



**A
Comprehensive
Economic
Development
Plan**
for the
**City of Norwich,
Connecticut**

Release 2.0

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Foreword to Release 2.0

(June 2009)

Six months ago, I released the first draft of this Comprehensive Economic Development plan for public comment. Since that time, volunteers and I have distributed nearly 5,000 surveys to Norwich area residents asking for their ideas about how to focus City Hall's efforts to improve the local economy.

We asked for feedback and we got it. Norwich residents have a lot to say and a lot of great ideas! To date I have received direct and detailed feedback from hundreds of citizens and business owners, and their suggestions are reflected in this latest version of the plan.

In some ways, the results of our inquiries are not surprising. The survey confirms some of what we knew even before we started; people want local government to work better and cost less. On the other hand, some of the individual results and suggestions have been both surprising and helpful.

Looking at the data, the following consensus points have emerged:

- **Property taxes are too high.** Taxpayers are *deeply* concerned about their property taxes, and we are losing residents to surrounding towns because our tax rate is too high. However, the public also understands that the best way to reduce residential taxes is to promote a healthy business community. If we can fill the storefronts on Main Street and elsewhere, we can reduce the tax burden on residents.
- **Retail!** More than anything else, Norwich residents want more retail. The city government must make an absolutely concerted effort to attract retail stores to downtown, the Norwichtown mall, and all across the city's business districts. Every single day, the next Mayor should be on the phone with national chain stores as well as up-and-coming retailers looking to expand their businesses. Attracting businesses to Norwich should be the Mayor's highest priority.
- **History is huge.** Norwich residents are rightfully very proud of the city's historic and architectural assets. The historic charm is one of the biggest reasons people choose to live in Norwich, and many believe that Norwich's history and stock of ancient buildings could serve as the basis for a thriving tourism industry if the city were cleaned up and marketed properly. Norwich's history and architecture are truly unique and we need to preserve and promote both.

- **Blight has got to go.** We need to eliminate blighted buildings and pick up the road-side trash that keeps people from seeing the beauty of our city. I am proposing tax incentives for property owners who voluntarily clean-up their properties. I am also proposing that the city develop a volunteer corps that will work with city agencies to conduct a street-by-street, neighborhood-by-neighborhood beautification campaign. We can't sell our historic charm to the outside world until we polish things up first.
- **Style matters.** As we bring in new businesses we need to make sure that they "blend in" with the local architecture. We need to develop and maintain a new Norwich look and feel that builds on the best of our past. Mayor Art Lathrop use to say "build nothing ugly." We need to get back to this common sense approach to development.
- **The Arts (and Crafts) as business.** Most Norwich residents don't frequent the art galleries and theaters downtown because they don't feel a social or cultural connection to those institutions. One commenter put it this way: *"Downtown needs more crafts you can buy and more popular things, less elitist things."* Next to the pubs, the existing arts galleries and theatres are the largest draw into the downtown neighborhood. However, if the arts are going to support a revitalization of the downtown, there must be a greater variety of arts and crafts offerings. Regular entertainment is also a very big deal, and it is the key to putting the "feet on the street" that are necessary for a retail expansion. People want movies as well as plays; pop concerts as well as organ recitals; public art as well as art galleries.
- **Where do you want to eat?** Norwich doesn't have enough restaurants to meet local demand. People want to be able to go to a Restaurant District and choose between various types of food.
- **Public safety.** People do not feel particularly safe in their own neighborhoods or the downtown. Fear of crime is a significant impediment to retail and restaurant development in the downtown. We must make our streets safe.
- **People love the harbor.** Boat rides, paddle boats, small sail boats and other water-based activities would attract Norwich residents and may encourage non-residents to visit the harbor area. The City should either recruit vendors who could operate water-activity businesses or invest in small, fee-based, city-run programs (such as paddle boats during the summer months).
- **Transit service is important.** I was surprised by the number of survey comments we received regarding bus service. For many residents, transit

service is a vital connection to work, the grocery store, friends, and family. Service in the region is not adequate and needs to be improved.

- **The public wants us to change the way City Hall does business!**
People want local officials to make rational, fact-based decisions, not personality-based judgments. There is a broad and general consensus that the city government is disorganized and city efforts are poorly coordinated. However, the public isn't just complaining about the problem; they are willing able to be part of the solution. They want more public hearings, and they are willing to volunteer to make improvements. There's a real energy just waiting to be tapped, but people need to feel safe in sharing their ideas, and they need to learn it's OK to have their ideas modified or added to. We as a community need to learn how to talk to one another without making it a winner-take-all-exercise.

There is so much good energy in this city that is just waiting to be focused on finding solutions to our common problems. Hearing your feedback over these last few months has made me more convinced than ever that our first priority going forward is that we need to learn how to get the public involved in constructive conversations. If we can do that then WE CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING.

I hope as you read Release 2.0 of this plan you are inspired to share your thoughts, your ideas and your energies. As with the first version of the plan, there are comment sheets at the end of every section of this plan to help you join the conversation.

Thanks for helping to build a better Norwich!



Bob Zarnetske
June 2009
Norwich, Connecticut

Introduction

Local government cannot solve all of our problems. Healthy economies come from private enterprise, not from government. The goal of this economic development plan isn't to "fix" Norwich's economy.

The goal of this plan is to identify some of the ways city government can work with citizens and community & business leaders to create the conditions under which private enterprise can thrive, and local individuals can make a good living for themselves.

The central idea behind this plan is that City Hall can help identify and fill gaps when local businesses, families, and individuals may not have sufficient information, time, expertise, or access to financial resources to make good ideas work.

And while the great "invisible hand" of supply and demand usually promotes the efficient allocation of resources, as we have discovered recently about the national and international economies, *markets aren't perfect* – they rely on information and analysis.

It's hard to sell local real estate opportunities to investors in New York if they've never heard of Norwich, and it's hard to sell a great burrito if you don't know how to make one.

In some cases, just having right information can help local businesses succeed. In other cases, the community may have to recruit entrepreneurs to fill niches that aren't currently being served.

