

2015

Economic Development Action Plan



City of Norwalk, CT





August 2015

Dear Colleagues:



Thanks to an enthusiastic and dedicated group of nearly 40 people from a wide variety of sectors -- including business, government, education, culture, tourism and the arts -- I am pleased to present Norwalk's Economic Development Action Plan. It is a living, dynamic document that we will update periodically, and use as a reference and guide in Board, Commission and Department Head meetings. Many individuals gave considerable time and expertise to assess business needs and identify actions that will make Norwalk an even better place to work, live, shop, play and dine. I am grateful for their time and hard work. I especially want to thank SCORE for facilitating the process, and Elizabeth Stocker, our Director of Economic Development, who coordinated it.

Norwalk is a New England maritime community with historic roots. Located in the heart of Fairfield County on Long Island Sound, the City welcomes large corporations, small businesses and entrepreneurs. Norwalk offers economic development expertise and a strong chamber of commerce. Business space ranges from sleek multi-story towers to historical buildings and new mixed-use waterfront developments in the heart of the downtown area. Tourist destinations, hotels, restaurants, and a strong tradition of arts and cultural activities round out this vibrant city.

Norwalk is planning for the future by capitalizing on its assets to attract and sustain business, create jobs, develop its workforce, and continuously improve the quality of life for all people. We will continue to partner with major corporations, entrepreneurs and small business owners who call Norwalk home, and reach out to those who might consider locating here. Our Economic Development Action Plan is designed to advance our macroeconomic development goals in a fast-changing digital age. We welcome you to come and see what the City of Norwalk is about!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harry W. Rilling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harry W. Rilling
Mayor of Norwalk

Vision

Norwalk is a Connecticut coastal community steeped in history, arts and innovation. Its stimulating lifestyle, attractive amenities and welcoming environment appeal to businesses of all sizes as well as residents and visitors of all generations and cultures.
Norwalk: where life meets opportunity in the digital age.



The Sheffield Island Lighthouse

Economic Development Action Plan

Goal 1. Support and encourage growth of established businesses; attract and welcome new businesses

KEY ACTIONS

- Establish a Business Retention and Expansion Program, engaging Norwalk's corporations, small businesses, and entrepreneurs.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Mayor and Economic Development Director.
 - Progress: The Economic Development Director has reached more than 300 businesses.
- Develop a strategic marketing plan for the City that includes a brand and implementation program.
 - Timeline: Second half of 2015 for branding, first half of 2016 for marketing.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director, Mayor.
 - Progress: Through a competitive process, we selected a consultant to create branding.
- Market Norwalk as a 21st Century city that is people and business friendly, with a vibrant commercial, retail and arts community.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director, commercial brokers, developers, commercial property owners.
 - Progress: The Economic Development Director continues to meet with commercial brokers, developers and realtors and is working with businesses to determine their space needs.



Merritt 7

- Implement a Red Carpet Process for business by reviewing and revising permitting, licensing, business approval regulations and procedures to make processes leaner and faster. Strengthen awareness of the economic development tie-in throughout City departments and emphasize a customer-service approach.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director, City Departments.
 - Progress: An Economic Development training session attended by City staff, board members, commissioners, and the public was held in April 2015.

The Economic Development Director serves on a number of inter-departmental committees to help coordinate initiatives.
The procedures initiated to expedite the Head of the Harbor development resulted in a model of the Red Carpet Process that will be implemented for business.

- Redesign the City website to reflect the City's brand, improve navigation and make it more business and user-friendly.
 - Timeline: First quarter of 2016.
 - Responsibility: IT Director, Economic Development Director, City Department Heads.
 - Progress: Funding has been allocated to hire a consultant.

- Assist business owners with site selection.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director.
 - Progress: The Economic Development Director is working with businesses to help find them Norwalk locations.



