino residents, comprising 8.5% of total population, of which 1,126 were of Mexican origin.

Norwalk has become slightly more diverse over the past decade, with a notably growing Hispanic population. In 2010, the Caucasian population was 94.8% of the total; 102 (0.6%) were African American, 367 All Other Races, and 288 were two or more races. The Hispanic/Latino population was 925 (5.4%).

The composition of Norwalk's households is also diverse. There were 7,267 households in 2022. Of this total, 2,617 (36.0%) were married-couple households, 1,726 (23.8%) had a male householder and no partner, and 2,439 (33.6%) had a female householder and no partner. Households with one or more people under 18 years old totaled 2,093 (28.8%), and 2,407 (33.1%) had one or more 65 years or over.

Norwalk's households are relatively small, but families are larger. The average household size was 2.30 (US 2.57; Ohio 2.40). The average family size (omitting single and unrelated people) was 3.20 (US 3.18; Ohio: 3.03).

There have been changes in household composition over time. In 2010, there were 6,985 households, of which 4,677 (70%) were family households, 3,396 (49%) were married-couple families, 2,350 households (34%) had people under 18, and 1,861 (27%) had persons 65 or older. The average household size in 2010 was 2.38 (US: 2.59) and the average family size was 2.85 (US: 3.17).

School enrollment has largely declined over the years: In 2022, there were 3,756 age 3 and older enrolled in school (4,176 in 2010), 304 in preschool (315 in 2010), 148 in kindergarten (223), 1,806 in grades 1-8 (1,847), 959 in high school (also 959), and 539, or 14.4% of those in school, in college or grad school (down from 832 or 19.9%; 27.3% US, 25.3% OH).

Norwalk's post-high school educational attainment is not as extensive as in the state or nation. Of Norwalk's population age 25 and over, 10,654 (90.5%) are high school graduates or higher (89% US; 91% OH). Residents with a bachelor's degree or higher total 1,982 (16.8%; 34.3% US, 30.4% OH), and another 924 (7.9%; 8.7% US, 8.8% US) with associate's degrees. Those with graduate degrees total 748 in Norwalk (6.4%; 13.4% US, 11.7% OH). In 2010, 85.8% were high school graduates or higher, 14.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher, 7.5% had an associate's degree, 9.2% had a bachelor's degree, and 5.1% had a graduate or professional degree.

Mobility in Norwalk is stable, with few moving long distances to live there. Of the 16,920 residents aged 1 and over, 14,948 (or 88.3%) lived in the same house as the previous year. Of the 1,972 moving from a different house, 1,135 moved within Huron County, 712 from another county in Ohio, and 116 from a different state. Nine had moved to Norwalk from abroad. Of the total population of 17,041, 16,529 were born in the US, (97.0%; 85% US; 94% OH). There were 13,838 (81.2%) people born in Ohio, 2,691 in a different state, 147 in US possessions, and 365 were foreign born, of whom 21 were from Europe and 344 from Latin America. Top five ancestries (aside from "American") for Norwalk residents were German (5,462), Irish (2,148), English (2,022), Italian (812), and French (553).

HOUSING

The 2022 American Community Survey counted 8,082 total housing units, of which 7,267 (or 89.9%) were occupied. There were 815 vacant housing units, with a homeowner vacancy rate of 0.5% and a rental vacancy of 15.2%.

Over half, 59.0%, of Norwalk's units are single unit detached, a smaller percentage than for the state or nation. (61.4% US, 69.0% OH), totaling 4,765 units. The Census 5-year average counted 571 duplex units, 763 in 3 or 4 units, 255 in 10 to 19 units, 359 in 20 or more units, and 359 mobile homes.

Norwalk has an aged housing stock, as indicated by the number of units built in each decade: 1939 or earlier, 1,547; 1940s, 517; 1950s, 1,128; 1960s, 839; 1970s, 987; 1980s 834; 1990s, 982; 2000s, 1,118; 2010s, 130; 2020 or later, at least 53; local officials have counted 17 housing starts in 2017, 0 in 2019, 8 in 2020, 19 in 2121, and 9 in 2022 (including two duplexes).

Nearly two-thirds of Norwalk's housing stock is owner-occupied, only slightly less than state or national averages (64.0% or 4,649 units, down from 65.7% but only 4,587 units in 2010; US had 64.8, OH 66.8), with 36.0% renter-occupied (2,618 units, 2,398 in 2010). Average 2022 household size in owner-occupied units was 2.50, and in rental units was 1.94. This has decreased from 2.53 and 2.11, respectively, in 2010.

A small component of residents indicated a lack of personal transportation. Of the 7,267 occupied units, 542 or 7.5% reported no vehicle available. Two-thirds of units (4,820 units or 66.3%) used utility gas for heating, and almost one-third (2,295 units or 31.6%) used electricity for house heating.

Housing in Norwalk is affordable. The 2022 Survey found the median value of owner-occupied units to be \$153,100, considerably lower than the US (\$281,900) and Ohio (\$183,300) medians. Among the renter-occupied units, median rent was \$781 (US \$1,268, OH \$945).

A review of rental housing complexes in Norwalk by the regional organization, Firelands Forward, found 13 market rate projects with 793 units, two tax credit projects with 100 units, three tax credit and government subsidy projects with 144 units, and 28 government subsidized projects with 356.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

In 2022, Norwalk had a local labor force of 8,297. The vast majority, 82%, drove alone to work, while another 9% carpooled and 5.4% (424) worked from home. This was up from 1.7% (130) in 2010, in part as an effect of changing workforce practices driven by COVID restrictions. The 2022 Census counted only one person using public transportation. Local sources indicate that the number is likely larger.

OCCUPATIONS IN 2022

OCCUPATION	# NORWALK	% NORWALK	% OHIO	% US
Civilian Employed Population Age 16+	7,906	100	100	100
Management, Business, Science, Arts	2,371	30	39	41
Service occupations	1,091	13.8	16.3	16.8
Sales and Office occupations	1,595	20.2	20.4	20.5
Natural Resources, Construction, Maint.	908	11.5	7.5	8.7
Production, Transportation, Material Moving	1,941	24.6	16.8	13.1

This table reveals Norwalk as a relatively “blue-collar” community, with a higher percentage of workers in production, transportation, and material moving than in the state or nation. Conversely, the percentage of management, business, science, and arts employees is smaller in Norwalk. Note that these tables are by place of residence, meaning they count workplaces of Norwalk residents, regardless of the location of the employer.

WORKFORCE BY SECTOR

INDUSTRY	# NORWALK	% NORWALK	% OHIO	% U.S.
Total employees	7,906	100	100	100
Ag, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining	85	1.1	0.9	1.6
Construction	813	10.3	5.8	6.9
Manufacturing	1,554	19.7	15	10
Wholesale Trade	197	2.5	2.4	2.4
Retail Trade	977	12.4	11.2	11
Transportation, warehousing, utilities	505	6.4	5.7	5.8
Information	103	1.3	1.4	1.9
Finance, Insurance, real estate, rental	223	2.8	6.5	6.7
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, waste management	585	7.4	9.9	12.1
Education, health care, social services	1,636	20.7	24.1	23.3
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations, food service	704	8.9	8.7	9
Other services except public admin.	139	1.8	4.3	4.7
Public administration	385	4.9	3.9	4.7

Norwalk has a notably higher percentage of construction and manufacturing workers than Ohio or the U.S. as a whole. The local proportion of workers is lower in some of the more office-oriented sectors, such as finance, insurance, real estate; professional, scientific, and management; and education, health care, and social services. The top five sectors of Norwalk residents, based on employment numbers, are: education, health care, and

social services (Fisher Titus Medical Center and Norwalk Public Schools are two top employers); manufacturing; retail trade; construction (Norwalk has a long history being home to construction firms); and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food service (based in part on the large number of restaurants and food providers).

Top posted occupations in Norwalk in late 2023 were healthcare practitioners and technical workers; transportation and material moving; sales and related; management; production; healthcare support; food preparation and serving; office and administrative support; and installation, maintenance, and repair. Further, analysis of late 2023 data by Lightcast Inc. found the top occupations in Norwalk by employment concentration (where the percentage of employees in these occupations exceeded their percentage nationally) were: production; farming, fishing, and forestry, construction and extraction, transportation and material moving, and installation, maintenance, and repair.

There have been notable changes in employment by sector over time. Of some note, total employed residents in Norwalk were 8,001 in 2010, of which 1,778 (1,554 in 2022) were in manufacturing, 671 (813 in 2022) in construction, 933 (977) in retail trade, 1,437 (1,636) in educational services, health care, and social assistance, and 1,015 (704) were in arts, entertainment, accommodations, and food services.

The U.S. Census found 8,842 workers employed within Norwalk's 44857 zip code, with more workers, 10,716, residing within that zip code regardless of where they worked. Thus, the area is a net exporter of labor. A different source, the 2020 five-year Community Survey, found that 58.8 percent of residents in the workforce worked within Huron County, while 43.0 percent worked in Ohio but in another county, and a small portion (0.9 percent) worked outside Ohio. 40.2 percent worked within Norwalk. The mean travel time to work for Norwalk residents was 23.5 minutes, indicating that **many residents are commuting to jobs in nearby communities.**

INCOME AND POVERTY

Median household income in Norwalk reported in the 2022 Community Survey was \$58,311, less than the Ohio (\$66,990) and U.S. (\$75,159) medians. Mean (average) household income was \$67,619 in Norwalk, \$90,958 in Ohio, and \$105,833 nationally. Finally, per capita income (income per person) was \$29,252 in Norwalk, \$37,729 in Ohio, and \$41,261 nationally. Thus, **Norwalk lags behind the state and nation by all three measures**, although Norwalk's median household income has risen from \$44,526 in 2010 (up 31%), mean income from \$57,786 (up 17%), and per capita from \$23,974 (up 22%).

Although household income overall is low in Norwalk, poverty rates are not notably high. The 2022 poverty rate was 7.8 percent among Norwalk's families, lower than the state (9.3%) and national (8.8%) rates. Among families with related children under 18, the rate rises to 13.0%, for married couples, it lowers to just 0.9%, and among female-headed households with no spouse present, it is 16.3%. Norwalk's individual poverty rate in 2022 was 13.0%, in line with the state (13.3%) and national (12.5%) rates. Among 18- to 64-year-olds, the rate is 11.9; for seniors aged 65 and over, it rises to 15.1%. In 2010, the family poverty rate was 12.5%, and the individual poverty rate was 14.0%. Notably, the rate for families with a single female householder with no spouse present, the poverty rate was a significantly high 42.4%. This rate, while still relatively high, has lowered considerably.

The City of Norwalk is considered a “distressed community” according to the Economic Innovation Group's Distressed Communities Index, where Norwalk scored a 57.9 out of 100 based on high school diploma attainment, poverty rate, adults not working, housing vacancy rate, median household income, change in employment, and change in establishments. While Norwalk scored in the “comfortable” range at 36.7 in 2000, the most recent score is just two points away from “at risk”. Nearly half (45.3%) of residents are Low-Moderate Income according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Further, 28 percent of students qualify by income for state free and reduced lunch benefits. Indeed, **there is a degree of distress being experienced by many of Norwalk's residents.**

2025-2035

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

6 LENSES

Land
Use

Housing

Natural
Resources,
Transportation,
Utilities,
Infrastructure

Economic
Development

Community
Character, Quality
of Life, and
Downtown
Norwalk

Community
Facilities,
Community
Services

LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan offers a semi-complete accounting of the evolution of land use patterns in Norwalk through that year. That document still holds relevant, valuable information which is not replicated here (i.e. description of principles of New Urbanism and of orderly growth).

Here is a summary of Norwalk's evolving patterns by land use before and beyond 2006, by type:

Residential uses radiated out from the oldest housing enclosing the central business district, along the Main Street, Whittlesey/Benedict, Norwood, and Milan Avenue corridors, then filling in along grid patterns as the city grew.

- More recent housing developments have been established farther from the urban center to the west (Sycamore Hills), south (Executive Estates, Fairwood), east (Deerfield, Woodridge, Shaker Village, Applewood Village), and north (Bennett Pointe, Hunter's Glen, Redwood Norwalk, Midtown Manor, and Westwind Drive area).
- Individual new homes have sprung up throughout the surrounding townships, and the Eagle Creek development abutting the golf course of the same name has been a growing subdivision just south of the city in Bronson Township.

These developments have met the needs for housing of varying design and price points, from manufactured housing to duplex condominiums and upscale homes.



Commercial development has largely landed along the Milan Avenue corridor from League Street north to Norwalk's northern border.

Commercial enterprises have filled in along this **U.S. 250 corridor**, resulting in a mix of franchise restaurants, varied retail outlets, anchor properties such as Wal-Mart, car dealerships (with a recent investment in new facilities by Ken Ganley Motors for their Dodge and Hyundai dealerships), hotels, offices, and entertainment options, including a multi-screen movie theater.

Retail establishments exist as **free-standing stores** and as tenants in **shopping plazas**. Retail uses also dot the U.S. 250 corridor as it travels from the north toward downtown, with grocery stores, pharmacies, a hardware store, and other businesses closer in.

The **south Route 250 corridor** has historically been less active regarding retail business, but with the proximity of Fisher-Titus Medical Center, is home to several new medical offices, and with newer offices and a daycare facility along the south side of Executive Drive.

Commercial businesses also appear along **the east Route 18 and Route 20 corridors**, with limited new development aside from Dollar General at the urban edge on Route 20.

Despite the development of these corridors, **Norwalk's downtown has remained as an attractive and viable location for a mix of uses**, including retail, office, county and municipal government (both City Hall and the County Courthouse, and related offices, are located downtown), restaurants, and public and quasi-public uses including the Norwalk Public Library, Post Office, and Firelands Museum, Ohio's oldest museum.



Manufacturing and distribution facilities are concentrated in several areas throughout the city, including:

- Northwest and North Pleasant Streets, Newton Street, along Jefferson Street, and in the vicinity of Ontario and Schauss Avenues. These are Norwalk's older continuously operating manufacturing areas and are essentially landlocked with limited opportunity for growth.
- More recent accommodations for new industry were made farther from the center of the community, including the Firelands Industrial Park along Republic Street north of Gallup Avenue, and
- Within proximity of the U.S. 20 bypass on Norwalk's eastern edge, along the business US 20 and State Route 18 corridors, and farther east in the Commerce Fields Industrial Park. Land in this eastern region presents the **greatest opportunity at present for future industrial development.**

Government and Institutional Uses: City and county government are firmly embedded in Norwalk's downtown:

- A new fire station was built a few blocks north of the Main/Whittlesey intersection.
- Norwalk Police operate from a justice center a short distance from City Hall, which is one block from the center of town.
- The County Courthouse and County Office Building, which houses several county offices, are positioned along the first block of East Main Street.
- Other entities within the central business district include the Norwalk Public Library, Firelands Museum and Laning Research Center, and Post Office.