This plan is based on the belief that local government can do four things individuals and small firms in the private sector *cannot* do by themselves:

- 1) Develop and implement fiscal and tax policies that promote the greatest long- and short-term benefits to our local economy and city residents;
- 2) Manage public money wisely to maximize the benefit to the local economy.
- 3) Facilitate the exchange of information, the development of skills, and the sharing of ideas that promote private investment and support rational economic decisions by individuals and businesses in the City;
- 4) Regulate private development and business activity to prevent harm to our community.

Following the principles I've outlined in this plan, I believe we can create the conditions that will allow Norwich residents in every neighborhood to become more prosperous.

We're all in this together. Real estate values, crime rates, school performance – the overall quality of life for *each* of us – depend upon the success of **all** of us.

This document is a work in progress. I've been fortunate, together with many selfless volunteers, to visit the various villages that comprise Norwich, sit in people's living rooms and front porches, and listen to what they want for themselves and for their families. The more I have that chance to listen, the more I hear a symphony of your hopes, dreams, and desires. Some of what I've heard has changed how I regard some aspects of economic development, while other's thoughts have also confirmed, in many instances, how I should approach this process.

What you are reading is a set of ideas that will be continuously in transition—a set of ideas that should be talked about, debated, refined, and reformulated, time and time again. Plans like these should not be static, and they should not be devised in the backrooms of City Hall's "politics as usual" environment or only by city officials; they should include the good ideas of citizens throughout the community who have a vested interest in the success of our city.

I deeply appreciate the help I've received so far. This document reflects the energy of people from throughout the city – Democrats and Republicans, business owners and big company managers, members of the arts community and history buffs, people with lots of money and people with less. The generosity of all who have worked with me has confirmed my heart-felt belief that broad, community-wide, collaboration is most productive way to run a city.

My goal, by November 2009, is to have a well-developed consensus that can be implemented as the new City Council and Mayor take office. This Economic Development Plan, and that consensus, will serve as a reference and a guide for the city's efforts and activities over the next several years.

We can, and must, work together, because that's how we will produce results!



Bob Zarnetske
December 2008
Norwich, Connecticut

SECTION ONE:

The Mayor's direct role in economic development

Overview

Under Chapter V, Section 2 of the Norwich City Charter, the Mayor is responsible for initiating activities that will improve local economic conditions and is charged with developing policies and coordinating the city's efforts to work with businesses, entrepreneurs, and real estate developers.

The Mayor's job is to be a liaison between City Hall and those trying to do business in the city. The Mayor should encourage business development by being the city's business-friendly face to the world and by being an effective advocate for the business community before state and federal officials.

The Mayor has no legal authority over the day-to-day operations of the city government. The *City Manager*, **not the Mayor**, is responsible for administering local government programs. The city's employees report to, and are accountable to, the City Manager.

However, under the Charter, the Mayor serves as "the general advocate for public policy of the City of Norwich." As the city's general policy advocate, the Mayor is responsible for monitoring the conduct of city business and proposing changes in how this business is done.

Our city council members are part-time citizen-legislators. They don't have offices in City Hall; they're paid but \$100 a month; they receive no project funding, and they simply don't have the resources to watch what's going on within the city from day to day.

The Mayor, by comparison, has an office in City Hall, a full-time secretary, and an office budget, so the Mayor's position is one from which good policies can be developed. The Mayor can, and should, communicate daily with the city manager. The Mayor should also be fully versed in the principles and laws of government administration so as to be able to make inquiries, suggestions, and policy proposals to promote transparency, honesty, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Its imperative the Mayor be credible – that he, or she, project an intelligent, honest, and professional image of the city. The Mayor's word should be the city's bond, so the Mayor has to know what can and cannot be promised.

The Mayor must know the laws that constrain city action, the economic forces that drive development, and the desires of the city's citizens that ultimately determine whether a project or business plan will meet the needs of our community.

Strategies

The Mayor's office isn't the apex of a pyramid; it's a **hub**, a central point for the gathering and distribution of information about the local economy, business opportunities & challenges, and government programs (local, state and federal) beneficial to local entrepreneurs and potential investors everywhere.

The Mayor needs to be able to:

- 1) Listen to citizens, business leaders and potential developers;
- 2) Continuously learn about the needs of residents and the business community;
- 3) Conduct market research to help identify opportunities for the city and its business community;
- 4) Using the threads gathered from listening for and to the stakeholders, develop a narrative about the Norwich economy that creates confidence and inspires investment; and
- 5) Advocate for policies to improve the likely success of businesses and the community.

What can we do?

1) Develop local economic and social indicators – Prepare quantifiable measures of the community's quality of life (economic, environmental, social, and political) and update them in a published annual report that measures the success or failure of development policies. Understanding whether policies are working is the *critical* first step in deciding whether to continue, modify, or abandon those policies. In the 1980s and '90s, this approach helped Oregon policymakers establish what Oregonians "cherished" most about their state and helped produce successful government policies that met the needs and expectations of Oregon residents.

2) Develop inventories of economic assets, including special skill sets, throughout the city. We should gather better data and information about assets in the region, especially un- or underused economic inputs like unemployed labor, vacant land, abandoned buildings, and idle machinery.

When I was City Manager, I initiated the development of an inventory of city-owned property. We produced a geographic information system (GIS) database with this information and could map where all city-owned land is located. We should expand on that effort to include other valuable assets.

3) Evaluate all the subsidies given by the city in the last twenty-five years to businesses (grants, loans, guarantees, tax abatements, capital improvements, TIFs, or bond

issues), and catalogue which went to local businesses; which went to out-of-town firms, and which produced the desired results we were looking for.

4) Develop a community prospectus – a booklet with the latest information about Norwich – indicators, assets, and imports, as well as other inventories noted below, to strategically identify business opportunities with the greatest benefit for the community.

5) Establish a “Mayor’s Award for Business Excellence and Innovation,” based on well-measured contributions to the local economy. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to evaluate the performance of all businesses in the city, and award a special seal to any firm that is not only locally owned but also a good performer with workers, consumers, and the environment.