Norwalk's In-Water Boat Show

GOAL 2. Create an environment that encourages innovation among small businesses and entrepreneurs

KEY ACTIONS

- Create partnerships with business development and support organizations to provide resources for start-ups, entrepreneurs and small businesses in Norwalk.
 - Timeline: Immediate and ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Mayor, Economic Development Director, and Department Heads.
 - Progress: Ignite Norwalk, a meet-up group for Norwalk's entrepreneurs, has been formed and is active. Norwalk 2.0 and the Makers' Guild are partners.

- Guide small business owners and entrepreneurs through the permitting process (Red Carpet) acting as an advocate.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director, Zoning, Department of Public Works.
 - Progress: A number of small businesses have called for assistance and have been walked through the permitting process.



- Create and maintain a toolbox of resources - - such as counseling, funding and job training programs - - that helps small businesses expand and thrive in Norwalk. Promote and use social media to disseminate this information.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk Public Library.
 - Progress: A Small Business Day was held in fall 2014 highlighting resources and opportunities.
Free counseling sessions for entrepreneurs and small businesses are hosted at City Hall, Norwalk Libraries and the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce.
The Norwalk Economic Development Director added information on the City's webpage with links to critical resources.



GOAL 3. Leverage Norwalk's cultural, recreational, art and historic assets as economic drivers

KEY ACTIONS

- Seek funding to implement and market programs that enhance Norwalk's historical, recreational and cultural assets.

- Timeline: Ongoing.
- Responsibility: Grants Coordinator, Arts Commission members, Economic Development Director, Recreation and Parks Department.
- Progress: National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Historic Preservation grants were obtained. The NEA grant promoted Norwalk's Works Progress Administration



(WPA) art and trained docents. The preservation grant will help restore historic SoNo houses.

Private organizations have been successful in developing initiatives and obtaining support for them.

The Arts Commission completed an inventory of culture and tourism assets and developed a policy for exhibiting, maintaining, and storing Norwalk's public art.

The Norwalk Museum is being recreated within the City Hall campus.

- Market Norwalk's coastal assets and related recreational opportunities.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.

- Responsibility: Economic Development Director, Recreation and Parks Department, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce.
- Work with GGP to establish a Norwalk Visitors' Center in a prominent location inside the SoNo Collection.
 - Timeline: Immediate and ongoing
 - Responsibility: Common Council, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, GGP.
- Establish an annual tourism summit to plan and coordinate the City's culture and tourism activities and maximize their impact.
 - Timeline: First quarter, 2016.
 - Responsibility: Economic Development Director, Common Council, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk museums and tourist destinations, Director of Recreation and Parks, Norwalk's hospitality industry.



IMAX Theater at the Maritime Aquarium

GOAL 4. Maintain and enhance the assets of Norwalk's business areas and neighborhoods

KEY ACTIONS

- Improve the quality of Norwalk's commercial districts to attract businesses, residents and visitors.