Additional county services and offices are concentrated along Shady Lane, on Norwalk's southern edge. Featured entities along the Shady Lane stretch include:

- Fisher-Titus Medical Center,
- Huron County Department of Job and Family Services, the Huron County Sheriff and county jail, the county License Bureau and title office, the Dog Warden, and
- Norwalk's new senior center (set to open in late 2024).
- Farther west along Shady Lane is Norwalk High School; elementary and middle schools are scattered among Norwalk's neighborhoods. There are plans to consolidate these grade levels in one building, and also along Shady Lane. St. Paul Catholic School, with provisions for kindergarten through grade 12, is located on their campus on the northwest corner of the East Main/Milan Avenue intersection.

PAST TRENDS AND PRESENT PATTERNS

Norwalk is a compact community, with signs of “sprawl” along the north Route 250 corridor and housing subdivisions appearing along the urban edge, but with all portions of the community accessible from anywhere in the city within a few minutes' drive.

Despite the impression that the city is largely built out to its corporate borders, the City Zoning Officer has identified sixty-one lots within the city with varying degrees of potential for growth. One hurdle exists in the fact that 27 of the 61 properties are owned by people who live a significant distance from their properties. There is also a roster of larger properties that could be developed as larger subdivisions or apartment complexes. One area of recent focus is the land adjacent to Norwalk Custom Order Furniture on the eastern edge along SR 18. A tract of property has been purchased to relocate a local highway construction contractor, and a shovel-ready, 84-acre site remains at that location with the intent to market and develop it for an industrial or distribution enterprise.

Other than that site on Route 18, Norwalk's former industrial sites have been largely built out. The Firelands Industrial Park can accommodate some businesses seeking smaller sites or available existing buildings, but the last large site was developed with the arrival of automotive supplier Autoneum (formerly Borgers). Another employer experiencing growth over time has been New Horizons Baking Company, located on Woodlawn Avenue on the Akron Road corridor. Aside from the newer industrial parks. Historically, Norwalk's industrial properties have been dispersed throughout the city.



Commercial activity has largely dotted the remaining sites along the 250-north corridor, with commercial additions including Chipotle and Dunkin'. There have been changes in tenants within the several commercial plazas in this area, and some vacancies have occurred. Potential for further growth on the north side has been enhanced through the completion of Emerald Parkway, connecting Milan Avenue to Theater Drive and the UEC Theater 8, and opening more commercial frontage. Emerald Drive also extends eastward with a small cul-de-sac, and the city was able to install a traffic light at the Milan/Emerald intersection.

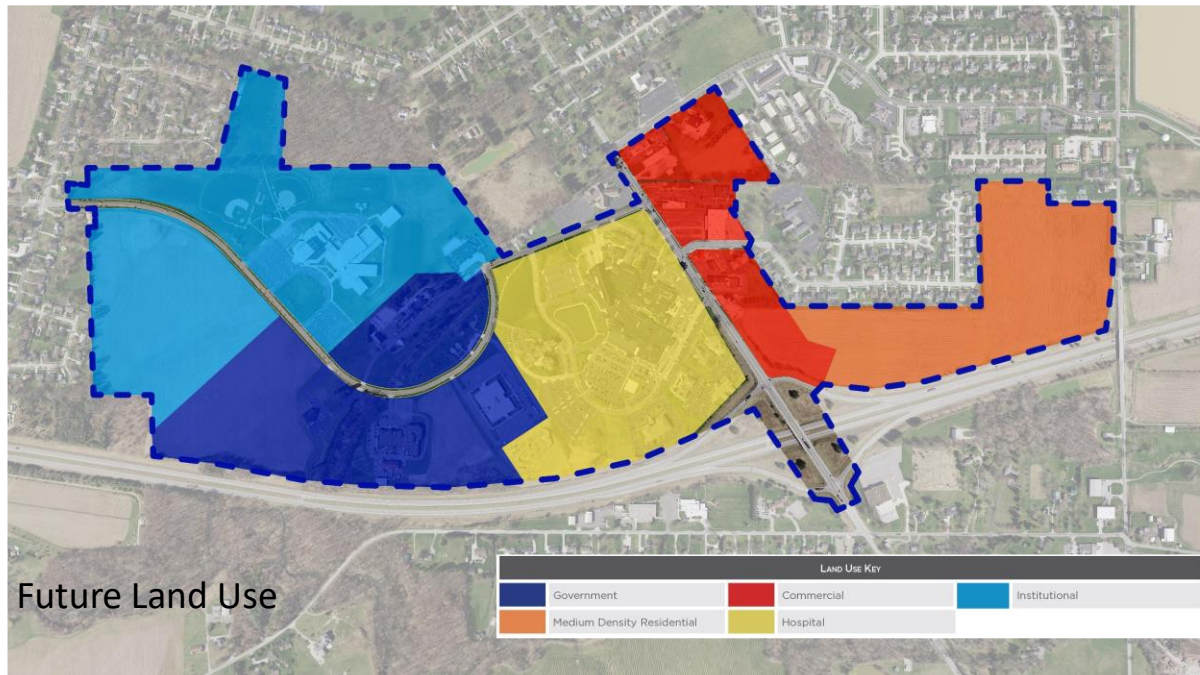
New activity along the Benedict corridor on Norwalk's south side has included reinvestment in existing fast-food franchises, construction of a new facility for Vacationland Credit Union, and current construction on a new Mickey Mart gas station, convenience store, and Dunkin' outlet.



This South Benedict corridor was the subject of a preliminary study and plan in 2022, in an effort to bolster its significance as a mixed-use location for commercial, office and residential uses, as well as improving its aesthetic appearance as the southern gateway to Norwalk, and enhancing its ease of connectivity for bikers, pedestrians, and automotive traffic.

The renewed emphasis on this district, ranging from the US 20 bypass to Executive Drive, where exclusively residential uses begin, aligns with the growing importance and activity along Shady Lane. Activities along this important connector road, reaching from Benedict Avenue to Norwood Avenue, have been augmented considerably since the location of Norwalk High School and a number of county offices and agencies, most recently including the county license bureau. The Fisher-Titus Medical Center campus has expanded in this area, adding medical services and specialties that have drawn increased traffic, as well as attracting medical partners, such as Family Health Services, located in a renovated former supermarket, and offering a range of medical and mental health service opportunities to those with

financial hardships. The Fisher-Titus campus could accommodate, to a limited extent, future growth and new ventures as well.



Huron County is constructing a new Senior Center, operated by Huron County Senior Enrichment Services, adjacent to and behind the license bureau, and the new center is expected to increase activity and traffic to that facility. Further, the Norwalk School District hopes to construct a centralized school for preschool through eighth grade students, bringing the entire student body of Norwalk's school district to the Shady Lane area. Further increasing traffic in the south Norwalk area will be a childcare center envisioned by the County, within reasonably close proximity to the public-school facilities, which will occupy space in a former CLI building on South Norwalk Road.

The Norwalk Central Business District continues to maintain close to full occupancy. Storefronts have indeed turned over in a number of cases, with new and successful uses including new independent merchants, a storefront church, and new offices. There has also been some growth in businesses locating along the edges of the downtown, most recently with the construction of an ice cream/coffee outlet. New investment in existing “anchor” entities promise to bring new attention to the downtown, including new ownership of the Berry's on Main restaurant and Sheri's Coffee House, an ongoing restoration project at the Norwalk Theater, and expansion plans at both the Norwalk Public Library and Firelands Historical Society.

Residential developments that have occurred over the past few decades were mentioned in the Introduction section. More recent housing development has taken the form of single family or duplex units on individual lots. Several duplex buildings were constructed most recently along Executive Drive on available land in the Luther Oaks section. Perhaps of greatest importance, two developers are now planning and constructing a significant number of new housing units on vacant land, which is relatively centrally located, east of Milan Avenue and north of Williams Avenue, straddling Republic Street north as far as Gallup Avenue. East of Republic, plans call for eighty units in forty duplex buildings, and to the west, platting and then construction will produce an as-yet undecided number of new units, possibly in a triplex configuration. Collectively, these two developments will help partially fulfill the need for affordable housing for working families that has impaired employers' abilities to attract new workforce talent to the community. It is hoped that an immediate and significant response to this new supply of housing can lead to additional, market-driven housing development in Norwalk.

Aside from the Norwalk Fire Station, which was a main goal promoted in the 2006 comprehensive plan, land use development patterns in the government sector have focused on reinvesting in existing properties, with no major new land uses.

A trail extending from the Memorial Lake Park north to the Ernsthausen Recreation Center, partially aligned along a former railroad right-of-way, connects a number of recreational, employment, and other entities, including the Reservoir Park and Ernsthausen Center, but also Contractor's Park, a relatively new sports and recreation facility built along Akron Road west of Old State Road as a public-private partnership to accommodate needs for additional sports venues.

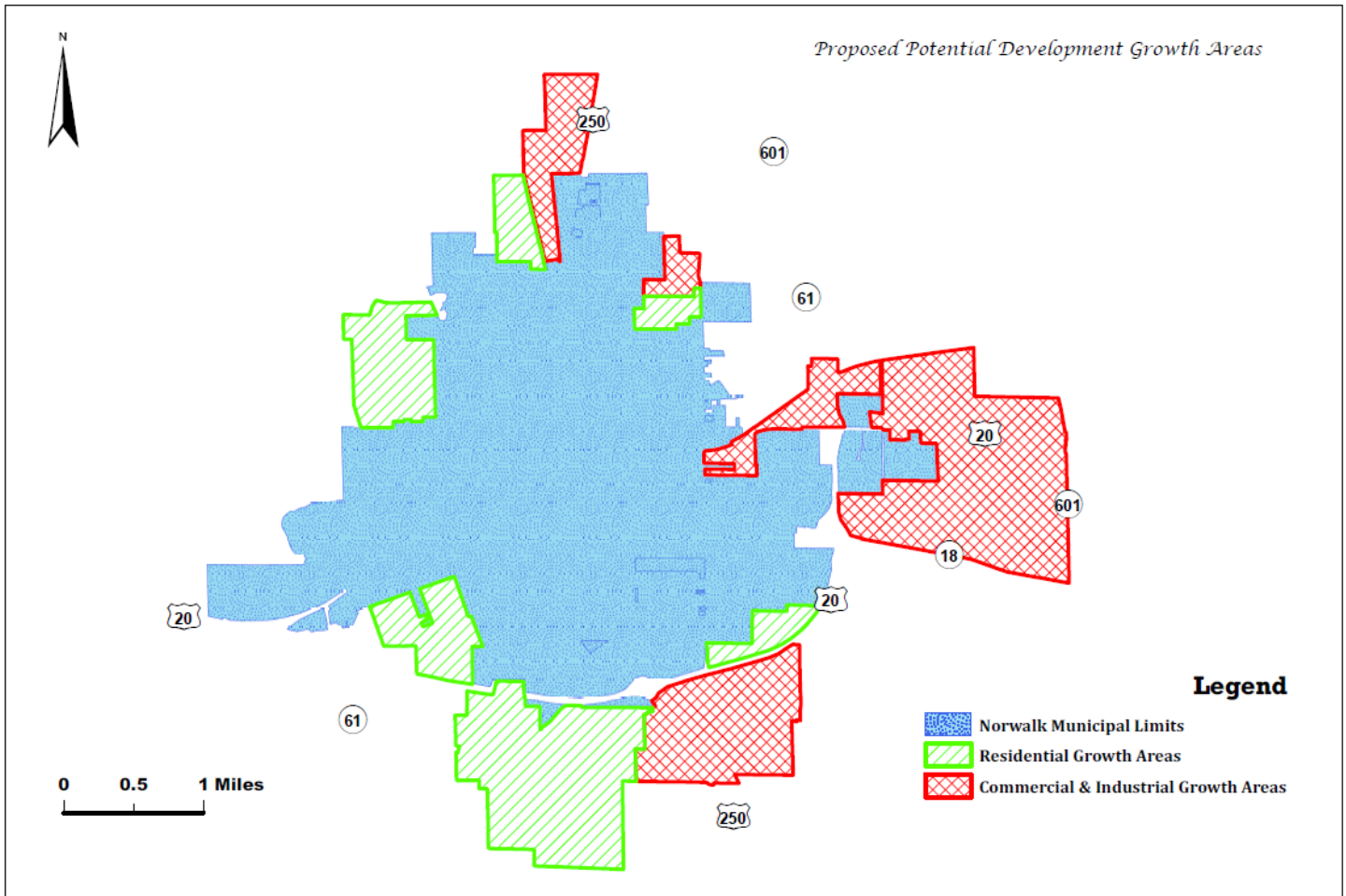
Current land use patterns are represented relatively accurately by Norwalk's zoning map. Current land uses largely conform to the zoning district boundaries, and thus commercial districts, for example, delineate areas of concentration of commercial activity.

Because of the landlocked, built-out nature of the City, and with limited opportunity to annex adjacent properties of significant size, it is important to consider the highest and best uses of existing vacant property within the City.

There are in fact a number of parcels of considerable size. A sampling of these properties includes property north of Gallup (some 52 acres); 85 acres east of the county fairgrounds; 25 acres east of Bennett Pointe and north of Redwood Village; west of North West Street across from the Hen House facility; 50 acres behind Rural King on the west side; and six acres at the end of Valley Park Drive.

THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN AND PROJECTED FUTURE LAND USE

The map below provides a conceptual view of future land uses. This map is not intended to address specific properties as much as generalized areas within the city. The map echoes many of the projected development patterns depicted in the 2006 plan.



The conceptual future land use map's purpose is not to highlight specific properties, but to outline likely and preferred areas where Norwalk could grow. These areas are selected based on such factors as surrounding land uses, availability of existing utility infrastructure and energy supply, and transportation access. Further, planned development should serve to control any undesirable growth moving southward from Lake Erie. In general, commercial and manufacturing growth is targeted to the north, west (along routes US 20, and SR 18, east as far as SR 601), and south (largely along the US 250 corridor). Residential growth is targeted to areas largely adjacent to compatible residential developments, to the west and south of the existing city limits.

HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

Norwalk suffers from a housing shortage. A lack of suitable, affordable housing for prospective employees has been cited by several sources as a major bottleneck for employers to be able to add to their workforce. Prospective employees, ranging from production workers to physicians and executives, frequently cannot meet their demand for housing in Norwalk.

A housing needs assessment commissioned by Firelands Forward, a regional development organization, and performed by Bowen National Research, found that the Firelands region (Huron, Ottawa, and Erie Counties), of which Norwalk is a part, had an “overall housing gap of 10,428 units for rental and for-sale product at a variety of affordability levels.” This gap included 4,166 rental units and 6,262 for-sale units. Huron County's share of the gap included 1,699 rental and 2,094 for-sale units.