6) Streamline the permit and approval process by having a business advocate literally walk prospective businesses through the process so that less time and money is spent opening the doors of a new business.

7) Ensure the city is fair in the uniform application of clear, rational, and understandable rules. Investors don’t like to do business on a handshake and a slap on the back, and they don’t want to be subjected to the whims of local politics or local politicians. Accomplished investors want to know what the rules are *before* they start, and they want to know that the outcome will be if they follow the rules. We need to eliminate the informality of our current procedures wherever they are unclear.

8) Expand the city’s World Wide Web presence. While a number of agencies, to include the Mayor’s office, Rose City Renaissance, and others all have websites, ***none*** are the exclusive marketing tool for those who seek goods and/or services in Norwich. In today’s ever-expanding digital marketplace, it is imperative that an attractive, informative city website be the cornerstone of our marketing efforts.
Being “digital” is now an economic development issue.

A continuously growing number of people rely on the Internet for product information and shopping, and more and more make their purchases there every day. Some of these “net-i-zens” are potential new neighbors, and *we want to attract them!* They’re smart, educated, inquisitive buyers, looking for someplace unique for their next home.

Today, “Googling” and “being Googled” is a part of the making of nearly every major business decision. Our image as a community depends, in large part, on what people see when they Google “Norwich, Connecticut.” We need to make sure that what people find is helpful and promotes the image we want them to have.

We should also develop foreign language versions of our municipal website. Norwich Public Utilities, NPU, has already done this for their site.

9) Continue the Mayor's Round Table discussions and expand participation to include the most successful business leaders in the city. Articulate and implement a formal plan with milestones and benchmarks to measure the progress of the process to effectively monitor and manage change when needed.

10) Help Norwich policymakers understand the operations, needs, and market conditions impacting Norwich's largest firms.

11) Establish an annual big firm awareness day to highlight the importance of these corporate residents to the community.

12) Establish a visiting scholar program at Three Rivers Community College—invite academic experts to discuss market and social issues effecting Norwich's businesses—large and small.

13) Work with the City Council, the Norwich Public Utility Board of Commissioners, and the professional staff of NPU to realize NPU's full economic potential. NPU's status as a public entity keenly focused on improving the quality of life for Norwich residents presents a huge opportunity for the city's economy. Unlike nearly every other community in America, we can control our energy future.

We should encourage NPU to produce more electricity locally rather than buying from outside sources. If NPU were to construct more local photovoltaic systems, we could reduce our reliance on out-of-town (and out of country) energy and also create jobs (for photovoltaic technicians, for example).

The key, of course, is to figure out where the break-even points are and to phase expansion accordingly.

SECTION TWO: Government Fiscal Policy

Overview

City government – including the Board of Education and Norwich Public Utilities – is the biggest economic actor in the City of Norwich. It is also the biggest employer and the biggest purchaser of goods and services. City tax, investment and spending policies have an important impact on the local economy.

Strategy

One of the best ways to promote local and out-of-town confidence in the Norwich economy is to keep taxes low and stable. If investors believe their investments will be taxed fairly, they will not worry about buying property in Norwich. The same is true for residential property owners as well.

Our tax policy over the next few years must reduce the burden on property owners, particularly in the City Consolidated District, where taxes are 10 to 15% higher than taxes in surrounding communities.

People vote with their feet. For years Norwich has been losing residents to newer, less costly housing developments and shopping malls outside the city limits. If we are going to continue attracting people and businesses back into Norwich, we must reduce our tax rate to compare more favorably to the rates in the cities and towns around us. This doesn't necessarily mean we need to make Draconian cuts, but it does mean we have to develop a more austere approach to government services.

We need to hold taxes as low as possible, reduce our debt, and only buy things that contribute to the long-term economic strength of our community.

What can we do?

14) Keep taxes as low as possible. Whether we like it or not, we are in competition with Lisbon and Waterford. Investors who can save hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars a year in real estate and personal property taxes by locating a few short miles to our north or south will do so. So, too, will home-buyers who can save thousands of dollars a year. We cannot ignore that fact.

15) Automatically apply the enterprise zone tax abatement. It isn't uncommon in Norwich to find that homeowners, especially in the City Consolidated District (CCD), will make great improvements to the *interiors* of their homes while leaving the exteriors unimproved. This is a rational approach to avoiding higher property taxes.

If the tax assessor drives by and see a beautiful façade, your tax bill will go up. We need to make sure property owners are NOT punished for improving their properties by automatically applying the enterprise zone tax abatement to commercial and residential properties.

16) Reduce public borrowing. Debt management is an important discipline. Used wisely, debt can help move a city forward; used poorly, it can cripple a community. The indicators of how Norwich is doing with debt are mixed. On the one hand, our debt load is relatively low for a city with a budget our size. However, *the per capita debt*, that is, the amount of public debt divided by the number of people in the city, is *higher* than most cities and towns in the area.

The one recent trend we need to guard against is borrowing to pay for items with short life cycles – things like portable fire equipment and vehicles that will be in service for only a few years. Items like these are best treated as operational expenditures, not long-term investments. Borrowing for them ends up costing the city more in a relatively short period.

17) Invest strategically in public infrastructure. Public infrastructure is one of our great advantages. With our utility company and a well-developed public water, sewer and electric network throughout much of the city, the costs of development or redevelopment are lower here than they are in other places.

As owners of the public utilities, we also have an obligation to maintain our existing infrastructure and to invest to assure water supplies are adequate to support development or redevelopment. This is particularly true in our older commercial neighborhoods – like the Eastside.

18) Invest locally. Consistent with the fiduciary duties of fund managers, we should look for opportunities to promote local pension reinvestment. Currently, pension funds holding investments from the city's employees have no investment in the city. This could be changed. Many public pension funds provide the capital for affordable housing. The city could work with the state housing finance agency to issue special bonds to build affordable housing that then could be purchased by local retirement funds and others.

19) Spend tax dollars locally. Over seventy percent (70%) of the City of Norwich's annual budget streams immediately out of Norwich. Wages to city employees who live in other towns (52% of city employees live outside the city), payments to retirees in states like Florida, consulting fees to outside firms,

contracts, grants, and subsidies to developers from out of the region account for the lion's share of city expenditures.