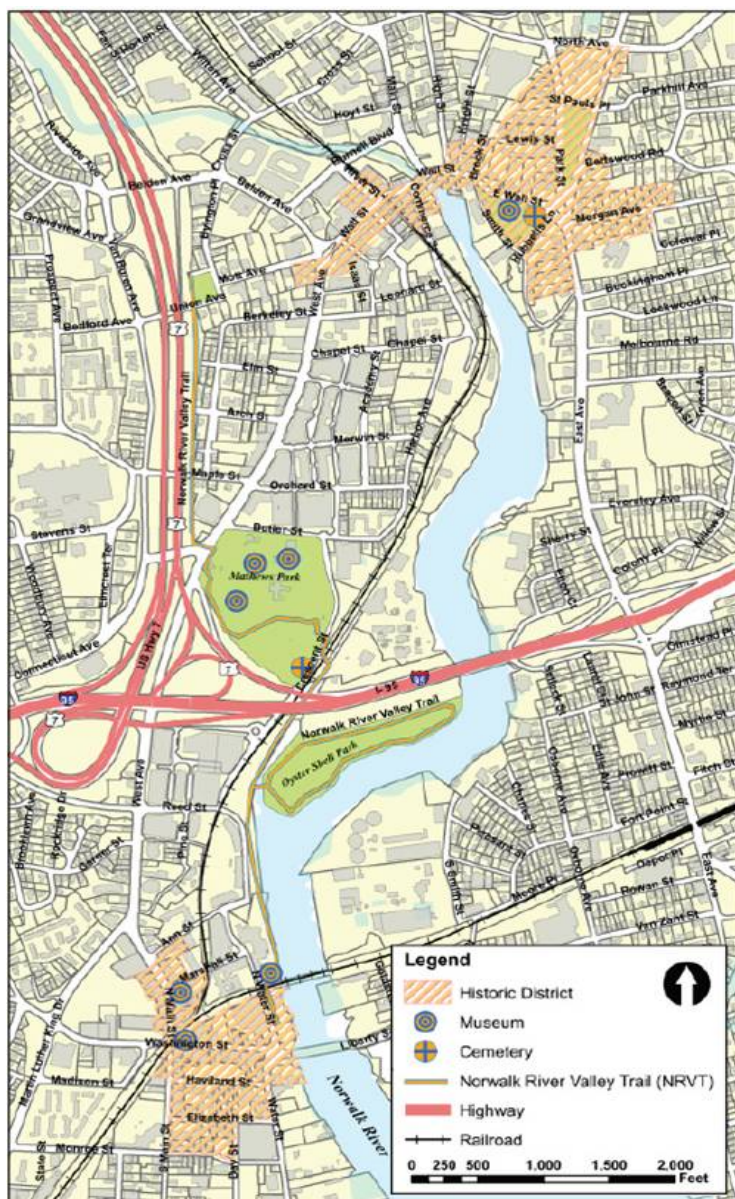
- Timeline: Ongoing.
- Responsibility: Mayor, DPW, Neighborhood Improvement Coordinator, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, Neighborhood Associations, property owners, tenants.
- Progress: Mayor Rilling instituted the Clean City Initiative in spring 2015, which includes street sweeping and additional crews to maintain attractive, litter-free commercial districts.



- Implement business-friendly parking strategies, policies and practices.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Parking Authority.
 - Progress: The City initiated a parking app that offers access to real-time information on open parking spaces.
- Continue to promote and implement Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in SoNo.
 - Timeline: Ongoing
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, Norwalk Planning and Zoning Commissions, Common Council.

- Progress: A TOD District Redevelopment Plan has been drafted by the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency and has been referred to the Planning Commission and the Mayor's Zoning Task Force.
- Create and implement wayfinding signs and information in Norwalk Center/SoNo. Coordinate and support via the City website, parking apps, and a communications program.
 - Timeline: Second quarter 2016.
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, Department of Public Works, Norwalk Parking Authority.
 - Progress: Funding has been allocated, and a consultant has been chosen to develop wayfinding.
- Support the creation of Special Service Districts in SoNo and West Ave/Wall Street to manage aesthetics, market these areas and strengthen their attractiveness to visitors, investors and residents.
 - Timeline: Immediate.
 - Responsibility: SoNo and Center Task Forces, property and business owners, Redevelopment Agency, Common Council.
- Create a focused marketing plan for key commercial districts: Wall Street/Norwalk Center, West Avenue corridor, SoNo, 95/7, and Merritt 7.
 - Timeline: Second half of 2016 and ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Property owners and their consultants, Economic Development Director, Redevelopment Agency, Special Service Districts.
- Work with owners of underperforming buildings in Norwalk Center to transform them into assets. Promote the adjacent Public Library, Court House and Post Office as cultural and civic anchors for this area.
 - Timeline: By the third quarter of 2018.
 - Responsibility: Mayor, Economic Development Director, Redevelopment Agency, business owners, Director of Library, Library Board of Directors.
 - Progress: The Mayor, Economic Development Director and the Executive Director of the Redevelopment Agency have met with property owners to discuss prospective tenants.