Overall Rental Housing Gaps		
Area	Housing Gap (Units)	Share of Region's Gap
Erie County	1,637	39.3%
Huron County	1,699	40.8%
Ottawa County	830	19.9%
Firelands Region	4,166	100.0%

Overall For-Sale Housing Gaps		
Area	Housing Gap (Units)	Share of Region's Gap
Erie County	2,734	43.7%
Huron County	2,094	33.4%
Ottawa County	1,434	22.9%
Firelands Region	6,262	100.0%

According to the assessment, the largest gaps are primarily for rental units targeting households with up to 80 percent of area median household income, which generally have rents under \$1,700. However, there is also a pronounced gap for higher-end rentals. The researchers note: “Without the notable addition of new rental product, the area will not meet the housing needs of its current residents or the growing and changing housing needs of the market.”

In the for-sale sector, it is noted that one of the greatest gaps is for housing priced between \$197,000 and \$283,000, which generally serves households earning between 81 and 100 percent of area median household income. Also noted were “notable gaps for housing that is affordable to lower income households, including first-time homebuyers, as well as for high-end product priced well over \$300,000.” Further, “the limited inventory of for-sale product limits opportunities for renters seeking to enter the homebuyer market, homebuyers coming from outside the region, or seniors seeking to downsize.” In conclusion, “the region will miss out on various growth opportunities and be unable to meet the needs of its current residents without additional housing.”

The gap in housing has been mentioned in several settings during the formation of this plan. Both Fisher Titus hospital officials and Norwalk Public Schools administrators cited the lack of suitable housing as a reason that many starting teachers, nurses, and new physicians have had to choose another community in which to live, and sometimes to work.

A SWOT analysis undertaken by the Steering Committee listed “housing” and “code enforcement - dilapidated properties, properties out of control” as weaknesses, and “housing, CRA”, and “code enforcement” as opportunities. A recognized factor, posed as a threat, was the need to retain and attract young people and workforce aged residents, through housing development, among other means.

PAST TRENDS AND PRESENT PATTERNS

Norwalk has an aged housing stock. Nineteen percent of its 8,082 housing units (1,547 units) were built before 1940. Another 2,484 units were built between 1940 and 1969. Thus, fully half of Norwalk's housing stock was built before 1970, and is over fifty years old.

Norwalk's median housing value for owner-occupied units, at \$153,100 (per 2022 Community Survey), is notably lower than the state (\$183,300) and national (\$281,900) medians. Of Norwalk's 8,082 units, 2,213 (or 27.4%), valued at under \$150,000, may be considered the city's most affordable. Another 2,025 are valued between \$150,000 and \$299,999. Only 411 (or 5 percent) are valued at \$300,000 or more.



Indeed, housing starts have been slow, with many recent years witnessing less than twenty new housing starts. However, since the 2006 plan, a number of initiatives have occurred, with the development of new lots in established subdivisions such as Whitefield and the subdivision located west of Old State Road on Norwalk's north side, the construction and occupancy of duplex apartments in the Luther Oaks development south of Executive Drive, and the development of condominiums and homes along Amber Way near Westwind Drive.

There are new initiatives to address the housing gap, with larger-scale projects creating relatively affordable housing. This includes the current

construction of forty duplex buildings (eighty units total) located west of Republic St, and north of Williams Avenue. Similarly, plans are being developed for new housing, possibly in triplexes, immediately west of the aforementioned project, located just west of the Republic. Both projects represent larger-scale infill development, producing relatively affordable homes in a central location within close proximity of shopping centers and major employers.

Despite these improvements and upcoming additions to the City's housing stock, there is a severe shortage of affordable housing. The wait list for housing voucher assistance through the Huron Metropolitan Housing office is nearing 800 households, countywide, of which 152 are from Norwalk alone. Coupled with this list is a severe lack of eligible and available housing units in which Metro Housing assistance can be used. Despite currently helping some 427 households under contract currently, the agency has funding for 612, but the inability to match households with eligible participating homes will result in returning a large number of unused vouchers to HUD, with a likely outcome being a smaller allocation of vouchers in the future. Thus, a resounding need for assistance in affording housing costs will be met with a reduction in the assistance available.

Coupled with the creation of new housing options is a need to preserve and restore the existing housing stock. This overarching need to improve what already exists can be enhanced through the use of “carrots” (taking advantage of resources that may be available for housing rehabilitation and repairs, for first-time homebuyers, tax relief, and other resources and tools) and “sticks” (tightening municipal housing and property maintenance codes and applying strict but uniform enforcement).

NATURAL RESOURCES, TRANSPORTATION, UTILITIES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is intended to bring the community up to date on the four topics mentioned in the title.

Natural Resources: The 2006 plan covered several relevant topics including:

- **Maintenance & Protection**
 - Enforcement of regulations and codes to protect and maintain natural resources, thus reflecting a community that is a good steward of its environment
 - Promotion and implementation of voluntary efforts to clean up blighted, littered, or polluted areas
 - A continuous program of tree replacement
 - Reduction of impervious surface areas (to facilitate absorption of rainwater)
 - Sustainable storm water management
 - Ensure sufficient raw water supply to support Norwalk, now and into the future
- **Promotion**
 - Marketing of public access to natural resources, including waterways, wooded areas, and Norwalk's reservoir
 - Recognition of the reservoir and its park and amenities as a major community asset
 - Inclusion and incorporation of Norwalk Creek as an asset in the community
- **Development**
 - Continue to develop natural parks and facilities, including trails
 - The preservation and addition of new green space
 - Beautification projects (including gateways)
 - The use of flexibility in site design and lot size to reduce costs and open connections to existing natural areas

Transportation: The 2006 plan addressed the need to provide efficient transportation flow through the city by;

- Continuing active transportation plan improvements
- Enforcing traffic rules systematically to ease congestion
- Projecting future traffic generators and needs for new thoroughfares
- Providing for vehicular and pedestrian safety
- Maintaining a public transit system which is responsive to public needs
- Continuing to focus on the railroad route through Norwalk to ensure it is maximizing its usefulness in delivering assets to local businesses

Public transportation remains the same as it was in 2006, a transit provider offering residents the ability to reserve rides at least 24-48 hours in advance, one local taxi service, and specialized services that offer rides to medical appointments, rehab and related facilities, and services for specific populations like Veterans and cancer patients. Additionally, Enrichment Centers of Huron County provide curb to curb transportation for senior citizens, with a 24-hour reservation requirement, and fares by donation.

Utilities: The 2006 plan largely addressed the need to bring needed energy infrastructure to targeted sites for growth and future energy consumption needs. The City was tasked with monitoring utility services to ensure that all areas and sectors of the community are provided with needed technology, power, and water, and working with energy utilities to increase their capacity to meet needs. There was also a hope that telecommunications and Internet technology would remain “state of the art” in accessibility, capacity, and speed.

Infrastructure: In this case, “infrastructure” includes water treatment and distribution, sanitary sewer collection and treatment, storm sewer collection, and streets and sidewalks. Targeted goals and points of emphasis included planning and constructing new infrastructure to guide and entice desired growth, but only when such improvements were affordable; monitoring the needs of residents, business, and institutions to ensure their needs are being met; and following a schedule of maintenance and replacement for water and sewer systems, streets, sidewalks, and other elements of infrastructure.

PAST TRENDS AND PRESENT PATTERNS

Natural Resources: So far, Norwalk has obtained its raw water supply from Memorial Lake reservoir and a second source, in partner with the Northern Ohio Regional Water Authority, that serves the eastern section of the city and serves as a backup when needed. The city is in preliminary planning to seek a third source that could provide water from the north, to reach the largest portion of the city. However, the current supply is considered sufficient for Norwalk's present and foreseeable needs.

Removal of non-viable trees on public tree lawns, and replacement with new trees within budgetary constraints, is overseen by Norwalk's Tree Board and carried out by general services employees.

Infrastructure: Norwalk's water and wastewater infrastructure is in very good condition, with sufficient capacity to serve present and near-future needs. Norwalk's water treatment plant, with a design capacity of 4.0 million gallons daily (MGD), processes an average of 1.5 MGD, with a peak demand of 2.0 MGD. There is thus an excess capacity to handle future growth, including the needs of future employers. Improvements are being planned to address recent water issues, including algae buildup in the reservoir. While dredging the reservoir has been discussed, a better solution under consideration would be to utilize existing upstream ponds to the east of the reservoir with vegetation placed where it can act as a filter.

Norwalk's wastewater treatment plant has a design capacity of 15 MGD, but an average daily flow of 2.25 MGD and a peak flow of 8.0 MGD. Recent improvements have been made to the “back end” of the wastewater treatment plant, including a sludge drying unit, new electric connections, and a cloth filter media system replacing a sand filter. Chlorine gas has been replaced with an ultraviolet system. The sludge press for bio solids allows the city to land apply waste as a liquid or cake, or safely send it to a landfill if needed. This project's cost totaled \$13 million.

Norwalk's daily flow has been reduced through a long-term plan to eliminate combined sewer overflows (CSO's). The City has eliminated combined sanitary and storm sewers through a series of costly but effective projects that have created new trunk sanitary sewer lines. In 2016, the city addressed Combined Sewer Overflow #3 with the Pleasant Street Lift Station Project. The project included a new lift station, storage basin, and sanitary sewer line upgrades. The last project in this series, which is responsive to EPA mandates, is under construction during the development of this plan. This 48-inch, 9,000-foot-long sanitary interceptor sewer extends from Bouscay

Avenue northward to the wastewater treatment plant. Through this project, water formerly going to Norwalk Creek will now be captured.

Upkeep to and replacement of water distribution and wastewater lines is an ongoing need, and water and wastewater projects must be prioritized to fit within budgetary constraints. Most recently, Oak and Maple Street water mains have been replaced. Waterlines have been replaced on Benedict Avenue, Parsons, and Grove Street as well. Future line replacement projects will concentrate on older, smaller, four-inch diameter lines. The city has also worked to line sanitary sewers throughout the community. A significant, continuing issue is the increased use of PFAs, a diverse group of thousands of chemicals, used in hundreds of products, which can enter the food supply, and which break down very slowly and have several negative health effects. New regulations governing the reduction of PFAs in the water supply are anticipated.

Other issues in Norwalk (but not unique to this community) include the continued existence of lead and copper pipes, and water loss through leaks throughout the system, and which accounts for some 13 percent of the total water taken from the Norwalk system (The EPA becomes concerned when water loss reaches 15 percent). Overall, Norwalk has had a good record with very few NPDES permit violations, and no non-compliance issues.

In the realm of wastewater collection, the city hopes to concentrate on improvements to its twelve lift stations, including moving the lift stations at Gallup Avenue and Southwest Street from in-ground to above ground.

Energy Utilities: Infrastructure has not significantly changed for the city's energy distribution services, which remain Columbia Gas of Ohio for natural gas distribution, and Ohio Edison for electricity distribution. Ohio Edison has made upgrading improvements to their substations at Adams Street and Northwest Street to improve power capacity and meet local needs. Columbia Gas has undertaken an aggressive program of gas distribution line replacement throughout the city. Electric and gas line extensions may become necessary when new development occurs in the City's potential growth areas, depending on the needs of industrial prospects.

Telecommunications infrastructure has been improved and new choices have become available within the city as Frontier Communications and Omni Fiber have installed fiber optic cable systems throughout Norwalk's neighborhoods. Residents and businesses can now take advantage of competitive Internet speeds at lower prices.

Transportation: Public transportation in Norwalk is now provided by North Central Area Transit (NCAT), an agency that serves Crawford, Seneca, and Huron Counties. Transit services continue to be provided anywhere in the county on a curb-to-curb, demand service. Reservations must be made in advance and a scheduled vehicle will arrive within 30 minutes of the reservation. Fares range from \$2 - \$5 within the county and up to \$25 to go to adjacent counties. Fares are reduced 50% for elderly and qualified disabled riders. Hours of operation are 7 am to 6 pm Monday through Friday, and 7:30 am to 3:30 pm for out-of-county rides. As mentioned, Senior Enrichment

Services of Huron County also operates a senior transit program.

NCAT is working to put into service two dedicated vehicles to respond to transportation needs in real time, rather than

requiring early notice. These vehicles will operate much like Uber does in the private sector, utilizing software to coordinate individual needs for travel.



Some recent and planned infrastructure improvements include:

- A total rebuilding of West Main Street within phases covering Cortland Street, Newton Street and Pleasant Street. The project will ultimately result in new traffic signals at Main and Northwest, Main and Pleasant, and new turn lanes for the Main and Northwest intersection
- A traffic light has been installed and improvements (such as turning lanes) have been made at the intersection of Milan Avenue and Emerald Parkway, one of the busiest areas of the city
- A crosswalk with warning lights has been installed at the Benedict/Norwood intersection
- A new multi-use path extending from the reservoir to the Ernsthausen Center on Republic Street, accommodating bicyclists and pedestrians

- Repavement of two major arterials, US Route 250 and Ohio Route 61 within the city limits
- ADA compliant curbs and intersections are to be installed along US Route 250 and Ohio Route 61 throughout the city, at a cost estimated at \$1.8 million, with assistance from an ODOT grant



- The city will continue to conduct an annual street improvement plan, selecting the streets or segments most in need of upgrading and new pavement, within the annual budget

Several recommendations have emerged from the planning input process. Some of these priorities for planned projects by city staff have been underscored, and additional needs have been identified, during the work of the steering committee and focus group.

Recommendations from the group have included;

- Seeking an alternative water supply
- Increasing energy availability for current and future businesses, including ample electricity to charge future demand by electric vehicles, including potential fleets of trucks
- Major arterial streets should be rebuilt to accommodate projected traffic, and some smaller streets should be earmarked for widening to more safely accommodate traffic

There has been interest from some interviewees in pursuing green infrastructure. One example would be to alter the city's zoning code to allow for small solar panel installations on ground level. There are no provisions for that now.

Administrators and staff from Fisher Titus Medical Center cited a need for full-service public transportation, to provide access for medical appointments and to allow patients to reach the medical facilities they need. They felt transportation to adjacent communities in other counties, not available now, would be helpful as well. One contributor lamented the presence of so many overhead wires in Norwalk and hoped many could be buried.

SUMMARY:

Natural resource, utility, & infrastructure capacities are sufficient for current and near-term needs, but are not planned for or resourced to accommodate future trends without intervention.

In general, the hospital indicated it could operate within current capacity in terms of infrastructure, but in assessing needs for future growth and operations, the capabilities may fall short. It was noted that the hospital had only one water supply and one power supply, and that redundancy would be helpful in times of crisis or a power outage. Some poor Internet connection and a decline in cell telephone service in some buildings were noted. Cell repeaters or a small tower on campus may be responsive. Also, to keep up with technology, a more robust, possible “dark fiber”, connection may be needed in the future.

Within the steering committee, some viewed Norwalk's infrastructure in general as a strength. However, some outside input provided us with areas to improve:

- A northern extension to tie into US Route 250 toward Milan was never constructed on the US 20 bypass
- The lack and limitations of public transportation
- Hopes for universal broadband and for a “Wi-Fi connected community”
- Need to consider extending Emerald Parkway westward to Plank Road

The economic development focus group considered parking, particularly in the downtown area, and agreed that attitudes around parking should evolve with the times. This group recommended improved signage and partnership with other private and governmental (County) parking lot owners, to support peak transient parking during certain hours, special events, and other times.