It's true that services such as education and building rehabilitation are provided here in Norwich, but too often the revenue flows out of the city as fast as it can be collected by the tax collectors office.

20) Selective Public Contracting – during this current City Council, former Alderman Coutu and I had suggested the city consider offering a bidding advantage to local businesses. I believe allowing local firms to match lower bids of outside firms will help local business. But, I also think that we need to think more broadly. We should require all bidders to explain where they buy their materials, where their employees live. The city should require an estimate of the anticipated multiplier benefits to the Norwich economy on all large contracts.

SECTION THREE: **Attract state and federal money**

Overview

State and federal money can prime the pump for local programs, projects, and initiatives. Even in good times, projects like the Otis Library reconstruction, the Mercantile Exchange, the Wauregan Hotel, and the Intermodal Transportation Center would not have been possible without state and federal grants or tax credits. During an economic downturn, it's even more important for Norwich to be able to secure such funding.

Strategy

Competition for state and federal grants or tax credits is always stiff. In order to prevail over other communities around the country, we need to present a professional face to federal and state officials. The communities that present the most compelling cases for funding – good explanations, based on solid documentation, data, statistics, and benefit analyses are the communities that win funding.

As the city's primary spokesman before state and federal officials, the Mayor needs to understand the grant process and legislative process to help the city succeed.

What can we do?

21) We should hire a grant writer, or the Mayor's office should take on the role of writing grants for specific economic-development activities.

22) The Mayor, in collaboration with the City Council and the City Manager, should lobby Congress, the Governor and the state legislature. The Mayor and members of the City Council should meet with state and federal officials in Hartford and Washington to explain why it makes sense to invest public dollars in Norwich.

SECTION FOUR: **Fostering a culture of entrepreneurship**

Overview

It's not a flattering truth, but a truth nonetheless: Connecticut is not as business-friendly as it should be. In 2005, we were the only state in the nation with a negative business-growth rate. We need to develop an environment that makes it possible for businesses to thrive.

Connecticut is the land of steady habits. Ours is a “salary seeking” culture, not an “entrepreneurial” culture. We're not inclined to reward risk but still long for the improvements and benefits that successful risk-taking creates. The structure of the state and local economy has driven a disproportionately large number of our best and brightest young people to seek comfortable salaried positions with state and local governments and large employers in a handful of industries (e.g., insurance, defense, and pharmaceutical) rather than striking out on their own to build new businesses and create new economic opportunities.

Those who want to start businesses find little support here and often relocate to places where their chances of success are greater—*or are perceived to be greater*. In fact, our economic culture is so geared toward income security (as opposed to innovation) that we think nothing of providing seminars and tutorials on how to fill out government forms for public assistance, but we provide little or no information on how to set up a successful business. We are willing to *give* fish to the needy, but unwilling to *teach* them how to fish.

Strategies for building an entrepreneurial culture

We can promote local entrepreneurial thinking and activity by – (1) providing training and business start-up support, (2) retaining and encouraging people who want to start businesses, and (3) creating market-oriented rewards for volunteers engaged in economically productive work.

What can we do?

23) Work with the Board of Education to develop entrepreneurship programs in the public schools, at Norwich Free Academy, Norwich Technical High School, and Three Rivers Community College to highlight local and small business opportunities and to stimulate young people to think about growing their own businesses. We could provide some municipal funds to help churches, Rose City

Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce, and other civic groups to set up entrepreneurship study groups.

24) Find other ways to get Three Rivers Community College more involved in local economic and studies and analyses. Colleges and Universities are a source of tremendous creativity, knowledge, and energy. The city government should create strong working relationships with the faculty and students at Three Rivers.

25) Establish mentoring programs. Link established businesspeople (especially retirees with extra time and experience) with young and aspiring entrepreneurs.

26) Provide Norwich-business Scholarships to help retain the best and brightest. Work with local businesses to create a scholarship fund that extends no-interest loans to returning college students. If the student returns to and settles in Norwich after graduation, s/he could apply for a no-interest loan to payoff market rate student loans. So long as the graduate continues to live in Norwich, s/he would continue to enjoy the no-interest provision. (Leaving the city would trigger the loan to incur market-rate interest.)

27) Work with local experts to provide how-to workshops for those who would like to start their own businesses.

28) Provide workshops on household and money management practices that benefit the local economy. It helps our local economy, for example, just to remind city residents that using credit cards means that more of their money goes to out-of-town banks and therefore isn't available to the local economy. *Remember.* every dollar that slips through the hands of a Norwich resident into the hands of someone far away is a dollar not available locally!

29) Support and expand the NFA's youth employment programs to expose more young people to business jobs.

30) Provide "Volunteer Vouchers" for people – especially young people and seniors – serving on corridor clean-up crews, neighborhood beautification teams and neighbor-to-neighbor training programs. The vouchers could be redeemable at participating local businesses or could be used to pay city fees for senior citizen programs, recreation activities and the like. The vouchers would be capped at \$100.00.

SECTION FIVE: **Toward people-oriented development policies**

Overview

Until recently, most of the city government's economic efforts have focused on eliminating blight and restoring the city's streetscapes, as revitalization is a precursor to economic expansion, and we have had success. The Marina at American Wharf, the Mercantile Exchange, the Wauregan Hotel, the Otis Library, and—to a lesser extent—the redevelopment of Chestnut Street are all examples of restoration that have had significant positive impacts on the city.

Focusing on construction of new homes and reconstruction of important buildings has helped bring people back to Norwich. After nearly 50-years of losing population, we are seeing people return. Now is the time for us to start focusing on jobs, job training and building the businesses that will occupy the refurbished buildings.

The next phase of our economic development strategy must be people-oriented, especially now that the real estate market cannot be counted on to attract investment dollars from outside the region. Our local government policies must recognize that healthy, well-trained people, capable of taking risks and trying new ideas, are absolutely essential to a strong economy.