- Use incentives such as Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) and façade improvement to attract business to the Wall Street area.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Mayor, Common Council, State Legislators, Economic Development Director, and Executive Director of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency.



GOAL 5. Enhance the multi-modal transportation infrastructure throughout Norwalk and encourage its use

KEY ACTIONS

- Improve connectivity among Wall Street, West Avenue, 95/7, and the SoNo Train Station via a trolley system.
 - Timeline: Immediate and ongoing
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Transit District, Planning Commission, Common Council, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, Developers/Owners, State of CT.
 - Progress: Proposed circulator and trolley routes have been drafted. A federal TIGER grant has been submitted.

- Support and expand multi-modal transportation initiatives offered by the State of CT, the City of Norwalk, the MTA, and Norwalk Transit District, including local and interstate trains, buses, walking and bike trails.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Transit District, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, Zoning Commission, Planning Commission, Bike/Walk Task Force, State of CT, Common Council.
 - Progress: The Common Council allocated funding to develop the Norwalk portion of the Norwalk River Valley Trail. A proposal has been submitted for funding to improve bike and pedestrian safety and additional funding is being pursued.

- Improve the efficiency of Norwalk's bus system. Examine bus routes and technology upgrades and implement changes to support the needs of residents and commuters. Coordinate bus schedules with train schedules.
 - Timeline: Immediate and ongoing
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Transit District, Planning Commission, Common Council, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency.
 - Progress: Norwalk Transit District is testing new technology.

GOAL 6. Encourage ongoing cooperation between business and the Norwalk School system

KEY ACTION

- Encourage additional businesses to partner with the Norwalk Public Schools, Norwalk ACTS, and Norwalk Community College.
 - Timeline: Ongoing.
 - Responsibility: Norwalk Public Schools, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Mayor, Economic Development Director, Norwalk Community College, business owners, and State Department of Education.
 - Progress: The Norwalk Public Schools, Norwalk Community College and IBM created P-Tech, Connecticut's first Pathways in Technology Early College High School, to prepare students for careers in technology.
Briggs Academy has become Norwalk Pathways Academy at Briggs, renamed to reflect a close partnership with Norwalk Community College and a strong career emphasis.



Norwalk Community College

Appendix

Profile, City of Norwalk

Overview: Norwalk is the sixth-largest city in the state of Connecticut, and a state-designated enterprise community. Located in Fairfield County on the coast of Long Island Sound, Norwalk is approximately 40 miles northeast of New York City. It is a demographically diverse community with 85,603 residents. It covers 23 square miles, and contains 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, a community college, a hospital, more than 100 places of worship, and over 3,000 businesses.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors recently recognized Norwalk as one of the top 10 most livable small cities in its nationwide City Livability Awards. Google named Norwalk the 2014 eCity of Connecticut for using technology to drive the local economy and help businesses link with customers.

Business Profile: Norwalk's urban core is undergoing a dramatic transformation with the construction of mixed-use developments, including housing, offices, retail establishments and restaurants. Major Norwalk developments include: Wall Street Place, Waypointe, Head of the Harbor, Ironworks, The Pearl, and a major expansion of Norwalk Hospital. General Growth Properties purchased the 95/7 site to develop The SoNo Collection, a retail center, hotel, and public realm which Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom have committed to anchor.

Norwalk is home to many notable businesses, corporate and regional headquarters, including Datto, Diageo, Dooney and Bourke, Financial Accounting and Standards Board (FASB), Pepperidge Farm, MBI, MetLife, EMCOR Group, FactSet, Media Storm, Priceline.com, Xerox, GE Capital, Frontier Communications and Stew Leonard's.