The focus group considered further needs, and identified the following as worthy of consideration: obtain the old substation across from the water treatment plant, dredge the reservoir, increase electric service capacity as recommended by need studies, consider traffic enforcement methods in the uptown district to improve safety, explore the potential for intermodal rail transportation, consider land swaps or acquisition to best serve aviation needs at the county airport, and consider transportation improvement projects at the 61/250 intersection downtown, traffic light installation at US 250 and South Norwalk Road, and improve a dedicated route using routes 301 and 18. Finally, consideration should be given to a public safety plan to address the possibility of a train derailment near the public water supply, where the Wheeling and Lake Erie line skirts the upper reservoir at Memorial Lake.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Economic development is associated with the creation and retention of jobs. This is indeed an important measure of the success of a community in achieving growth or stability. To a municipal government, however, the growth or stability of the tax base which provides the revenues upon which the local government operates is critical as well. Municipalities in Ohio largely rely upon income taxes, based mostly on payrolls generated within the City limits, for revenues with which to operate.

Thus, the creation and preservation of jobs within the city is of primary importance to the operation of the city government and all its functions.

It is always preferable to increase revenues by expanding the tax base, rather than raising tax rates for everyone.

For 2024 –

- General fund income tax receipts were projected at \$6.780,000, a four percent increase over actual 2023 receipts
- This revenue source funds most general fund expenditures, which are projected at \$9,694,280
- Other sources of general fund revenue include the County Local Government Fund, State Local Government Fund, and interest income
- Total municipal income taxes, which help fund capital improvements and other items, including a special allocation to fund the sanitation department, as well as the general fund, have increased over the past three years, from \$8,426,198 in 2021 to \$9,404,989 in 2022 and \$9,752,903 in 2023
- Some municipal functions also rely upon property taxes, thus there is a need to fund certain municipal functions, such as portions of the Park and Recreation program and City pension funds, through the city's real property tax base

The 2006 plan encouraged maintaining an environment to nurture, retain, and expand current businesses, including those in the central business district, and making information and resources available to businesses to facilitate growth. Other themes included diversifying the employment and tax base, favoring job growth that best matches the strengths and abilities of the local workforce, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, developing a proactive tourist outreach program, offering attractive and functional building sites in Norwalk that capture local revenues and lessen the leakage of local consumer expenditures to competing nearby markets.

Several goals of the 2006 plan still resonate today. Among those is:

- Ensuring that development plan review, property inspection, and permitting processes are clearly explained, efficient, and timely
- Boosting small and downtown business support
- Partnering with local banks and lenders, as well as local investors, to facilitate project and business development
- Partnering and collaborating closely with county government, townships, schools, and local institutions such as Fisher-Titus Medical Center
- Providing a broad education and public understanding of the need for the specific economic development strategies and tactics being practiced in Norwalk

PAST TRENDS AND PRESENT PATTERNS

The 2006 plan was followed by an economic development “innovation forum” with a focus on achieving long-term economic sustainability through five areas:

- Entrepreneurship and innovation
- Strong and affordable utilities
- Teaching to Grade 14 (associate’s degree level)
- A strengthened resource network
- Expanded transportation options

The forum further stressed four crucial elements:

- Businesses must be regularly informed of available economic development resources
- Retention, where most economic growth will originate, must always be the primary focus.
- Any incentives provided must incorporate two critical components: accountability and tangible benefits, with guidelines to ensure that pledged goals are reached
- A strong regional partnership should be constructed, specifically to glean regional benefits from nearby regional assets, such as the NASA Plum Brook runway, a project being pursued at the time of the forum

The regional partnership has been developed in a more general sense, incorporating active involvement with Team NEO, the State-supported regional development partnership for northeast Ohio, with the creation of a joint Erie/Huron County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and with participation in Firelands Forward, a multi-county, workforce-related organization whose mission is to “grow our region's economy by connecting a stable skilled and supported labor force to meaningful and sustaining employment.”

More recently, Norwalk's economic development organization, formerly known as the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation, has taken on county-wide responsibilities, assuming the goals and work program of the former Huron County Development Council, with a more robust work program, as well as additional staffing, budgeting, and a more inclusive name, the Huron County Growth Partnership (HCGP). The HCGP has also assumed management of the Huron County Chamber of Commerce and the local tourism bureau.

In 2023, prior to its county-wide service area, NEDC attained over \$2 million in incentives, helping to retain 586 jobs and create 26 new ones, and Norwalk was named a "Top 100 Micropolitan" in the U.S. for new and expanding facilities by Site Selection Magazine.

Among its many roles and functions, HCGP facilitates the Huron County Business Advisory Council with area school districts, serves on the Firelands Forward advisory board, facilitates the Firelands Manufacturing Alliance, houses a local office for the two- county (Huron and Erie) RISE Regional Incubator for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship, which held 172 one-on-one business advising sessions involving 122 unique entrepreneurs, and held workshops and events with 347 attendees.

In addition to playing critical roles in business development projects of all sizes, such as the relocation and expansion of Oglesby Construction to a new facility in the North Central Ohio Industrial Park on Norwalk's east side, the organization also plays a role in community development projects, working hand in hand with the city, in a long standing, seamless partnership.



Community leadership is mindful of the crucial role played by locally owned, successful enterprises that were started and nurtured in Norwalk. Examples of such success include Ploger Transportation (which grew from five to 100 employees in recent years), Maple City Rubber/Tuftex (undergoing an expansion), and New Horizons Baking Company, which, not being immune to macro trends of expansion and acquisition, has acquired three additional companies and continues to operate from administrative offices and an expanded manufacturing facility in Norwalk.

THIS PLAN AIMS TO EMBRACE THE FOLLOWING ATTITUDE TOWARD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Eliminate any self-imposed limitations to realize emerging development goals and opportunities. Reach beyond any lingering thoughts that “We are just Norwalk”. Learn and change from current successes and failures. Break down silos and seek beneficial collaborations and understand that it is beneficial for the city to communicate its support for private investments

In the “SWOT” analysis, several economic development-related factors were highlighted.

- Among community assets were:
 - Norwalk's central location, community involvement and “ownership” by citizens in the community, the central importance and image of the downtown business district, the large and diverse number of small to medium sized businesses in the community, hard-working people, good schools, and robust healthcare. Additional community assets for development that were mentioned included involvement and stewardship, with citizens and groups that are vested in Norwalk, Norwalk's larger companies and major employers, the large number of contractors in the area, financial means to capitalize projects, infrastructure, leadership, and success in retaining businesses.

- Noted disadvantages included:
 - a decline in manufacturing over the past fifteen years, the loss of residents' disposable income expenditures to the Sandusky/Erie County area, a shortage of land for development and industrial sites, and a lack of hotels and restaurants, a limited number of large industries, and needs to offer diversity in career fields to effectively attract people, to retain young talent, and to grow industry and good jobs.
- Participants also cited a need for technology growth and support for innovation. Many wishes for a more diverse retail and restaurant selection in town were expressed across all sources of input, including the high school and general population surveys.

The high school survey identified several retail businesses and restaurants that students desired in Norwalk. Other aspirational assets that were singled out in interviews or in the public survey included a venue for meetings and events, a hotel, “third places” for children, downtown destination points (including possibly a microbrewery), niche shops, more shopping and eating options, cultural opportunities, and non-chain restaurants.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER, QUALITY OF LIFE AND DOWNTOWN NORWALK

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers three different but related topics. First, “Quality of Life” refers to those features that can make living in a community more appealing and fulfilling. Second, the downtown area is a key component, blending shopping, office, and eating opportunities, but also providing public and private spaces for entertainment, arts, music, theater, and worship activities. There is some potential to add residential opportunities downtown as well, with the creation of upper-story apartments. Downtown is indeed the most mixed-use district in the city, and it is this mixture that can make it appealing and representative of the character, culture, and promise of the entire city. And third, “community character” is the sum of several subjective factors that make up the culture and “brand” that a community supports.

Economic success is typically measured by the number of employees, business starts and expansions, tax base, and other quantifiable variables. However, it is the subjective connection that residents make to their community that determines an area's sense of place and quality of life. That sense of attachment is what can transform a small city like Norwalk into a supportive, connected, growing community. And to the business prospect, site selection and business location decisions are often based, at least in part, upon these quality-of-life factors. Norwalk's “community character” is the sum of all the attributes that make it unique, establishing a lasting personal connection for its residents. Planners typically include among the components establishing community character such features as gateway entrances, high profile corridors, focal points, activity centers, landmarks, and public space. But many more features, businesses, entertainment options, parks and natural areas, and leisure activities contribute to the overall community character.

The 2006 comprehensive plan's goals concerning community character included preserving the history, cultural heritage, and traditional values and morals of the community; maintaining the character of a family-oriented, welcoming community; creating an atmosphere of openness to appropriate and positive change; continuing as a supportive community, addressing the unique needs of such groups as seniors, youth, the unemployed, and the disabled; being open to honest self-evaluation; and continuing to value well-maintained, attractive buildings, properties, neighborhoods, and public places. The plan reviewed the appearance of the community's major gateways and corridors. Focal points and activity centers included the U.S. 250 North corridor and its varied businesses, Norwalk's public and private

school facilities, the Ernsthausen Recreation Center, Norwalk's parks, the Fisher Titus Medical Center campus, major employers, and Summit Motorsports Park, which is often the local landmark best known to outsiders. Other landmarks include the Huron County Courthouse, the Norwalk Public Library, the West Main Street historical district, and now Suhr Park with its tribute to coach Paul Brown, and within a few years, the Norwalk Theater.

Since the 2006 plan, in addressing its goals, various entities, including the Firelands Historical Society, have continued to support historic preservation and an appreciation for Norwalk's historic properties. The City's website has been maintained as a source of information and news. Senior services have been maintained and will receive a boost in the coming months when the new Senior Center opens, offering expanded and enhanced facilities for new and continuing programming and services.

Quality of Life goals in 2006 included fostering a high quality of life and preserving Norwalk's small-town character through controlled growth, supporting a holistic, for the community that incorporates local government as well as nonprofit organizations schools, health care entities, arts organizations, and recreation providers. Additional goals included providing opportunities for all community members to contribute, supporting a diversity of retail and service businesses to broaden consumer choices, and ensuring that the future quality of life is tied to its rich history, values, work ethic, and rural background.

Since the 2006 plan, the arts have been elevated through the increased presence of Artists' Open Studio, the Norwalk Arts Center, and private entities such dance studios. Health care options have increased, the city has added to its network of paths and trails, and the community soccer complex has been completed and is in full use at Sofios Park, accessed from Old State Road.

The 2006 plan included a long list of goals pertaining to its downtown district, including promoting an environment to nurture and retain current businesses, ensuring that businesses are aware of any programs or incentives that could assist their business, providing a pro-development and cooperative atmosphere, and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship. The plan also advocated for a focus on developing businesses and services that capture local and external revenues, such as full-service restaurants, with hours, products, and services that match the needs and habits of the local market. Since the plan's completion, Main Street Norwalk has been discontinued as a locally staffed and funded entity, and downtown development activities are managed by the Huron County Growth Partnership, which houses the Huron County Chamber of Commerce. In the

absence of a formal umbrella organization, downtown Norwalk's stakeholders have collectively retained a vibrant mixture of destinations, including specialty shops, restaurants, offices, and institutions. Further, the municipal government of the City of Norwalk, through conservative and prudent fiscal controls in past years, is in a strong fiscal position to assist in undertaking projects that improve the quality of life and character of Norwalk, while meeting community needs.

PAST TRENDS AND PRESENT PATTERNS

Several key developments have occurred to positively impact the quality of life in Norwalk and reinforce its community character. New activity in the central business district has resulted from the programs of Artists Open Studio, emphasizing artwork from area residents with disabilities, and the Norwalk Arts Center, which is occupying a county-owned storefront to provide arts and drama classes and productions while simultaneously planning and fundraising for the renovation and eventual occupancy of the historic Norwalk Theater on Main Street. The Norwalk Public Library has brought programming and events to its facility on West Main Street and continues to plan for its expansion into an adjacent property. The Firelands Historical Society, located behind the library on Case Street, operates Ohio's oldest museum, and provides educational tours and public access to the museum and the exhibits of the nearby Laning Research Center. The Historical Society also has plans for expansion and construction of a new building to house part of its expanding collection.

Improvements to park and recreation facilities have been noted elsewhere, with one new feature impacting quality of life being a fully equipped amphitheater recently constructed in the Norwalk Reservoir Park. Norwalk's tradition of generosity has been enhanced in recent years by the philanthropic work undertaken by "100 Women Making a Difference", who contribute \$100 apiece on a quarterly basis (totaling \$40,000 annually) to selected local charities that directly help local residents. As a hub agency, the Norwalk Area United Fund continues to meet its annual giving goals, funding a variety of local charities and proven programs. Several locally based philanthropic foundations have also supported local nonprofits in fulfilling their mission. These include the Geotrac Foundation, the Ernsthausen Foundation, and the Huron County Community Foundation, among others. Other important, active local service agencies include (but are not limited to) the Norwalk Area Food Bank, Salvation Army, and Erie-Huron Community Action Commission.

Suhr Park has become a focal point in downtown Norwalk, and is the site of concerts, a public splash pad, public restrooms, and a new statue and tribute to “favorite son”, coach Paul Brown. As noted elsewhere, McGuan Park has become more popular, drawing users from beyond Norwalk's borders, with the installation of a distinctive “all ability” playground, as well as a pump track for bicyclists.



Improvements have been made to Norwalk's high school football stadium and track, and a new sports facility for softball and other activities (Norwalk Contactors Park) has been constructed on the east side of the city. Several events are held each year using the downtown area as a backdrop, including the re-established Norwalk Strawberry Festival. The Norwalk area is home to the Huron County Fair, an annual reminder of the city's agrarian roots and the continuing importance of agribusiness in the area. A number of new restaurants have appeared in Norwalk, ranging from franchise operations to locally owned enterprises. Among the latter, the downtown flagship restaurant, Berry's, has returned under new ownership. And Summit Motorsports Park has grown in stature as a prime venue for NHRA sanctioned drag racing events.

The steering committee and the surveyed public had much to say regarding quality of life, community character, and Norwalk's downtown. The following is a sample of the comments and other input received regarding these topics.

Norwalk's character is described by many as safe, family-friendly, and civic minded, with an emphasis on community involvement. The downtown area is viewed as a primary asset, and there is pride that the downtown and its occupant businesses are largely owned by citizens in the community. One respondent praised the “generations of people who live, work, and worship here who genuinely care about the city and invest in the city, creating an inviting, hometown atmosphere.” A related comment referred to “stewardship that is committed to advancement and investment.” That word, “investment”, was mentioned several times. A related comment praised the fact that “no matter the issue or problem, the community typically pulls together to solve it or improve upon what we already have.” The parks,

Recreation Center, and bike trail were frequently mentioned as assets, as were Norwalk's churches and faith community.