Strategies for putting people first

City Hall cannot train everyone who needs a new job. Nor can city government provide financing to every small business that needs new equipment. But City Hall can serve as a clearinghouse that gathers, produces (in partnership with others), analyzes, and distributes useful information to help residents and investors clearly understand our local markets, and emerging opportunities and challenges.

If done right, this clearinghouse function can be incredibly powerful. Many individuals and small firms simply don't have the time or resources to conduct research and market analyses or develop the expertise necessary to open up new lines of business. Many small businesses pass on potential state government contracts because the bidding process is too complicated. The city government might be able to reduce the barriers to entry into the state contracting process by offering seminars on how to fill out the forms and win state bids.

The point is that people-oriented policies focus on the needs of individuals—consumers, homeowners, business operators, and employees. People-focused policies should provide individuals with tools that they can use to their own economic advantage.

The idea is simple: the city's success is the combined success of those who live here. The best way to restore Norwich is to increase the incomes and wealth of as many residents as possible. People with higher incomes generally improve their homes, which will, in turn, improve property values & neighborhoods, and they purchase more in local restaurants and shops. It is *everyone's* success which will revitalize the whole city.

What can we do?

- 31)** Develop an inventory of current city training and information programs.
- 32)** Identify people and firms in town capable of developing market data, training seminars and public information programs.
- 33)** Prepare a broad-range of local training programs and seminars to assist Norwich residents to develop economically-valuable skills – job training, money management skills, investment skills, consumer habits, etc.
- 34)** Work with nonprofit organizations to build on the success of their current programs.

SECTION SIX: **Education policy is economic policy**

Overview

This economic development plan recognizes that there are no silver bullets—no single projects or actions that will make everything better overnight. Sustainable economies are grown “organically”, from within. They grow and become stronger over time as the pieces – individual people and businesses – become stronger. It takes time to develop the skills, abilities, and attitudes that promote economic success.

Education is the *single biggest* input into an economy’s workforce and entrepreneurial thinking. Education establishes the intellectual basis for all economic activity. Without a strong educational system, a local economy with low-skill labor will be exploited by economic actors outside of the area. With a strong educational system, a local economy has a greater chance of giving rise to creative, innovative economic activity that produces wealth for those in the local area.

Strategy

We need to educate the next generation of Norwich economic leaders.

Like economies themselves, good education systems are built on solid fundamentals. We all understand that a child who learns to read early and well will develop strong linguistic skills and will acquire more (and more-complex) knowledge than a student who learns to read later or never learns to read well.

But economic success isn’t always tied to developing the skills associated with the traditional American “middle-class liberal arts education.” In fact, Connecticut’s education system has been criticized for focusing too much on skills that serve students well in white-collar office positions, but not necessarily in other sectors of the economy. It’s been suggested that low-income students have more difficulty in school than more affluent students because the schools are training them to do things that are not relevant to their lives.

The result of middle-class education in Connecticut has been that we train everybody to go away to college. Those who leave for Boston, New York, and Washington contribute nothing to the local economies of Connecticut. Those who have been trained as if they were going to college, but instead stay in their hometowns are left without tools that can be applied to the local economic conditions.

Our current education strategy hurts us in two ways – (1) it fails to keep the entrepreneurs who were the best performing students and, (2) it fails to provide sufficient entrepreneurial training to the students who stay and become the business leaders of the community – leaving them to learn everything they need to know about business on their own after they leave high school.

Education should be student-outcome-oriented and tailored to meet the needs of our local student population and local & regional economy. Obviously that doesn't mean we should abandon traditional education—everybody should know how to read, do math and use a computer—but *locally-relevant* training should also be part of the curriculum.

What can we do?

35) Make a very deliberate effort to work with the Board of Education to identify ways to incorporate students and teachers in local businesses and economic policy development.

SECTION SEVEN:

Think locally¹

Overview

The secret to economic success is actually no secret at all. Prosperity is a function of having more money coming in than is going out. While this truth is universally understood, it isn't always acted upon by local policymakers. But proactive local government officials around the country have started to realize the best way to strengthen their communities' economies is by expanding *opportunities for locally-owned businesses to serve local markets.*

Strategies for focusing on local economics

Norwich's local government should adopt a Locally-Owned Import-Substituting (LOIS) approach to economic development. Local ownership means that working control of a company is held within a small geographic area. "Import Substituting" means that the company is focused first and foremost (though not exclusively) on serving local markets.

Finding opportunities for "LOIS" requires an analysis both of dollar leakages (i.e. where residents are spending money outside the local economy) and of opportunities for plugging those leaks. (*Note: Section Eight of this plan focuses on how to stop leakages in the Norwich economy.*)

Local ownership is critically important for the success of the Norwich economy, because locally-owned businesses have a greater "multiplier" effect than non-local businesses. *Every local purchase triggers purchases by others within our community.* A dollar in rent paid to a local landlord will be spent, again, by the property owner at a local grocery store. In turn, that grocery store will use the dollar to buy local baked goods. The baker will then use the dollar to pay for dental work for his children or take the family to dinner at a local restaurant. That's "the multiplier" effect.

The *more* times a dollar *circulates within* the city *and* the *faster* it circulates without leaving the city, the *more income, wealth, and jobs* it creates here. But as soon as that dollar "leaks out", or escapes the city, it starts generating income and wealth somewhere else – which is good for that distant place, but bad for us.

¹ This section and the next section are based largely on a 2007 study by Michael H. Shuman & Doug Hoffer of the Training & Development Corporation, called [Leakage Analysis of the Martha's Vineyard Economy](#).

Locally-owned businesses tend to be more loyal to the local community than out-of-town firms, because local businesses tend to stay put. A community made up of locally owned businesses is better equipped to promote smart growth, draw tourists, attract talented young people, and foster an entrepreneurial culture. Studies show that locally-focused economies are more stable and promote lower levels of welfare than economies based on a small number of absentee-owned businesses.