Redevelopment projects include a \$30 million Choice Neighborhood grant awarded to Norwalk Housing Authority and geared toward developing high-quality mixed-income housing that will be responsive to the needs of the surrounding neighborhood. New initiatives include redevelopment of Ryan Park, improved street lighting, a creative public art installation, a residential and commercial façade improvement program, a multi-family preservation program, a new police programming vehicle and police bicycles for use in South Norwalk.

Labor Force: Norwalk has a labor force of 51,422, which has shown consistent growth. In July 2015, the unemployment rate was 4.6%, a significant decrease from January of 2015, when it was 5.9%. Over 89% of the city's workforce has a high school diploma, and 41.3% have earned a B.S. degree, with 15.6% of the workforce having completed graduate or professional school

Government and Public Services: The Mayor is elected and serves for two years; Norwalk's Common Council is an elected legislative body of 15, also serving for a two-year term. The City of Norwalk has historically maintained an AAA bond rating, the highest rating possible. Norwalk is one of fewer than 30 AAA-rated Connecticut municipalities and had its rating reaffirmed by all three credit rating agencies in July of this year.

Norwalk's Economic Development office works closely with the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations

to offer information, support and services to corporations, small businesses and entrepreneurs, and links them with resources and incentive programs to facilitate business growth. The City is streamlining processes for business development.

Quality of life initiatives designed to support businesses and residents include Norwalk's Clean City initiative, operated in partnership with the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency to keep business districts and the urban core attractive and litter-free. Norwalk's Click and Request system allows businesses and residents to report issues such as litter, potholes, drainage, and other concerns from their cell phones or the City's webpage. The report, including location, is automatically sent to the appropriate City department for resolution. Progress of the request can be tracked through this application.

Transportation: Norwalk is accessible by car, bus, train and boat. I 95 and the Merritt Parkway cross the City and have several interchanges within City limits. The major north-south artery is Route 7, which connects I 95 in Norwalk to I 84 in Danbury. Norwalk has three Metro-North train stations on the New Haven line plus a fourth station in the Merritt 7 business area on Metro North's Danbury Branch line. The Norwalk Transit District operates WHEELS, a bus system that includes the inter-town Coastal Link, a link to Merritt 7 corporate park, cross-town services, and designated commuter shuttles. There is easy access to LaGuardia, Kennedy, and Westchester airports.

The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency is recommending the adoption of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) initiatives, emphasizing transit connectivity, workforce housing, and redevelopment that creates a walkable city.

Education: Norwalk students participate in a wide variety of Advanced Placement and Honors classes. Jefferson Science Magnet School won the 2014 National Blue Ribbon School Award. The Center for Global Studies at Brien McMahon High School offers an international studies program that includes Arabic, Chinese and Japanese. Briggs Academy has become Norwalk Pathways Academy at Briggs, renamed to reflect a close partnership with Norwalk Community College and a strong career emphasis.

Norwalk Public Schools work with corporate and non-profit organizations to build innovative programs. Current partnerships include GE Capital, Norwalk Children's Foundation, Fairfield County Community Foundation, and the Norwalk Education Foundation. Norwalk Public Schools partnered with the Connecticut Department of Education, Norwalk Community College and IBM to create Connecticut's first P-TECH model school. This initiative ensures that graduates gain the skills and experience they need to step into available jobs in information technology, while earning an associate degree.

Norwalk ACTS is a diverse partnership of over 100 civic leaders, educators and organizations working collectively to achieve the mission of enriching and improving the lives and futures of all Norwalk's children, cradle to career.

Recreation and Tourism: Norwalk's beaches, islands, parks, historic sites, and arts and cultural activities make the City a destination for tourists from Connecticut and out of state. Boating, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, bird watching and camping are available.