One theme running through the steering committee's discussions was a quest for quality. It was considered important by many to preserve the historically significant architecture of the downtown and the city's historic neighborhoods. In order to pursue this goal, participants felt that construction and property maintenance codes needed to be reviewed to ensure their effectiveness in meeting safety, health, and appearance standards. Additionally, those codes, once deemed appropriate, must be enforced rigorously, but fairly and evenly. There may need to be an educational component, as property owners are advised of the community's standards.

Another theme, which touches on character and quality of life, was the need to retain and attract youth and young adults. This is a universal rural challenge, and it has been singled out by a number of participants in the development of this update. The factors that are needed to attract this younger population include a supply of desirable and challenging jobs and careers that match the education, skills, and interests of the younger candidates; attractive housing which is affordable to households at the start of their careers; and physical amenities such as walking and biking trails that appeal to Millennials and subsequent generations. It is recognized that Norwalk's population is aging, a wave of retirements in coming years will shrink the workforce, and a pool of younger workers to replace retirees will become more important than ever.

The input of the steering committee, high school students, and the general public has yielded a variety of suggestions and requests. Among those which have been offered a number of times are the following:

- Construct attractive gateways at the entrances to Norwalk along major corridors (US 250, SR 61, and to a lesser extent, Norwood and Whittlesey Avenues).
- Create more affordable activities for kids, and for adults and families together.
- Focus on winter activities; provide an ice-skating rink.
- Maintain Norwalk's small-town character.
- Maintain bicycle and walking trails; create a trail to the north, connecting with Milan.

- Bring more cultural opportunities to Norwalk.
- Develop a conference and meeting center that can accommodate large and small meetings.
- Make sure new projects and structures are designed to last and built with quality.
- Provide avenues for more community engagement.
- Remove dilapidated homes and clean up blighted properties.
- Enforce building and maintenance codes.
- Comments with respect to downtown included: Increase the downtown's shopping and eating options, including niche shops; assist non-chain restaurants; more family and community events and festivals, and live music; more outdoor seating; Find more ways to draw people in and capture through traffic, and ways for them to spend money; create an arts district.
- Seek greater diversity within the community, as desired by younger adults.

One comment received in the public survey cut to the crux of community character: “Figure out (Norwalk's) identity and lean into it.” Although branding Norwalk as “The Maple City” is well-known and helps identify the community and has led to a number of local businesses incorporating “Maple City” into their name, perhaps an additional tag line could be developed to further define the city and highlight its positive attributes. The notion surfaced in several conversations that an overarching, identifying catchphrase or vision could help put Norwalk on more people's radar. A community work session on branding the city could be of potential benefit, internally and externally.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

While many of the community facilities and community services goals listed in the 2006 comprehensive plan have been achieved, there is considerable need to address new goals and tackle new challenges as needs change. Notable public facility improvements that have been achieved include the fire station constructed north of the antiquated, former station; a re-imagined, all-access playground and pump track at McGuan Park, now with expanded parking; improvements to Suhr Park in downtown Norwalk, with improved parking, public restrooms, and a splash pad, accommodation for Norwalk's growing youth soccer enthusiasts with the development of Sofios Park, which includes multiple soccer fields, a picnic and shelter area, and a wooded boardwalk path that is integrated into neighboring residential areas; a newly constructed amphitheater and improved walking paths at Memorial Lake Reservoir, and a cross-town pedestrian and bike trail linking the reservoir to the Ernsthausen Recreation Center. Additional improvements have been made by Norwalk's numerous public institutions, in physical plant and in programming, including Fisher Titus Medical Center (FTMC), the Norwalk Public Schools and St. Paul Catholic Schools, the Enrichment Centers for Huron County, and the Norwalk Public Library. Each is summarized in the following section.

On the topic of community services, the spectrum of active service entities such as the United Fund and County Health Board, food and clothing banks, and Community Action Commission has been supplemented with new services such as the Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Family Health Services, and a relocated County Health District office. New resources and partnerships have been deployed to address Norwalk's social and community issues.

As stated above, a number of the 2006 plan's goals have been or are being achieved. Notable among these realized goals are: construction of a new senior center, replacement of Norwalk's fire station, review of the capacity of Norwalk's school facilities, resulting in a plan to construct a centralized facility serving pre-K through eighth grade in close proximity to the high school on Shady Lane, basic English literacy programs for Hispanic residents, acquisition of an adjacent storefront property to expand the Norwalk Public Library, establishment of an urgent care facility by FTMC, and a collaborative outpatient surgery center off Milan Avenue on Emerald Parkway in Norwalk, acquisition of new technology and diagnostic equipment at FTMC, construction of Sofios Park to accommodate a growing youth soccer

organization, and establishment of a skateboard park across from the Ernsthausen Recreation Center.

Community services goals which have been realized include the new fire station, safety forces staffing studies, a concerted focus on substance abuse as a priority problem, ongoing safety forces training programs, a new senior center, updating of the county disaster plan, steps to ensure cost-effectiveness in the city's recycling plan, increased coordination among community service agencies, the establishment of the Mental Health and Addiction Services Board and programming to realize its mission, and changes in management and operation of the county's commercial building inspection service.

The Steering Committee ranked among their top priorities, "Grow services for youth; housing for misplaced youth, mental health services in schools and preschool, and place a behavior consultant in school". Among the refined list of priorities were also "Develop a community center to accommodate a variety of meetings and sizes", "Develop affordable child care solutions", and "Improve the code enforcement process".

A SWOT analysis with input from the Steering Committee revealed that among the city's assets are its park system, referred to by one participant as "Norwalk's greatest asset." Also mentioned were good schools and "robust healthcare close to home." The several mentions of low crime and a feeling of safety are a tribute to local law enforcement services. The Ernsthausen Recreation Center was mentioned as an advantage Norwalk has over other communities. One disadvantage identified by the steering committee was the lack of a central elementary school, and drug abuse was identified as a community problem. Also mentioned was the need for more affordable day care service, with a special need during evenings and weekends for hospital and other workers without a daytime weekday job. Norwalk's feral cat problem was also identified as an issue.

PAST TRENDS AND PRESENT SITUATION

Because of the broad diversity of entities providing public services and social service assistance, major entities will be discussed separately below.

General Government facilities: The City of Norwalk continues to operate out of its centralized City Hall at 38 Whittlesey Avenue, a building with limited space and no room for expansion. One alternative for the reuse of the adjacent former fire station would provide record storage space and meeting space, freeing up some existing space now used for storage. County offices

continue to be concentrated in the Courthouse and adjacent County Office Building downtown, as well as the County Administration Building on Milan Avenue. Some space in the Administration building was freed when the county's health district offices were moved to a former medical office building on Executive Drive.

Police Department: Norwalk's Police and Fire departments are largely paid for through the city's general fund, which derives its revenues from income tax. The Police Department's expansion in personnel has resulted in crowded conditions, with officers sharing offices within their relatively new police station. Earlier in 2024 the department had 25 officers, somewhat fewer than the ideal of 32 for a city of Norwalk's size. The Police Chief cited the department's need for the replacement of unmarked cruisers, reaching desired staffing levels, improving the societal image of law enforcement through increased communication and interaction, working with the Ohio Collaborative to ensure that policies are up to date, and the use of new electric bicycles for downtown patrols and event safety. Specific areas of concern cited by the Chief and Assistant Chief included drugs and sex offenses, where the number of reported instances has increased over time.

Fire Department: Major capital investment needs in the next few years for the Fire Department include the replacement of two pumpers and a tanker. There is a new effort to save money before making a purchase of a large vehicle, rather than borrowing and paying significant interest after the purchase. One pumper can cost \$800,000 to \$1 million, so these acquisitions must clearly be treated as major capital investments. Steps are being taken to maintain the new fire station in its excellent condition. Staffing in the department is at 19 personnel, and to increase to twenty would require a change in the city's codified ordinance.

Long term plans for the Fire Department include being able to step in and provide EMS services if North Central EMS ever ceases operation. There is also discussion of creating a district or county-wide fire department in the long term; there is a nation-wide trend toward establishing larger, consolidated districts. Norwalk's Fire Department already serves the city and Bronson Township, covering 49 square miles, 23,000 people, and some 700 businesses. Other recent trends impacting firefighting include building materials that help prevent fires, but which burn hotter when there is a fire. Another trend has been toward receiving more service calls, such as tracking gas odors or assisting the police department. People tend to be reaching out in more and more varied instances to service departments and safety forces.

Park and Recreation Department: The Ernsthansen Recreation Center is now 35 years old, and its aquatic center has reached thirty years. These facilities

require significant attention and resources to maintain their functionality and to replace aging components such as the HVAC system and roof for the central area. The aquatic center will next require a new roof and HVAC system. There are also plans to improve the aesthetics in the lobby and locker room. Longer term visions for improvement include expanding the Ernsthausen Center, to the east, to accommodate growth and offer new facilities, increasing the gym and fitness areas, and possibly including an indoor turf area. Other long term goals include gym space for indoor soccer and possibly pickleball, more meeting space, and improving the Monroe Street facility, opening its basement area for use, and improving its HVAC system.

Planning in Norwalk's parks largely involves maintaining the large inventory of existing parks, but includes ongoing replacement of playground equipment (the next improvement will involve the playground next to the old shelter house at the north entrance to the reservoir park). Another goal is to improve wayfinding signage along the North Coast Inland Trail through town. Long-range planning may involve the creation of additional smaller neighborhood parks to provide access to a park for every neighborhood, and to offer usable public green space in areas where private yard space is limited.

Observed trends in usage include an increase in the average users' age, with the largest growth segment being age 65 and older, and a desire for more space to work out, first provoked by COVID. The department is not actively looking to add new green space; rather, they are trying to maintain their existing acreage. However, in the long term, demand and residential growth may lead to the development of a neighborhood park on the south side. The parks, and the reservoir facilities and Ernsthausen Center in particular, have been cited by many as key community assets, in the public survey and through other input.

Sanitation Department: Norwalk has retained its own Sanitation Department, which operates from a dedicated portion of local income tax, and which has stayed on budget. Waste from Norwalk's residential accounts is delivered to Huron County's waste transfer station, and from there it is transported to the Richland County Noble Road landfill. Commercial waste is collected by private waste management companies. Norwalk produces about 4,800 tons of waste annually, as well as 600 tons of dedicated recycled materials. One goal is to publicize the curbside recycling program and educate residents on eligible materials, which, under Norwalk's user-friendly system, is co-mingled in marked bags. Any increase in participation in the recycling program will result in an overall reduction in program costs, since recycled waste costs the city about twenty dollars less per ton than

general waste. The City also provides curbside yard waste pickup in season, and a fall leaf pickup.

Norwalk City Schools: Norwalk accommodates its student body in six academic buildings throughout the city. While some of the buildings were initially intended to serve as neighborhood elementary schools, Norwalk now assigns specific grade levels to each school. The school system is advocating for the construction of a single, central school to accommodate pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students. The entire student body would then be housed in two buildings clustered on Shady Lane.

One building which would be subsequently vacated, Pleasant Elementary, is being considered for reuse as a preschool and early education center. The school system would also retain the auditorium and cafeteria portion of the existing Middle School for community and school purposes. The use of a single pre-K through 8th grade school would solve existing logistical problems and improve consistency among staff. The new building would be more efficient and effective in fulfilling its role in education.

The school district is facing new challenges. It is difficult to hire teachers in specialized areas, such as Spanish and consumer science. Fewer people are choosing to be teachers, and social media and modern communications methods have changed the nature and accessibility of teacher/family interactions. Another challenge has been to accommodate the needs of a growing and commonly non-English speaking Hispanic population. Some 221 students in the system have a language barrier (out of 2,350 enrolled students.) The school system was cited in surveys as a valuable community asset. One strength is that the Norwalk system is considered to be of an advantageous size, being the largest district in the county, and large enough to provide attractive extracurricular activities, such as robotics and extensive music and drama programs. Yet, it is small enough for teachers and students to know each other.

Norwalk Catholic Schools: Norwalk Catholic Schools (NCS) is a unified school system in Norwalk. Building on the legacy of its parishes, families, and alumni, the mission of Norwalk Catholic Schools is to guide students to cultivate a personal relationship with Christ, rooted in the Catholic tradition, and to educate students in a rigorous academic environment to serve and lead in the global community. The school system serves students from preschool through grade 12, with an enrollment of approximately 660 students. School facilities include an Early Childhood Center on State Street, Norwalk Catholic Elementary on Milan Avenue, Norwalk Catholic Junior High School on East Main Street, and St. Paul High School on East Main Street, with all but the early childhood center on the downtown campus.

Recent improvements at NCS have included a new Learning Commons room with the versatility to be used for a variety of gatherings, meetings, and learning experiences. The cafeteria has also been redesigned and reconstructed as a more inviting and functional space. Near term plans include redesigning the first, second, and third grade classrooms, and taking steps to improve safety and security on campus in collaboration with the City of Norwalk. These and other steps are included in a comprehensive plan for NCS entitled “Vision 2037”.

NCS has proceeded with new curricula in K-12 reading and K-6 mathematics, and while fully staffing the system is often challenging, NCS has remained fully staffed, through an effort to improve the experience for teachers as well as students, and to offer more competitive salaries.

KinderCasa Preschool was founded in November of 2006 to address the needs of Spanish-speaking preschoolers in the Norwalk area. The program is dedicated to helping its students learn to understand and speak English, develop kindergarten readiness skills, and learn to navigate an English-speaking classroom. Due to the extraordinary generosity of the community, this program, as well as transportation to and from school, is provided free of charge. The partnership with many enables various student services. Norwalk Catholic provides a classroom at the Early Childhood Center, and serves as Fiscal Agent. When needed, students receive speech and special education services from Norwalk City Schools, and physical and occupational therapy from Fisher-Titus Medical Center. The Enrichment Center for Huron County contracts with KinderCasa to provide affordable transportation to our students.

Health Care and Fisher-Titus Medical Center: While the city's primary health care institution, Fisher Titus Medical Center, does not have any significant plans to grow their physical facilities in the short term, they plan to retain Norwalk as their hub, providing acute care and medical specialties, while surrounding communities are demanding and, in several cases, receiving ancillary care closer to home, as demonstrated by FTMC's recent opening of a facility in Willard that provides rehabilitation, lab draw, and x-ray imaging services. FTMC also operates the local EMS service, known as North Central EMS, which covers a 600 square mile service area. The system is also developing more preventative services and activities, and has financially supported a number of local and school-based physical fitness facilities throughout Huron County, including parks, high school tracks, ball courts, and paved walking trails.