“Import Substitution” matters for economic prosperity as well. Every time a community imports goods or services that it could cost-effectively produce for itself, it “leaks” dollars and the critically important economic “multiplier dollars” associated with them. However, import-substitution does not mean cutting off a community from the global economy. To the contrary, by focusing on self-sufficiency for awhile, local businesses can grow stronger and become net “exporters” as they produce more of their goods and services than can be consumed locally. As the local economy grows, so will the demand for goods and services – both local and non-local. The goal of LOIS isn’t full export substitution. There will always be some goods and services imported into the local economy. What “import substitution” does is help identify where the local economy has the opportunity to grow.

What can we do?

36) Encourage consumers to buy local. Even a small shift of consumption of just 5 to 10% to local business by city residents could provide a *significant* stimulus for the Norwich economy each year, could improve business profitability, expand jobs, and encourage reinvestment in city neighborhoods.

37) Whenever possible, pick local developers. Private projects also often siphon money out of the local economy. The vast majority of projects assisted by the City in recent years have been projects built by out-of-town developers. When the city puts taxpayer dollars into private developments that will be owned by outside landlords, we create situations where local tax dollars make it possible for absentee landlords to extract rent checks from local residents, without *any significant positive impact on our local economy*. While this sort of economic trade-off is justifiable in a rapidly expanding economy, it is counter-productive in a slow economy.

In good times, we can afford to have money leak out of the city, as long as the benefit (rehabilitated buildings, new housing stock, and new office buildings) is realized locally. But, in a slow economy, money that leaks out is less likely to come back as absentee landlords are slower to make repairs or look for new projects in Norwich. In a slow economy, we must redouble our efforts and focus on helping local businesses survive.

The real estate development/redevelopment sector is also an area where there are opportunities to help grow new local businesses. Rehabilitation of historic homes is a specialty in the construction trades. We have a unique need for such services in Norwich. This is a niche that can be filled locally.

38) Advertise. Many Norwich businesses cannot afford to advertise and that hurts all of us. We need to sell our businesses to ourselves and to those willing to make a day trip to Norwich. As a small business-owner myself, I know *advertising works for my business* and believe it will also create more local business and more trips to the city.

City Hall should work with the Chamber of Commerce to develop a series of advertisements to run in local and regional newspapers, radio, and cable television stations.

39) Develop directories of local business and products. We should create lists of local businesses for residents and businesses in print, on line, in newspaper ads.

40) Develop and promote the use of a local label – an emblem of local ownership that lets consumers know if a store is locally owned or if a product is locally made. This was the idea I had in mind when I first developed the “Norwich Now” logo in 2005. That effort should be reinvigorated.

41) Buyers’ Cards. City Hall could encourage local businesses to issue “Norwich Now!” loyalty cards and gift cards.

42) Promote “Buy Local Days.” Coordinate discounts in Norwich shops and restaurants to maximize the benefit of shopping in particular neighborhoods on particular days.

43) Establish a peer-to-peer lending program, brokered through a local nonprofit organization—such as the Norwich Community Development Corporation, Rose City Renaissance, or the Chamber of Commerce—with operational assistance from City Hall.

44) Business to Government Bid Service. City Hall should work with Rose City Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce, Three Rivers, and others to develop a consulting service that helps local business compete more effectively for public contracts.

45) Broker “B2B” (business to business) deals. We should think about replicating the model of the Oregon Marketplace, which in the 1980s and early 1990s helped local businesses buy cost-effective inputs from local suppliers.

46) Smart Growth. We must restructure our zoning rules to encourage redevelopment of older neighborhoods and to discourage the destruction of green space.

SECTION EIGHT: **Stop the leaks**

Overview

City Hall, by itself, is ill-equipped to identify market opportunities. However, city government employs people who are well-qualified to do the research that small businesses simply do not have the time to do.

By studying the number of goods and services being purchased from producers and shops outside of the city, we can identify the most promising markets for new or expanded local businesses and help the private sector understand which investments are likely to be profitable.

Rose City Renaissance conducted a limited retail leakage analysis in 2007 and concluded there are a large number of retail opportunities in Norwich including clothing (especially women's specialty clothing), natural foods, furniture, small book stores, and electronics.

Why not expand on this analysis of the retail sector to identify the whole range of possible import-replacement opportunities that seem most plausible, given the skills, assets, and goals of our community?

Strategy

The first step to understanding where the leaks are and how we can plug them is to conduct a comprehensive study of purchasing patterns for goods and services bought by city residents. Once we understand *what* people are buying and *where* those goods and services come from, we can begin to better see opportunities for local suppliers to provide the same or similar products.

The leakage analysis should be a broad community-wide exercise designed to:

- 1) Provide policymakers with a clearer vision of how to allocate scarce public resources for economic development;
- 2) Help existing small-business owners develop a better sense of promising opportunities for expansion;
- 3) Help entrepreneurs see the most profitable markets for startups;
- 4) Assist local banks, lenders, & investors in allocating their commercial capital;
- 5) Assist local foundations, nonprofits, and grassroots groups in developing a clearer sense of who to mobilize for community action; and

- 6) Help consumers appreciate the payoffs of buying more goods and services locally.

Measuring leakages isn't easy. It requires a great deal of analysis by people with specialized economic training, and it requires patient and careful deliberation by stakeholders in the community. Some of the information provided by leakage analysis conflicts with common sense and will require open-mindedness.

What can we do?

47) Commission the study by a consultant who can bring a fresh perspective and experience from other communities.

48) Where we can identify leakage without a study, we should begin taking steps *immediately*. For example, we could refocus our festival efforts. We've done a good job in recent years in hosting public festivals. Now we have to ensure that benefits to the local economy are maximized. Some events, like the Taste of Italy and the Wine and Rose Festival, are specifically designed to promote participation by local business. Others are not.

While the Fourth of July fireworks display at the harbor draws *a huge crowd and large numbers of vendors* or vending trucks, most of the vendors are from out-of-town. Downtown restaurants and shops do not see an increase in their business. Vendors from Massachusetts, Rhode Island – *and Georgia!* – realized they can profit from our festivals. We can and must do the same. We need to make sure more of the money generated by these events stays in Norwich.

49) We should work with local business to encourage them to sell goods at local events.