Annual events such as the In-Water Boat Show and the Oyster Festival draw crowds. Additional Norwalk attractions include the Maritime

Aquarium, the Sheffield Island Lighthouse, Stepping Stones Museum, the 62-room Matthews-Lockwood Mansion, the Gallaher Estate Mansion, the Mill Hill Historic Park and Museum, the Norwalk Symphony and Norwalk Youth Symphony, and the Silvermine Arts Guild. Norwalk's Recreation and Parks Department maintains 1,215 acres of grounds and property as well as the city's boat launching ramps, comfort stations, and boat moorings.

In summary, the City of Norwalk has a strong government, rich natural resources and many assets to offer business, residents and tourists. The City's ongoing progress to enhance all sectors ensures that its economic future is bright.

The Workgroup performed a SWOT Analysis to help identify Norwalk’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats across multiple sectors. The results of that analysis informed the Plan and are noted below.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Coastline and Harbor • Transportation Network • Diversity • Education System • Stable and Honest Government • AAA Bond Rating 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-Year Mayoral Terms • City Administrative Structure • Educational Cost-Sharing (ECS) Formula • Various Quality of Life Issues • Business Climate Concerns • Public Engagement • Educational Disparities • Infrastructure/Transportation
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Education • Workforce • Transportation • Arts and Culture • Development • Diverse Business Space • Tourism 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Downturn • Lack of Funding • Unwillingness to Invest

Workgroup

Name	Board/Commission/Organization
Alexander, Jeffrey	Commerce Packaging Corp
Alvord, Hal	Former Director, Norwalk Department of Public Works
Astrom, Torgny	Chair, Norwalk Planning Commission
Baxendale, Brian	SCORE (Planning Facilitator), Mayor's Business Advisory Council
Berman, Peter I, Ph.D	Financial Management Consultants
Bryant, Tod	Heritage Resources
Carey, Harry	AT&T, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk ACTS, Mayor's Business Advisory Council
Clark, Jim	Chair, Norwalk Board of Estimate and Taxation
Collins, Bill	SoNo Taskforce; Former Mayor, City of Norwalk
Dixon, Irene	Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Mayor's Business Advisory Council, Seaport Association, Fire Commissioner
Greene, Mike	Director, Norwalk Planning and Zoning Department
Hempstead, Doug	Majority Leader and Former President, Norwalk Common Council; Chair of Planning Committee
Hickey, Yvonne	Xerox Corporation, Mayor's Business Advisory Council
Ireland, Bill	Chief Building Inspector, Norwalk Code Enforcement Dept.
Kydes, John	Energy/Environment Taskforce; Norwalk Common Council
Langley, Latanya	Diageo North America, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency Commissioner, Mayor's Business Advisory Council
Levinson, David	President, Norwalk Community College
Lightfield, Jackie	Norwalk 2.0, Center Norwalk Taskforce
McGuire, Michael,	The Austin McGuire Co.
Mobilia, Dorothy	Former Norwalk Zoning Commissioner
Mocciae, Mike	Director, Norwalk Recreation and Parks Department
Morque, Kim	Spinnaker Real Estate
Musante, Ed	President, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce
Rich, Tom	F.D. Rich Company
Rilling, Harry W.	Mayor of Norwalk
Rivera, Dr. Manuel	Former Superintendent, Norwalk Public Schools
Valenzisi, Ralph	Chief of Technology, Innovation & Partnership, Norwalk Public Schools
Schulman, Lou	Former Director, Norwalk Transit District
Scofield, Ron	Assistant Manager, Third Taxing District
Serrano, Felix	Chair, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency
Sheehan, Tim	Executive Director, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency
Simms, Travis	Norwalk Common Council, Minority Leader
Smith, Jim	General Manager, Third Taxing District
Stocker, Elizabeth	Director, Norwalk Economic Development
Sutton, Mike	Former Chair, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Benefits Planning Services
Toni, Patricia	Norwalk Hospital
Wallerstein, Susan	Chair, Norwalk Arts Commission
Webber, Alan	M.F. DiScala & Company

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