As with other institutions, FTMC is dealing with an aging population and an overall population decline. FTMC also faces a challenge, as Norwalk's largest employer, in recruiting new employees. The workforce is transient, although turnover has been observed to be stabilizing somewhat. There is a perennial shortage of nurses, and physicians often seek quality-of-life options not offered in the Norwalk area, such as more extensive grocery, theater, and dining options. Other challenges for employees include the need for child care options. Health care staff often need available childcare on weekends, overnight, and on holidays. These options are largely unavailable. Physical limitations to the FTMC campus also include the danger of having only one water source and power supply. Improved and upgraded Internet connectivity, such as dark fiber, would be helpful in meeting future needs. Cell service needs to be improved as well, where there is bad connectivity in some buildings.

While FTMC is Norwalk's largest provider of health care services, other entities have entered the health care space. These include Sandusky-based Northern Ohio Medical Specialists, or NOMS, a physician group practicing over thirty specialties, which has some specialists' offices and a physical therapy/rehab center in Norwalk, and Family Health Services, also based in Sandusky, with facilities adjacent to the FTMC campus, and specializing in making medical, dental, and mental health counseling care available to those with limited incomes.

Norwalk Public Library: The Norwalk Public Library continues to fulfill one of its core functions, by providing information and referral services to those with questions about local services and programs. Such requests are often about available social programs. Other services include a free notary service, internet connectivity with computers available for public use, and a variety of free programming for children and adults. The library has established a role as a safe place for youth after school, even providing snacks for students who would otherwise be home alone after school. Programs have included art projects, entertainment, nutrition classes, and informative lectures, all with an educational component. Due to space limitations, the library has brought some programs outside their walls, to parks and other venues.

The library acquired an adjacent property, the former Hills Interiors building on Main Street, and intends to modify and use this space, as well as addressing the need for extensive modifications to its existing, historic Carnegie building. Accessibility issues need to be addressed as well. The new space is intended to expand meeting facilities, accommodate an expansion in the children's department, and provide quiet space for tutoring, preparing for job interviews, quiet research, and other uses. The new space

will intentionally be designed to be flexible, to serve known and unknown future needs.

Enrichment Centers for Huron County: The Enrichment Centers provide senior services throughout Huron County, with senior centers in Norwalk and Willard. The Norwalk Center will be housed in a newly constructed facility by 2025, with capabilities to hold larger meetings, congregate meals, educational programs, and craft and arts projects. The facility will accommodate its trip planning department and Age Exchange, an intergenerational program serving at risk children, and allow for new programming. Other Enrichment Center outreach programs outside the walls of the senior center include serving hot meals to home bound seniors and providing curb to curb senior transportation throughout Huron County.

Public Services: In the preparation of this plan, team members met with leaders from a number of agencies addressing social issues and challenges throughout the community. Interviews included the Norwalk Area United Fund, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (MHAS), Huron Metro Housing, the Huron County Department of Job and Family Services, and leadership from the Hispanic community.

A number of concerns emerged from these discussions, many of which were echoed by more than one entity. The following is a list of social concerns which were highlighted during the course of the discussions.

Affordable housing remains a primary concern throughout the public service community. The lack of suitable affordable housing is causing businesses to lose employees who would otherwise reside in Norwalk, and it is disrupting local households who can no longer pay their increasing rent or afford a mortgage. Further, the lack of affordable housing has led to continued homelessness, and to relatives and friends “doubling up” in housing units. Affordable housing is discussed in more detail in the housing chapter.

Mental health assistance is viewed as a great need. This includes providing mental health counseling and assessment services in Norwalk's schools. One area receiving attention is the provision of a Mobile Crisis Team that will respond to emergency calls involving mental health and/or drug abuse and overdoses. Those in crisis will now be sent to the resource or facility they need at the time they are met by first responders.

Coupled with drug abuse is the abuse of alcohol. It has been observed that this issue expanded during the COVID pandemic, when people could have alcohol delivered to their homes, causing private, individual use of alcohol to increase. The uptick in-home use of alcohol spurred more frequent incidents

involving domestic violence, child abuse, and other family issues. Another unfortunate by-product of the mental health issue has been a notably high incidence of suicide in Huron County.

Transportation: A recognized deficiency in the current public transit system is that public transportation is not available on demand at all times, and a ride must be reserved one or more days in advance (A pending program addressing this need is described in the chapter addressing transportation.) The existing system does not assist second- or third-shift workers, or weekend employees.

Child Care: There is a perceived lack of affordable child care services in Norwalk and, similar to the transportation gap, child care is especially scarce outside of standard weekday business hours. Affordability is also an issue for low income parents. This issue is being addressed by a child care committee, working with Firelands Forward, a regional workforce development agency.

Issues involving youth have increased over time, notably involving behavioral problems. Parents will often refuse or neglect to sign off on assistance plans for their child, and there is a marked lack of parenting skills among many parents.

The Hispanic community faces a number of concerns, including those listed above. Transportation is a very important service to them, but current taxi services are inadequate and there is a hesitance to use public transportation because of the language barrier and concerns about the unknown, including police involvement in other communities, and the potential for harrassment.

Housing is another barrier, with unique characteristics. Hispanic residents generally rent their homes and pay their rent in cash. Most are housed in mobile homes. The renovation of some parks in the recent past has been a help, but many others are still not in satisfactory shape up to code.

The Hispanic community's opportunities for career development and entrepreneurship are also subject to barriers, including the language barrier, the ability to obtain credit, and a lack of knowledge concerning any entrepreneurial technical assistance program geared to their community.

Many of the above issues are being addressed by one or, in most cases, more than one collaborating agency. DJFS operates a portfolio of programs to help low income households meet basic needs. For example, in 2023, 6,232 individuals made SNAP (food stamp) and OWF intake applications, and \$15.5 million was issued in SNAP alone. Ohio Means Jobs, an employment service,

has been moved to the front of the DJFS building to make it more accessible and “client friendly”. The office processed 5,964 Medicaid intake applications and 7,393 Medicaid renewals; from January to October 2024, Medicaid expenditures in Huron County totaled \$83.1 million. Childcare assistance was provided to 339 children, assisting parents in maintaining employment.

As noted above, some apartment complexes and mobile home parks have been improved and buildings have been rehabilitated. This effort, much of which was enforced by the City, may result in the expansion of eligible subsidized low income housing units.

2025-2035

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Goals



Strategies



Tactics

GOALS

During the development of the plan, several overarching themes emerged. These goals will drive the strategies relevant through all six lenses.

1. SET STANDARDS AND PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY [KC2]

To be a distinctive community, a standard of quality must be established and followed. Such a standard, which speaks to “curb appeal” as well as safety, security, and sustainability, can become a great attractor, as well as raising expectations and the overall image of the community.

2. HIGHEST AND BEST USE OF ASSETS

It is important to strive to locate the “highest and best” use in any given property, whether a vacant lot or an uptown storefront. Similarly, it is critical that public funds are expended in a manner that addresses greatest needs, reaches as many beneficiaries as equitably as possible, and yields the greatest public return on investments.

3. PLANNING FOR GROWTH

While Norwalk is not currently experiencing significant growth, it is important to prepare for and be responsive to the next industrial prospect, housing subdivision, or retail location. The greatest driver of growth will be existing businesses, and Norwalk must be proactive in these efforts.

4. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND

A brand is a promise of what to expect within the community. The brand can be expressed “upfront” with appealing gateways, and throughout the community with uniform signage, and repeated thematic imagery and phrasing (Maple City, raceway, Uptown arts/entertainment, and other elements).

5. STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

Many planning goals remain merely a theory until sufficient resources are mustered to make them reality. Strong fiscal management is essential, and outside resources must be continuously sought to make many of the stated goals a reality. Fiscal effectiveness can be achieved further using innovative and evolving partnerships, collaborations, incentive programs, and capital improvement planning.

STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

LAND USE STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

- a. Plan for accessibility to essential services and basic shopping needs for neighborhoods and residential areas housing a large number of low-moderate income or otherwise disadvantaged populations. Make pathways to these services and stores **safe and accessible by foot and by bicycle.**

1. HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS

- b. Develop a concerted effort to **promote and implement infill projects**, making best use of available undeveloped or underutilized property within the city. In a community which is experiencing limited growth, it is most effective to concentrate on bringing properties within the city to their highest and best use. Infill is an especially **pertinent strategy for a slow-growth, landlocked community**, where farmland still exists in several locations in the city, and in which convenience and proximity to essential services, stores, and other destinations is highly desired. Indeed, much can be accomplished and developed within the existing corporate boundaries. There is much opportunity to develop vacant land, build on Norwalk's considerable assets, and complement and improve on what is already here.
 - ii. A list of vacant and available properties within the city should be maintained.
 - iii. In cases where vacant properties are not reaching their potential, encourage upgrading to the best use for that property.
 - iv. Industrial parcels should be brought to "shovel ready" status, ensuring adequate provision of utilities and energy sources to those sites. Land uses and activities that support the family unit should be emphasized, including recreational options. Seek out and promote new uses such as recreational options, entertainment, safe and attractive "third places" for children and youth, intergenerational activities, and innovative uses of institutions and facilities (schools, parks and rec centers, the new Senior Center, the library). Concentrate on uses that facilitate year-round child and youth activities and programming.
 - v. Similarly emphasize connectivity to similar and corresponding uses (an example is a new Mexican grocery store located within a block of dormitory housing for several hundred Hispanic agricultural and horticultural workers who largely have no automotive transportation available).

- c. Follow the principles of **asset-based community development** as a guideline, attempting to make the highest and best use of the unique and recognized assets of the community.

2. PLANNING FOR GROWTH

- d. Concentrate on specific **focus areas** that have been identified in this process as of highest interest and potential.
 - i. Look for opportunities to support **mixed use developments**, combining retail and commercial business in close proximity to housing. A special example would be developing upper story and loft apartments in Norwalk's central business district. Another example is the development of the south Norwalk Benedict Avenue corridor, where commercial, retail, and office uses could coexist with higher density housing development abutting Benedict Avenue, and with lower density housing to the immediate east on available property. Again, the City's role would be in the realm of **incentives and enforcement**.
 - ii. **South side/Benedict corridor development** should be orderly and attractive. Align planning and implementation with the current South Side plan. That plan emphasizes: consistent branding and development of a gateway (and other gateways at prominent entrances to the city); an enhanced streetscape along Benedict Avenue; eventual development of a medium density residential sub-district to the east of Benedict bordering the US 20 bypass to the south; and connectivity for non-motorized mobility of pedestrians and bicycles, creating multi-modal safe routes.
 - iii. In addition to Benedict Avenue, **develop attractive gateways and streetscapes at major entrance points to the city** (US 250 North, East and West Main Streets, Norwood Ave., West Washington St., Whittlesey Avenue).
 - iv. Continue to **develop and nurture downtown as a multi-use destination point** with multiple and diverse attractions. Consider the important role of the downtown as the heart of the community, and its potential as an activity generator and civic center. As such, maximize the usefulness of such civic focal points as Suhr Park, the Norwalk Public Library, the Firelands Historical Society properties, and, once it is operational, the Norwalk Theater.
 - v. Ensure **adequate utilities at planned growth areas**, most typically at the periphery (such as the 84-acre industrial property on Akron Road/S.R.18)
 - vi. Consider giving preference to the development of properties located within the Norwalk School District, in order that resulting property taxes can support the community's school system and provide more localized benefits.

- e. Review the City of Norwalk's Zoning Code for possible modifications to meet new, changing, and projected needs or patterns of growth and development. It is likely that a **comprehensive review and revision of the code** would be most beneficial. Examples of some newer provisions worth consideration, to address contemporary issues, include:
- vii. Allowing smaller lot sizes in cases where homes were originally constructed on lots with dimensions that are no longer allowed. In some cases, housing vacancies or abandonment has resulted in available lots that are not buildable under current requirements. For example, where a 60-foot frontage is required for an R1 lot today, there are older single lots of 40- or 50-foot frontage. Provision should be made for these lots to become productive. Maximum house sizes could be regulated accordingly, and these smaller lots could easily accommodate “tiny houses”, which have become in demand in some markets.
 - viii. The City currently has no provisions in the zoning code for solar power. While panels can be installed on roofs, there is no provision for large or small solar fields, or a small free-standing array of solar panels.
 - ix. There could be benefit from the land use options provided by an overlay district covering the downtown. In this case, requirements and uses could reflect the unique characteristics and possibilities represented in the downtown district. The overlay could help facilitate residential housing downtown. For example, the current requirement for the provision of two parking spaces for each unit could be eased. Create a downtown zoning overlay district allowing for a desired mixed-use growth (including commercial and service activities), as well as accommodating safe and high-quality upper story housing.
 - x. The code should include provisions to ensure that electric and illuminated signs are attractive and safe for the traveling public.
 - xi. Ensure adequate regulations for “big box” developments are in place, considering firefighting capability, building dimensions, parking, and other factors.
 - xii. Set aside appropriate green space as residential neighborhoods expand or are created.
- f. Maintain an **inventory of available sites**. This can be housed in the City Zoning Director's office, with GIS and other pertinent data on file.
- g. Maintain a base of useful and compatible **digital orthos** to plan the future use in Norwalk and surrounding areas.
- h. Plan for **accessibility and connectivity to Norwalk's neighborhoods**. New park or recreation facilities should focus on proximity to underserved neighborhoods and districts, such as the southernmost residential areas where no community parks exist.

3. BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND

- k. Emphasize the **restoration and preservation of existing properties** that are (or have potential to be) significant assets.
 - i. Maximize the potential of Norwalk's Central Business District and its many assets, including commercial, office, arts, governmental, entertainment, upper floor and close-by residential, and restaurant uses.
 - ii. Improve Norwalk's housing stock through code enforcement and incentives for housing renovation and construction.
 - iii. Plan for adaptive reuse or replacement of vacant school properties once the new preK-8 school is constructed and functioning. Consider: Pleasant Street school as a preschool resource building; the Middle School auditorium/gymnasium and cafeteria areas as a community center; conversion of Maplehurst school to apartments targeted to workforce, and conversion of its campus to new residential; and sale of League Street and Main Street properties.
 - iv. Maintain standards of development, emphasizing quality, aesthetics, compatibility with surrounding properties, accessibility and connectivity to complementary land uses, and safety.
 - v. Research and promote new "best uses" for significant but vacant or underutilized properties such as the former Norwalk fire station. Research resources and incentives that can assist in incentivizing development of such historically significant properties.
- j. Maximize the use of public and other accessible spaces throughout the community, with **physical improvements and public programming**. The new amphitheater at Memorial Lake reservoir is a prime example, and the new Senior Center will present new opportunities as a venue for socialization, as well as cultural and educational activities.

4. STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

- k. **Promote the long-range development of the east side and utilities along Route 18 and 20 corridors**, as far east as SR 601. Similarly, promote the **planned development of available land south of the US Route 20 bypass, primarily along or near the U.S. 250 corridor**.
- l. **Seek outside (state, federal, foundation) resources**, as well as local sources of investment capital, when appropriate, to help implement any activity to address the above activities.
 - ii. Assess the capacity of the existing Norwalk Community Development Corporation as a conduit for local investment.
 - iii. Research the applicability of the Community Improvement Corporation in addressing real estate development and ownership.
 - iv. Employ the resources of the Huron County Land Bank to assist in acquiring and developing formerly vacant or dilapidated properties.
 - v. Research and promote, where applicable, the use of established resources and incentive programs such as the presently utilized Enterprise Zone program and/or the establishment of a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) which could encompass as much as the entire corporate limits of the city.