50) We should encourage out-of-town vendors to partner with local business and use local suppliers whenever possible.

51) We should pass an ordinance establishing a discounted vendor permit fee for Norwich residents.

SECTION NINE: Think small

Overview

A very successful large system is almost invariably developed first from a successful *small-scale* system. Because of our historic perspective, we tend to think of large-scale manufacturing as the basis for all strong economies, but *small* production facilities are, and always have been, very important to the vitality of local economies. Small manufacturing and cottage industry firms aren't inferior to large firms; in fact, they have distinct social, environmental, and economic advantages over mega-production firms.

Today, we don't do much manufacturing in Norwich, and, because of national and international competitive factors beyond our local control, we aren't likely to attract large scale manufacturing facilities any time soon. However, as the costs of transportation increases and preferences for "Green" technologies grows, there may be real opportunities for small scale, locally focused, manufacturing operations.

Further, Norwich is home to strong artisan and tradesman's communities. We ought to be looking for opportunities to promote small scale production facilities, particularly around the production and recycling of construction materials.

Strategy

Concentrate local government efforts and policies on supporting small- and mid-size firms in Norwich. Work with artists, artisans, and trades people to identify opportunities for small-scale manufacturing. Work with small property owners to make improvements to commercial and residential properties.

What can we do?

52) Work with local construction experts to identify the viability of a establishing a Norwich building materials restoration facility. Many communities have been successful in developing "second hand" building material restoration facilities where doors, windows, lighting fixtures, and furniture are refurbished and resold locally. Some of these efforts have been done through nonprofits, and others have proved quite profitable. All have benefited the local economy by replacing "imports" with locally-reproduced goods. Given the stock of old buildings here in Norwich, it's also possible that refurbishing old building materials (or furniture) could become a Norwich export business.

53) There is a reservoir of talent in Norwich of artisan skills in crafts such as woodworking, chair caning, and furniture restoration. City Hall should conduct a survey or census of the artisan community and encourage intensifying economically-expandable artisan activities.

54) Its easy to imagine other cottage industries tied to the existing artist and artisan community. Some production facilities are inexpensive to set up and can generate high-value goods because the value comes from the creativity of the artist or artisan. Pottery, specialty foods, artistic prints, tee-shirts and clothing, jewelry, and furniture are all examples of goods where values can be high while input and set-up costs can be low.

Such industries can often help in the conversion of waste products such as metals, glass and paper, which is currently put into landfills, burned, or sent to China to be remade into new products. It may well be possible to establish working relationships between local artisans that would allow them to cooperatively fill large orders that no single artisan could fill alone.

55) Thinking small can also help in addressing retail challenges. Instead of allowing the Norwichtown Mall to sit vacant, the city could contact the owner and encourage them to open the Mall for development of a local Bazaar or Farmer's Market. The space is currently generating no revenue and could be provided to small-scale retailers at a rate far below that paid by national chain stores, giving an opportunity to local businesses that they might otherwise never see.

56) Sometimes thinking small means looking for small things that could make a big difference for local businesses. For example, not all local restaurants can afford, or need, a full-time delivery person. However, most restaurants would benefit from being able to provide delivery to customers who occasionally want it. In some communities this situation has prompted restaurant owners to pool their resources to develop a city-wide "take out taxi service."

57) We should also re-explore the possibility of developing a local biofuel market. Around the country, imports of oil, gasoline, and other fuels are being replaced with biofuels. State-of-the-art technology is being used to convert waste restaurant oil and grease into biodiesel. As the technology for cellulosic conversion improves, it will be possible to convert all kinds of plant matter – wood waste, cut grass – into ethanol. Because the inputs are essentially free, and the costs of tooling up are relatively small, facilities for producing biofuel and ethanol can easily be scaled to fit the local economy.

When I proposed last year that we develop a local waste vegetable oil exchange program, the concern voiced by naysayers was "it's not practical." Well, since then, a Fairfield County firm (Connecticut Biofuels) has started collecting waste vegetable oil *from Norwich restaurants* and blending it with home heating oil for

SECTION NINE: Think small

sale in western Connecticut--*but not here!*. The profits, of course, are now accruing out of our region. Perhaps we should re-examine whether a local effort could succeed....

SECTION TEN: **Think globally**

Overview

While it's true we are in competition with Lisbon, Waterford, and New London to attract investors, home-buyers and shoppers, it's also true we are competing with Beijing, Fort Lee, NJ, and cities around the world.

Strategy

Effective global thinking starts with recognizing the strong social connections between the Norwich newcomers and the communities and economies of the places they have come from. The Norwich Chinese community, for example, has strong ties to New York and mainland China. These ties create opportunities for our economy. So too are there very strong ties between the Norwich Haitian community and the French-speaking people of Haiti, Montreal and Paris.

What can we do?

58) Set up regular trips for potential entrepreneurs, business-owners, and investors from around the country and overseas to tour the opportunities in Norwich.

59) Prepare foreign-language marketing materials that can be sent to businesses and potential investors overseas. I've recently worked with members of the local Chinese-speaking community to develop a thirteen-page Chinese brochure about the City of Norwich.

SECTION ELEVEN: **Preservation, architecture, and history as economic forces**

Overview

Norwich is home to some of New England's best-preserved colonial and Victorian residential and commercial buildings. *The architecture of this city is amazing,* and ties us to a grand past, just around every corner, and just over every hill. We are reminded of the city's incredible success and its prominent place in history every time we look up the river or down a city street. These assets have an economic value that can be used to generate income for local businesses.

Strategies for making money with history

Preservation

Preservation in its various aspects — the renovation of historic structures, heritage and cultural tourism, and the preservation of open space — generates a positive return for entrepreneurs, local governments and taxpayers.

The economic benefits include providing more in taxes to state and local governments, and more jobs and payroll in the private sector. Based on the experience of communities across the country, it's clear preservation pays — history and cultural tourism are profitable in both good times and bad.

When property owners renovate and restore historic structures, they make a very real contribution to the local economy and help to retain the unique charm and character of our historic communities. The rehabilitation of historic structures, when compared to new construction, is cost competitive and more labor intensive. That means more money going to local tradesmen, and less leaking out of the community to out-of-town building supply companies.

