CITY OF NORWALK
CITYWIDE PLAN - PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT 2019-2029

PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
January 15, 2019
Creating the plan with the public

- Oversight Committee
- Interviews and focus groups
- Citywide Visioning Forum, November 17, 2017
- Nine neighborhood district workshops, July – September 2017
- Four topic-based workshops, May 2017
- Youth and Latino outreach workshops, May-June 2017
- Opportunities for digital participation
- Public review of the draft plan
State master plan requirements

✓ Physical, social, economic and governmental conditions, needs, and trends
✓ Affordable housing and economic diversity
✓ Drinking water supply protections
✓ Energy efficient development patterns
✓ Renewable energy
✓ Sea level rise scenarios
✓ Land use and density
✓ State and regional Plans of Conservation & Development
✓ Consistency with the municipal coastal program to restore, protect, and reduce pollution in Long Island Sound

CGS Ch. 126, sec. 8-23
How is this plan different from the last plan?

Focus on…

- Developing a culture of planning for the entire city
- Establishing systems and system plans to support data-driven and coordinated decision-making
- Stronger design standards and guidelines for development
- More organized communication and information-sharing with residents, business, and others to enhance transparency and community involvement
An ambitious vision guides the plan

• By 2029, the City of Norwalk has become a national example of a small city that boasts a thriving and dynamic economy; varied housing choices for all income levels; many safe and convenient ways to get around the city, including walking and biking; connected, accessible and beautiful open spaces; and an active and resilient coastline. Norwalk is the center of art, culture, and entertainment for our region. We combine the character of a historic New England community on the coast of Long Island Sound with a thriving city in the country’s largest metropolitan area.
An ambitious vision guides the plan

- Diversified economy
- Center of culture and entertainment
- Community of racial and ethnic diversity
- Housing choice
- Transportation choice
- Green and blue network of open spaces
- Protection and enhancement of the environment

- Norwalk Harbor as a center of water-based activities on the Sound
- Community of life-long learning
- Energy- and resource-efficiency
- Climate change adaptation
- Well-maintained, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure and public services
- Cost-effective city government
THE BIG PICTURE

Livability
Prosperity
Equity
Sustainability
Resilience
THE BIG PICTURE: Trends

• **Generational transition** from Baby Boomers to Millennials and Generation Z
• **Modest population growth**, approximately 0.5% over 10 years
• **Most households contain one or two people**
• **Increased diversity since 2000** – growth in Latino and Asian population
• **Some 41% of employed residents work outside the city** in Stamford, New York City, and smaller communities
• **Income and education disparities** within the population
• **Commercial/industrial share of the Grand List** approximately 20.5% in recent years
THE BIG PICTURE: Strengths

- Proximity to New York City and booming metro economy
- Waterfront/coastal location and identity
- Educated and higher income population
- Higher-paying economic sectors
- Active private development investment and recent growth
- Public school improvements
- Historic character and intact walkable urban areas
- Strengths in diversity:
  - economy
  - racial and ethnic
  - housing and neighborhoods
  - landscape
THE BIG PICTURE: Weaknesses

- Traffic congestion and limited multimodal transportation
- Relatively high real estate and land costs for business
- Empty storefronts in Norwalk Center
- Affordable housing needs
- Fragmentation:
  - Four activity centers – Merritt 7, Norwalk Center, SONO, SONO Collection Mall
  - Multiple identities: taxing districts and neighborhoods
  - Municipal government silos
  - Lack of system plans
THE BIG PICTURE: Threats

• Traffic **congestion** and limited state transportation funding
• **Walk Bridge project impacts** to local businesses and the harbor
• Enhanced **neighbor town centers now compete with Norwalk restaurant and other attractions**
• **Changing markets for office space**
• Desire by some to restrict residential development in the urban core
THE BIG PICTURE: Opportunities

• Mixed use and TOD in South Norwalk and East Norwalk
• Stronger connections among activity centers
• More robust tourism economy
• More waterfront activity
• Attract tech and creative economy start-ups and niche industrial users
• Develop more workforce housing
• More regional collaboration (“Fairfield Five”)
Top priorities for the ten-year plan

- Rewrite and modernize the zoning code to achieve the plan’s goals.
- Establish an economic development office and implement an effective economic development strategy.
- Make the City website more “customer-friendly”—up to date, organized, efficient, and transparent.
- Implement the School Facilities Master Plan.
Top priorities for the ten-year plan

Prepare and begin implementing the following studies and plans:

✓ Industrial zones and activities
✓ Housing Policy Plan and Strategy, including both market-rate and affordable housing
✓ Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan to include critical infrastructure like the Wastewater Treatment Plant
✓ Land use/transportation corridor plans, including a market analysis, for the Main Street/Main Avenue Corridor first, then Connecticut and Westport Avenues
✓ Parks, Open Space, Trails, and Recreation System Plan
✓ Historic Preservation Plan
Strategic priorities

Mixed-use activity centers:
• regional
• employment
• entertainment centers

Robust connections:
• multimodal facilities
• greenway and blueway routes

New housing and economic opportunities on corridors
• Route 1
• Main Street/Avenue

Coastal and environmental focus
• protected open space
• water quality
• sea level rise
• access
ACHIEVING THE VISION:
TEN PRIORITY CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES
FOR QUALITY OF LIFE, ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY
Proactive economic development to grow jobs and the Grand List

• Strong, experienced, economic development leadership; municipal and regional coordination
• Market Norwalk as a business location
• Business retention and attraction program
• Small business and entrepreneurial initiative
• Strategy for light and niche industry
• Tourism strategy
Enhanced transportation choice and connectivity.

- Multimodal Level of Service standard and Complete Streets Policy
- Land use decisions that support transit, walking, biking
- Innovative transit options
- Access management in major corridors
- “Right-sized” parking
- Advocate for regional solutions
Norwalk Public Schools as the best city school system in the state.

- Facilities upgrades and improvements
- Continue NPS strategic planning
- Continue performance improvements
- Publicize NPS performance, improvements and benefits to multiple audiences
Modernized and user-friendly land use regulations

- Adopt general land use principles consistent with the vision to guide land use decision making
- Modernize and rewrite the zoning ordinance using best practices and user-friendly organization and layout
- Design standards and guidelines for mixed-use and non-residential development – major corridors, major centers, village districts
The Norwalk parks and recreation system as the best city system in the state.

- Develop an integrated Parks, Open Space, Trails and Recreation System Plan.
- Give priority to completing the Norwalk River Valley Trail.
Enhanced protection of environmental resources.

- Water quality improvement and flood mitigation through green infrastructure and low-impact development
- Tree canopy improvements
- Balance environmental protection, water-dependent uses, public access, and recreation in the coastal management area
Housing policy and affordable housing solutions.

• Housing Plan including data analysis, policy framework, affordable housing strategy,

• Diverse housing types for urban core, transit locations, mixed-use clusters on corridors, village districts
Leadership in sustainability and resilience

• Climate Action Plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions
• Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan
Enhanced preservation of historic resources

- Historic Preservation Plan
- One or more Local Historic Districts
- Heritage tourism initiative
A higher education activity for Norwalk Center

Actively recruit a higher education presence for Norwalk Center, such as:....

- NCC downtown education center
- Business training
- Arts program
- Start up incubator
- Multi-institution collaborative
Performance: putting the plan to work

- Annual public review of implementation progress
- Incorporate the plan into city government operational and capital budgets, departmental work plans, etc.
- Enhance transparency and customer service in city government: online services and data
- Measure and communicate government performance