HOUSING STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

- a. **Review and revise, as necessary, Norwalk's building and property maintenance codes.** The focus group believed that it is important to maintain high standards for building, with an understanding that outside investors are expected to maintain these standards throughout their ownership of housing. However, some balance must be maintained; codes and regulations should be designed to promote safety, quality, and aesthetic attractiveness, without becoming so burdensome that desirable new development is inhibited. A possible approach would be to commission a blue-ribbon committee to review these codes and make recommendations regarding requirements and enforcement.
- b. **Demand quality in all construction endeavors.** One theme that has emerged from the housing focus group as well as others is the demand for quality in construction and in planning renovation projects. Local contractors have voiced appreciation for this emphasis, and it will be important to convey this to property owners and developers who live elsewhere. The push for quality can be conveyed through the development and enforcement of building and property maintenance codes, and also through enforcement of zoning and subdivision regulations as well. Quality design can be rewarded in the case of a planned unit subdivision (PUD), where green space set-asides can be compensated with relaxed lot size requirements, for example. It is also important, however, to balance such requirements with a continued perception (and reality) of the City of Norwalk as user-friendly and easy to work with, and with processes that are not unnecessarily time-consuming.

2. HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS

- c. **Consider the adaptive reuse of one or more vacant school buildings as housing.**
- d. **Consider the development and encouragement of multi-generational housing.** Accommodating multiple generations (particularly focusing on elderly relatives) has become an affordable way to maintain independence for seniors and has emerged as a viable option in the aftermath of the COVID epidemic. City officials can assist by making residents aware of this option, ensuring that zoning will allow it throughout the city's residential areas, and providing incentives for housing improvements and expansions.

3. PLANNING FOR GROWTH

e. Advocate and research the market for mid-income housing for young professionals.

- i. Consider the to-be-vacated school buildings. There are plans to consolidate five existing school buildings into a new, single school building on Shady Lane, serving grades pre-K through 8. If this project goes forward, five buildings throughout the city will become vacant. While plans for utilizing specific buildings, including the middle School and Pleasant Elementary, may emerge, one or more other schools could be converted to “starter” housing for new professionals accepting employment in Norwalk, such as teachers and nurses. The city could promote and support this project, which would also require private investment and ownership. A successful model of this project would likely involve the City, the School District (as initial property owner and employer), other employers who may wish to facilitate housing for their employees, and private developers who could own, design, develop, and manage the project. The role of the city would be restricted to providing incentives for investment, as well as enforcement to achieve community standards of quality, safety, and appearance.
- ii. Examine the potential for creating new housing units in upper stories of buildings in Norwalk's downtown. The 2006 plan recommended “developing attractive upper-floor apartments in the Downtown area.” This concept has been discussed by several sources during the development of this update. A concerted effort to develop a “critical mass” of upper story apartments would involve the coordinated effort of each individual property owner, the City and its code enforcement staff, contractor/developers with relevant expertise, one or more housing development organizations, and a coordinating and promotional agency such as the Huron County Growth Partnership. Technical assistance may be available from Main Street Ohio and the National Main Street Center. Individual efforts to promote the active use of upper stories downtown, especially including apartments, should be encouraged, subject to applicable codes and requirements.
- iii. Explore the creation of housing for workers earning a modest income, created by a partnership which includes one or more of Norwalk's larger employers. Interested organizations and entities can review a model program established in Williams County, Ohio, where employers invested in housing for their employees. The project was overseen by a voluntary board of retired businesspersons and attorneys. The businesses invested in the program provided \$750,000, and the community matched them 2:1 with \$1.5million. State funding was also accessed for a portion of the cost. The result was the creation of market rate workforce housing. Twelve 1,100 square foot units were constructed in a year, costing \$160-165,000, for families with incomes of approximately \$40,000. The program intends to construct and sell approximately one hundred homes, in which contracts are signed before completion of each unit. The corporation managing this program purchases the construction materials, and they employ four new local construction builders. Participating homeowners make a down payment, and local banks provide mortgages. The goal of this market rate workforce housing program is “to provide quality, affordable housing options for the local workforce, including teachers, healthcare workers, service employees, and other professionals who contribute to the

community's economy but may find it challenging to find affordable housing.”

- f. **Reinvigorate the task force which had been focused on affordable housing.** Provide continuing support to and coordination with this task force and those who are involved in bringing a housing “continuum of care”, and a mix of housing development, to strengthen and align the network of services associated with housing.
- g. **Information on all housing assistance and related programs should be made available and accessible in a centralized location,** such as the Norwalk Area United Fund, or through the county's “211” system.
- h. Take steps to **accommodate housing needs of the elderly and disabled.** Design modifications can often allow elderly residents to remain in their homes and “age in place”. One simple but common improvement is the construction of an entrance ramp to replace the porch steps. Many such ramps have been constructed in Norwalk and surrounding areas by the local charitable organization, ACT (Answering the Call Together), which could undertake other needed modifications. Additional services and programs can often help seniors remain in their homes. These may include Meals on Wheels, home health programs, homemakers or chore services, and other programs through the Enrichment Services of Huron County, DJFS, and other agencies.

4. BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK’S BRAND

- i. **Preserve Norwalk's architectural past.** Another theme impacting housing development and rehabilitation is the value placed on historic preservation, and the maintenance of the city's historic character, as reflected in its downtown district and the homes along West and East Main Street, as well as other architectural treasures scattered throughout the community. In some cases, historic tax credits may apply to a project that is adhering to federal historic preservation standards. One method to adhere to historic preservation standards in the central business district is to re-engage the Architectural Review Board, an entity appointed to review construction and renovation proposals throughout the downtown district for conformity to preservation standards.

5. STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

- j. **Align this comprehensive plan with Norwalk's and/or Huron County's Comprehensive Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS), or any planning studies that are required as a prerequisite for the receipt of grant funds for housing rehabilitation.** Such plans typically advocate for housing rehabilitation and repair incentives, home ownership incentives, rental housing incentives (especially for affordable rental property), housing targeted to elderly and disabled households, tenant-based housing assistance, and housing solutions for the homeless. Further information on the CHIS and associated funding can be obtained from the Great Lakes Community Action Partnership, which administers CDBG Housing funds. Above all, action should be taken to advocate for an increase in the supply of affordable housing, as well as subsidies to allow Norwalk's lower income households to secure safe, affordable housing, and to coordinate an effort to match developers, funding entities, project sponsors, and other necessary parties to make a dent in the affordable housing gap a reality.
- k. **Research proactive and innovative financing and incentives, seek and obtain them for City use when warranted, and deploy them to maximize their benefit to Norwalk residents and to the City's housing stock.** Specific resources were identified which could potentially assist in realizing some of the strategies outlined in this chapter. It is recommended that an effort is made to obtain these resources, when deemed appropriate and responsive to recognized needs.
- i. Huron County's Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP). This is largely funding, originating from HUD and administered by the Ohio Department of Development, for housing rehabilitation and repair projects, and has been utilized in Norwalk for many years.
 - ii. Housing improvement funding through USDA Rural Development, as available
 - iii. Programs of the Federal Home Loan Bank
 - iv. Special needs housing funds such as 202 elderly and Section 811 funds.
 - v. New housing construction for eligible households through the Firelands Chapter of Habitat for Humanity
 - vi. Rental vouchers (commonly known as "Section 8") offered through the Huron Metropolitan Housing Authority
 - vii. Encouragement of low income and elderly housing construction through the use of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. Ancillary programs include the Housing Development Loan (HDL) program, Multifamily lending Program (MLP), and Ohio 811 Project Rental Assistance Program. One resource for information is the Ohio Housing Finance Agency.
 - viii. Enactment of local tax incentive programs such as a community-wide Community Reinvestment Area, where property tax relief can be applied to significant investments in existing or new housing, as well as other real property improvements.

- ix. Local lenders' assistance programs should be cataloged and publicized to eligible potential homeowners. To this end, the city should strengthen its relationship with local banks and credit unions to align homebuyers' and developers' needs with available lending products and affordable, accessible sources of capital and debt.
 - x. The Weatherization Assistance Program for qualifying low-income households, managed in Huron County by Great Lakes Community Action Partnership.
 - xi. Use of utility payment assistance programs, such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- I. **Explore the creative use of existing organizations, development tools, and resources to address housing quality, accessibility, and affordability needs through collaboration.** Among those potential tools are:
- i. The Huron County Land Bank, which can acquire a dilapidated and otherwise unneeded property, then arrange a sale to an entity that will develop, improve, and repurpose the property, making it a functional and attractive component within the City.
 - ii. The Huron County Community Improvement Corporation, a quasi-governmental entity that can be used to hold title to a property during the transition to its planned development.
 - iii. The Norwalk Community Development Corporation, a for-profit entity in which local investors inject capital into a development project with an anticipated but modest return. It is possible that the NCDC could invest in all or a portion of a housing development project.

NATURAL RESOURCES, TRANSPORTATION, UTILITIES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

- a. Improve water taste by **dredging the reservoir** and taking other steps as deemed appropriate.
- b. Practice better **access management**, especially on major thoroughfares and in congested areas, by limiting driveway permits, installing medians or turn lanes, ensuring clear views, designing shared access to multiple sites, and regulating distance between access points.

2. HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS

- c. **Revise and augment public transportation** options to allow for more immediate responses to needs and extended days and hours.

3. PLANNING FOR GROWTH

- d. **Meet the needs of existing and projected new businesses and residences in the distribution of energy sources (electricity and natural gas, including appropriate renewable options) and water.**
 - i. Invest in infrastructure and sufficient energy supplies to bolster growth areas, including industrial sites and open areas along the city's edge.
 - ii. Pursue sufficient water from multiple sources to meet the needs of projected future residents and businesses. Continue to coordinate with NORWA, as well as any other identified source.
 - iii. Specifically, research and assess the adequacy of the existing electric grid, to ensure it can supply projected needs, including charging of personal and commercial electric vehicles.
 - iv. Partner with county and township officials, as well as NORWA and other utility providers as appropriate, in cases where it is advantageous to provide utilities outside the City's corporate limits. Develop a framework for possible JEDD or CEDA shared funding arrangements.
- e. Consider and, if feasible and determined to be beneficial, **construct** the following, as warranted:
 - i. Extend N West St. northward to connect to an extended Westwind Drive
 - ii. Extend Emerald Parkway westward to Plank Road.
 - iii. Extend Pleasant Street south to Fair Road.
 - iv. Improve intersections at US 20 and Old State Road, E. Main St. and Old State Rd., Old State Rd. and Townsend Avenue.
- f. **Rebuild major arterial streets and widen connector and local streets** where deemed necessary.
- g. **Investigate and plan truck routes to improve traffic flow through and around the city.**

4. BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND

- h. **Improve parking conditions through wayfinding signage.** Enforce off-street employee parking. Include realistic parking requirements in a downtown overlay zoning district.
- i. **Continue and expand, as possible, the city's sidewalk repair and installation program.** Install sidewalks where current conditions are found to be unsafe. Strive to make Norwalk a more pedestrian-friendly community.
- j. **Develop consistent signage throughout Norwalk, including wayfinding and directional signs, trails, and gateway signage.**
- k. Take ongoing steps to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists and facilitate their safe and effective coexistence with vehicular traffic, along rights of way and on trails. Make Norwalk more walkable.

5. STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

- l. Initiate and adhere to **citywide capital improvements planning.** Periodically survey businesses and others to determine infrastructure needs and issues. Note and work to fill any infrastructure “gaps” that hinder new business prospects or expansion plans. Develop a plan for maintenance and replacement of infrastructure over the next twenty years.
 - i. Research funding options for planned infrastructure investments, monitor funding gaps, match needs with potential funding sources, and develop an overall budget, by category, for infrastructure projects.
- m. **Coordinate infrastructure updates with other municipal priorities,** including the south side development plan, needs and plans of major businesses and institutions, and possible new or emerging priorities, depending upon development projects, such as properties east of the city along US 20, SR 18, and SR 601.
- n. **Support and help implement the goals and objectives of the Huron County-Norwalk Airport comprehensive plan.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

- a. Strive to make **municipal processes and procedures as accommodating to the timely approval and launching of business projects as possible**, without compromising the due diligence that ensures high-quality construction that conforms to specifications. This includes examining permitting processes and zoning regulations for any unnecessary process delays or redundancies. It was suggested to consider employing a planning professional in City Hall to oversee and facilitate these processes. Develop a “one stop shop” for all required municipal processes, with all relevant processes clearly explained.
- b. **Incorporate within the established Business Retention and Expansion program a survey of businesses regarding deficiencies and potential solutions in the areas of transportation services, affordable employee housing, and day care facilities for employees.**
 - i. Note areas where multiple businesses cite similar needs, and work with those businesses to better define and then address these needs.
 - ii. **Always look toward future trends such as Artificial Intelligence, increasing automation, and robotics applications.**

2. HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS

- c. **Focus efforts on targeted properties and areas within the city**, including the former fire station, and the South Side area along Benedict Avenue as described elsewhere. Match available “infill” properties to pending projects.
- d. **Pay specific attention to marketing and seek an industrial or distribution firm to occupy the remaining 84 acres of the North Central Ohio Industrial Park** (a portion of the initially identified 18/601/20 area east of Norwalk).

3. PLANNING FOR GROWTH

- e. **Redouble efforts to grow the local workforce** to meet the needs of existing and prospective employers. Typical for a rural community, Norwalk's workforce is aging, and prospects to replace the wave of retirees are diminished, as many of Norwalk's youth leave their hometown behind to seek education and careers elsewhere. The challenge is not only to recruit willing and able younger workers and their families, but to nurture and grow the type of job opportunities that can attract this prospective workforce and offer sufficient income to support a household comfortably. This need to import younger workers is noteworthy enough to **consider creating a**

working team to develop and implement strategies and marketing methods to attract younger households.

- i. Develop strategies and support for remote workers, including shared office space, ancillary office services, and other amenities as demand prescribes.

4. BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND

f. **Support entrepreneurship** through the provision of mentorships, counseling, and other services available through the RISE partnership and other resources, including Small Business Development Centers and SCORE chapters. Match start-up businesses with affordable and suitable space, including shared workspaces, in local properties.

- i. Endorse and support efforts to create an outreach and support center for the growing Hispanic population and their entrepreneurial ventures.
- ii. Focus on local downtown businesses when providing entrepreneurial coaching and small business assistance in Norwalk.

2. STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

g. When appropriate based on development goals and where fiscally feasible, **participate in economic development projects.**

- i. Seek innovative public-private partnerships to facilitate and finance new projects. This could involve such entities as State and Federal agencies, the Norwalk Community Development Corporation, the Norwalk/Huron County Community Improvement Corporation, the Huron County Land Bank, and possibly the creation of new entities, such as a Port Authority, over time to spur new investments and respond to new needs.
- ii. When deemed feasible on a cost-benefit basis, assist in investing in new infrastructure to ready industrial or commercial sites for development. Partner to help developers bring such industrial sites to “shovel ready” status. This may include extending the infrastructure and distribution lines to the periphery of the City, where sufficient vacant land is available, and may require new energy distribution infrastructure. Consider creative incentives to spur the development of necessary infrastructure, such as Tax Increment Financing.
- iii. Develop, refine and, where deemed helpful, create citywide incentives for investment in community growth. Consider a city-wide Community Reinvestment Area that incorporates property tax exemptions, which are tailored to the scale and impact of a project.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER, QUALITY OF LIFE AND DOWNTOWN NORWALK STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

- a. Improve Norwalk's existing housing stock and neighborhood “curb appeal” through **code enforcement and incentives**. **Review and revise code language and enforcement methods** as deemed necessary. Insist upon a high degree of quality in all construction, renovation, and property maintenance. Improve the code enforcement process, stressing safety, quality, and aesthetics.

2. HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS

- b. Consider a teen center, perhaps as one function within a broader community center, and **work to create safe and attractive “third places” for teens**. Note: The Norwalk Public Library has done considerable work to create a safe “third place” for school students after school.
- c. Take steps to **accommodate pedestrians and bicycles** along rights-of-way and on trails. **Improve bike trail connectivity** where feasible.
- d. **Research the feasibility of the development of attractive and safe downtown housing units in upper floors of buildings in the central business district**. Gauge the degree of interest among downtown property owners, and research possible incentives for housing development.
- e. Monitor downtown parking usage and patterns and **address any parking issues** that are identified.
- f. **Capitalize on opportunities for more outside seating and communal open space downtown**. **Program activities** for Suhr and Pohl Parks, as well as storefront sidewalks, while accommodating and allowing for a free flow of pedestrian traffic.

3. PLANNING FOR GROWTH

- g. Research strategies to **retain and attract youth and younger families, including those who have left Norwalk**. This may require a coordinated effort to launch a “bring them back” or young adult attraction campaign, involving entities such as the Growth Partnership, local school systems, and suitable employers with workforce needs.

4. BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND

- h. **Develop attractive gateways at major entrances to the city** (US 250, SR 61) and make the entranceway corridors attractive and appealing.
 - i. The US 250 North corridor is especially neglected in presenting an appealing “first impression”.
 - ii. Improvements may include cooperation on visual improvements with property owners, planting, screening, and an attractive gateway structure.
 - iii. The US 250 South corridor will benefit from following the guidance of the 2023 South Benedict District plan.
- i. **Implement a uniform design for wayfinding and trail signage with a logo identifying Norwalk.**
 - i. One recommendation is to include QR codes on bike trail signage with links to a center for useful community information.
- j. **Emphasize the preservation of historic and significant properties throughout Norwalk**, in the downtown area, and in Norwalk's neighborhoods. Ensure that future policies and decisions respect Norwalk's heritage and enhance livability.
- k. Support efforts to **promote tourism**, including coordination of events and key facilities and attractions, including those within entertainment (including the existing DORA) and potential arts districts.
- l. Create a unified and comprehensive “community calendar” and disseminate it over as many media and means as is financially feasible. **Achieve effective city-wide promotion of events, organizations, and opportunities for citizen involvement and volunteerism.**
- m. Identify or **establish a centralized contact point for downtown development** projects and programming; publicize the role of the Norwalk Area Visitors Bureau in spearheading downtown initiatives, and work to promote a unified image of downtown and messaging related to programs, events, new business openings, and related key information.
 - i. Pursue working relationships with downtown organizations in similar and nearby communities, and local Main Street Programs, and contact Main Street Ohio to obtain information on best practices. Consider Main Street Ohio membership if deemed beneficial. Regardless of such membership, continue reinvigorating the efforts of the extant Uptown Committee.
- n. **Maintain a relationship between the downtown and Summit Motorsports Park; seek opportunities for cross-promotion.**
- o. Capitalize on synergy between Artists Open Studio, Norwalk Arts Center and the Norwalk Theater, and specialty shops and other enterprises to **work toward the establishment of an Arts District.**
 - i. Once momentum is established, draw additional related businesses and arts organizations.

- ii. Tie in related entities outside the physical district, which may be a portion of East Main Street, such as the Norwalk Public Library and Firelands Historical Society, and even the local schools' art, music, and drama departments, and Enrichment Centers for Huron County, which is not located downtown but could have a presence and participation in downtown programs. Seek opportunities for synergy between these entities and between generations.
 - iii. Allow Norwalk's "creatives" to envision and work toward an ideal arts district.
 - p. **Incorporate the input of diverse groups** such as seniors, youth, Hispanics, and special needs groups in planning efforts. Find opportunities to encourage contributions to the cultural richness of the community.
5. **STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING**
- q. **Periodically review Park and Recreation plans and consider potential for new activities or facilities to attract families and appeal to younger adults.**

COMMUNITY FACILITIES & COMMUNITY SERVICES STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY
 - a. **Increase knowledge of how to obtain information and referral services** when a resident confronts a social, economic, or personal problem for which there may be an agency or program to address that problem.
 - i. Include increased publicity of the county-wide 211 programs, the information services of the Norwalk Public Library, and information available through coalitions and collaborations of agencies.
 - b. **Maintain frequent communications between the City and Norwalk's major public institutions and public service agencies to assess ongoing and new challenges, new programs and assets, and recent successes.**
2. HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS
 - c. **Encourage the renovation and adaptive re-use of the former fire station on Whittlesey Avenue, and research, promote, and facilitate the use of incentives to preserve and bring into active and productive use. The facility could have potential as a functional municipal asset.**
 - d. **Encourage and develop one or more distance learning centers** within the city to bring a higher education and technical assistance presence to Norwalk. These could be existing facilities, such as the new senior center or high school facilities.
3. PLANNING FOR GROWTH
 - e. **Support the efforts of the Norwalk Public Library** to expand and renovate their facilities, in order to better accommodate current and future programs and services.
 - f. **Grow and develop strong children that will be the future leaders of the community.**
 - i. Focus on increasing services for the city's youth. Among the strategies to consider include housing for misplaced youth, mental health services in preschool and daycare facilities, and placing a behavior consultant in schools.
 - g. **Support the development of a community center that will be large enough for all types and sizes of community meetings** and other various functions. The current alternatives for community and public gatherings are limited in capacity and amenities, The intent is to provide communal space that does not feel owned by just one person or entity. Coordinate the use of other existing and planned

meeting and event spaces (Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center, the new Senior Center, and the Norwalk Theater once it is functional.)

- h. City officials should continue to **research and work toward the development of affordable, accessible, and round-the-clock childcare facilities in Norwalk.** Employers, as well as employees, should be consulted to work toward the most responsive solution.
 - i. Publicize and grow the community recycling program
- 4. BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND**
- j. Investigate pathways **to communication and participation with the growing Norwalk Hispanic community** to help them overcome personal obstacles and fear of involvement and increase opportunities for safe collaboration to provide needed outreach and informational services.
- 5. STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING**
- a. **Adhere to and promote the development plans of the Norwalk Park and Recreation Department,** including improvements to and eventual expansion of the Ernsthausen Recreation Center, upgrades to community parks including new playground equipment, development of new neighborhood parks or green spaces when deemed appropriate, and maintenance and management of the new amphitheater located at the reservoir park
 - b. **Support all local schools** including Norwalk Catholic Schools and Norwalk Public Schools, specifically on redevelopment of pre K-8 centralized school.
 - c. **Support the training and staffing needs of the Norwalk Police and Fire Departments and promote financial plans that can raise sufficient capital prior to the purchase of major items.**
 - d. Maintain and upgrade a county- and **community-based disaster plan** that can be responsive to the variety of potential events.
 - e. Continue to support and facilitate the efforts of city departments to assist one another in projects where the expertise or equipment held by one department may assist another.

10 PRIORITIES

Develop a mechanism for local investment in worthy development projects (could include housing)

Invest in infrastructure to bolster growth areas and improve distribution of energy sources

Develop attractive gateways at major entrances to the city

Develop citywide incentives for investment in community growth; consider citywide CRA

Improve & preserve Norwalk's existing properties & housing stock through code enforcement and incentives

Promote City-wide events, organizations, and opportunities for citizen involvement

Seek innovative methods to recruit young adult population to move to Norwalk

Find a new, productive use for the former fire station

Implement consistent signage throughout Norwalk: wayfinding, trails, gateways

Support and collaborate with community organizations to minimize workforce barriers; transportation, childcare and housing

SUMMARY OF GOALS & STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: SET STANDARDS & PROCESSES THAT DRIVE QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

- Demand quality in all construction endeavors.
- Review and revise, as necessary, Norwalk's building and property maintenance codes.
- Be safe and accessible by foot and by bicycle.
- Improve water taste by dredging the reservoir and taking other steps as deemed appropriate.
- Practice better access management.
- Strive to make municipal processes and procedures as accommodating to the timely approval and launching of business projects as possible,
- Incorporate cross-sector City goals within the established Business Retention and Expansion program.
- Improve Norwalk's existing housing stock and neighborhood “curb appeal” through code enforcement and incentives.
- Improve referral services for residents’ socioeconomic issues.
- Maintain frequent communications between the City and Norwalk's major public institutions and public service agencies.

THESE STRATEGIES:

Focus on processes, partnerships, and modernizations.

GOAL 2: HIGHEST & BEST USE OF ASSETS

- Promote and implement infill projects.
- Follow the principles of asset-based community development.
- Encourage the renovation and adaptive re-use of the former fire station on Whittlesey Avenue, and research, promote, and facilitate the use of incentives to preserve and bring into active and productive use. The facility could have potential as a functional municipal asset.
- Consider the adaptive reuse of one or more vacant school buildings as housing.
- Consider the development and encouragement of multi-generational housing.
- Revise and augment public transportation.

THESE STRATEGIES:

Are of critical importance to Norwalk’s future trajectory due to finite assets such as land.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

Redevelop former fire station for municipal use.

Develop vacant industrial land.

- Market to recruit an industrial or distribution firm to occupy the remaining 84 acres of the North Central Ohio Industrial Park.
- Work to create safe and attractive “third places” for teens.
- Improve bike trail connectivity.
- Research the feasibility of the development of attractive and safe downtown housing units in upper floors of buildings in the central business district.
- Address any parking issues .
- Capitalize on opportunities for more outside seating and communal open space downtown.
- Program activities in Downtown.
- Encourage and develop one or more distance learning centers.

GOAL 3: PLANNING FOR GROWTH

- Concentrate on specific focus areas for mixed-use development, via incentives, enforcement, gateway development, utility expansion, and destination development.
- Complete comprehensive review and revision of the zoning code.
- Maintain an inventory of available sites.
- Maintain a base of useful and compatible digital orthos to plan the future use in Norwalk and surrounding areas.
- Prioritize accessibility and connectivity to Norwalk's neighborhoods.
- Advocate and research the market for mid-income housing for young professionals.
- Reinvigorate the task force which had been focused on affordable housing.
- Compile information on housing assistance and related programs.
- Take steps to accommodate housing needs of the elderly and disabled
- Meet the needs of existing and projected new businesses and residences in the distribution of energy sources (electricity and natural gas, including appropriate renewable options) and water.
- Rebuild major arterial streets and widen connector and local streets where deemed necessary.
- Investigate and plan truck routes to improve traffic flow through and around the city.
- Redouble efforts to grow the local workforce.
- Attract young households.

THESE STRATEGIES:

Have a heavy focus on housing and population due to current and projected future conditions.

- Support the efforts of the Norwalk Public Library .
- Grow and develop strong children that will be the future leaders of the community.
- Support the development of a community center that will be large enough for all types and sizes of community meetings
- Research and work toward the development of affordable, accessible, and round-the-clock childcare facilities in Norwalk.

GOAL 4: BUILDING & MAINTAINING NORWALK'S BRAND

- Emphasize the restoration and preservation of existing properties,
- Preserve Norwalk's architectural past.
- Maximize the use of public and other accessible spaces throughout the community, with physical improvements and public programming.
- Improve parking conditions through wayfinding signage.
- Continue and expand the city's sidewalk repair and installation program.
- Develop consistent signage throughout Norwalk, including wayfinding and directional signs, trails, and gateway signage.
- Take ongoing steps to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. Make Norwalk more walkable.
- Support entrepreneurship.
- Develop attractive gateways at major entrances to the City.
- Implement a uniform design for wayfinding and trail signage with a logo identifying Norwalk.
- Promote tourism.
- Achieve effective city-wide promotion of events, organizations, and opportunities for citizen involvement and volunteerism.
- Establish a centralized contact point for downtown development.
- Maintain a relationship between the downtown and Summit Motorsports Park; seek opportunities for cross-promotion.
- Work toward the establishment of an Arts District.
- Incorporate the input of diverse groups.

THESE STRATEGIES:

Reiterate that Norwalk's brand is its historical Uptown District and Norwalk needs to lean into this heritage with signage and branding.

GOAL 5: STRONG FISCAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

- Promote the long-range development of the east side and utilities
- Promote the planned development of available land south of the US Route 20 bypass, primarily along or near the U.S. 250 corridor.
- Seek outside resources, as well as local sources of investment capital, when appropriate, to help implement any activity to address the above activities.
- Align this comprehensive plan with Norwalk's and/or Huron County's Comprehensive Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS).
- Research proactive and innovative financing and incentives, seek and obtain them for City use when warranted, and deploy them to maximize their benefit to Norwalk residents and to the City's housing stock.
- Explore the creative use of existing organizations, development tools, and resources to address housing quality, accessibility, and affordability needs through collaboration.
- Initiate and adhere to citywide capital improvements planning.
- Coordinate infrastructure updates with other municipal priorities, including the south side development plan, needs and plans of major businesses and institutions, and possible new or emerging priorities.
- Support and help implement the goals and objectives of the Huron County-Norwalk Airport comprehensive plan.
- When appropriate based on development goals and where fiscally feasible, participate in economic development projects.
- Periodically review Park and Recreation plans and consider potential for new activities or facilities
- Adhere to and promote the development plans of the Norwalk Park and Recreation Department.
- Support all local schools.
- Support the training and staffing needs of the Norwalk Police and Fire Departments and promote financial plans that can raise sufficient capital prior to the purchase of major items.
- Maintain and upgrade a county- and community-based disaster plan.
- Continue to support and facilitate the efforts of city departments to assist one another.

THESE STRATEGIES:

Ensure all other recommendations in the plan are feasible by using all resources at our disposal.

NORWALK 2035



**Heritage preserved.
Growth Achieved.**