Historic rehabilitation provides high-paying employment, thereby giving a positive boost to local employment and earnings. Renovated properties also increase in value, often significantly, which is a substantial plus for local property-tax revenues. Studies in Virginia indicate that every one million dollars spent rehabilitating historic buildings generates 15.6 construction jobs, 14.2 jobs in other sectors of the economy, and \$779,800 in household earnings.

Cultural Heritage Tourism

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines cultural heritage tourism as traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic, and natural resources.

The Heritage Tourism Program provides assistance ranging from how-to cultural heritage tourism publications to consulting services tailored to meet the needs of individual clients. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism Program provides fee-for-service assistance in heritage tourism development, management, and marketing. The staff also works at the national level to track national trends, provides how-to training tools and programs, and advocates for increased national support for heritage tourism.

Studies have consistently shown cultural heritage travelers stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of travelers. A good cultural heritage tourism program improves the quality of life for residents as well as serving visitors.

Norwich is well positioned to become a Connecticut/Southern New England “stay-cation” site. Stay-at-home travel has grown since September 11, 2001 and, given the permanent changes that have come to the air travel industry, analysts predict that local travel and recreation will continue to be a growth industry for the foreseeable future.

Since bad economies also discourage long-trips, it is reasonable to infer that local Heritage Tourism will be profitable even in down times. Heritage or history tourism also has good multiplier effects.

The preservation of our past is critical not only to our sense of place and high quality of life, but also to our region's economic health. Preservation and history tourism aren't alternatives to economic growth, but key components of it. Our challenge is to seek new ways to strengthen and support preservation and small-scale tourism as a profitable segment of the region's economy.

What can we do?

60) The time is right to begin the dialog about seeking National Historical Park or National Heritage Corridor Gateway status for Norwich, and to commit a major effort and resources to develop a strong historic tourism industry in the city. In consultation with Norwich historic and museum officials and the Norwich City Historian, I have developed a proposal about how to promote historic tourism in the City of Norwich. (*See my website for the Historic Tourism Policy Paper.*) When elected, I will take that proposal, along with those historic and museum officials,

to meet with our Congressional Delegation to begin the process of securing recognition from the National Park Service of the unique architectural and historical heritage we have in Norwich.

61) The city should support the Norwich Historical Society's efforts to establish a library and museum of the Presidents of the Continental Congress. The story of the Revolutionary Continental Congress and its leaders, including Samuel Huntington, is a historical treasure and should be preserved. A library and museum of the Presidents of the Continental Congress has great potential for intra- and interstate trips to Norwich.

62) Encourage more history tourism trips. There is a tour company that brings tourists from Pennsylvania to Norwich by bus twice a year. Visitors are shown around the city and the city's cemeteries. They eat lunch at the Marina and learn about Norwich from a local history expert. One way to encourage *more* of this sort of activity is to coordinate the days on which local facilities such as Slater Museum, the DAR museum, and the Leffingwell House are open.

63) City Hall should begin a "value of preservation" campaign to provide home owners, real estate agents and city officials with information about the economic value of preservation-oriented construction, renovation and rehabilitation.

64) Provide property tax rebates for owners of historical properties who improve their properties. It makes *no* sense to punish those who improve their property with higher tax bills.

65) Norwich Technical High School or Three Rivers should be encouraged to develop courses available to local homeowners on restoration technologies and techniques.

66) Protect existing local and national register districts, including Bean Hill, birthplace of Underground Railroad conductor David Ruggles.

67) Finish the historic and architectural surveys of Norwich to make sure we have identified all historically and architecturally significant buildings, structures, and districts.

68) Make better use of Norwich's status as a Historic Preservation Certified Local Government to leverage additional preservation grants for the city.

69) Develop a corridor beautification initiative focused on removing debris, weeds and other detritus from the city's main thoroughfares.

70) Develop a pedestrian plaza in downtown Norwich – on Lower-Broadway or Franklin Square.

71) Make parking system enhancements. Downtown businesses are in competition with suburban developments with large paved parking surface lots, and rely on convenient customer parking in close proximity to their front doors. The lack of downtown parking is often cited by business owners, customers, and would-be customers. Rose City Renaissance's inventory of parking suggests we change how we manage EXISTING downtown parking spaces to eliminate or greatly reduce the demand for new spaces. Signage should be increased to identify parking structure locations and provide real-time information on parking space availability. Street signage should identify which lots are full as well as how many spaces are available throughout the day. We should make facility upgrades at the Cliff Street parking lot.

72) We should install video cameras downtown to provide visitors with security and prevent crimes.

SECTION TWELVE: **Help grow the arts and entertainment sector**

Overview

Several arts and entertainment businesses and nonprofit organizations are doing well in Norwich; there is, however, plenty of room for growth.

Norwich and area residents attend Spirit of Broadway and Norwich Arts Council events. The Norwich Bowling Center is thriving. The Norwich Public Golf Course continues successfully without public subsidy, and the Norwich Skate Rink remains viable. The new, Norwich Community Cinema just screened its first monthly film on the eve of the 350th celebration to a sell-out crowd.

Aside from these wonderful resources, most of the region's entertainment demands are currently either being served by the two casinos or going unmet. Unfortunately, there's no full-time movie theater in Norwich, and there are few teen- and family-oriented entertainment facilities. Concerns over the absence of appropriate entertainment have sparked calls for the construction of a community center or a series of centers. While a public facility may be desirable, the demand for entertainment services suggest private facilities may prove profitable.

Strategy

Again, thinking small is important. Local government policies should support grass-roots, for-profit, development of entertainment venues. We should be looking for opportunities to develop small, sustainable, revenue streams.

What can we do?

73) Work with entertainment industry experts to determine under what conditions private facilities could be made to work in Norwich.

74) Work with the Spirit of Broadway, NAC, the Slater Museum and local hotels (particularly in the winter when rooms are vacant) to develop art education and tourism programs for locals and visitors.

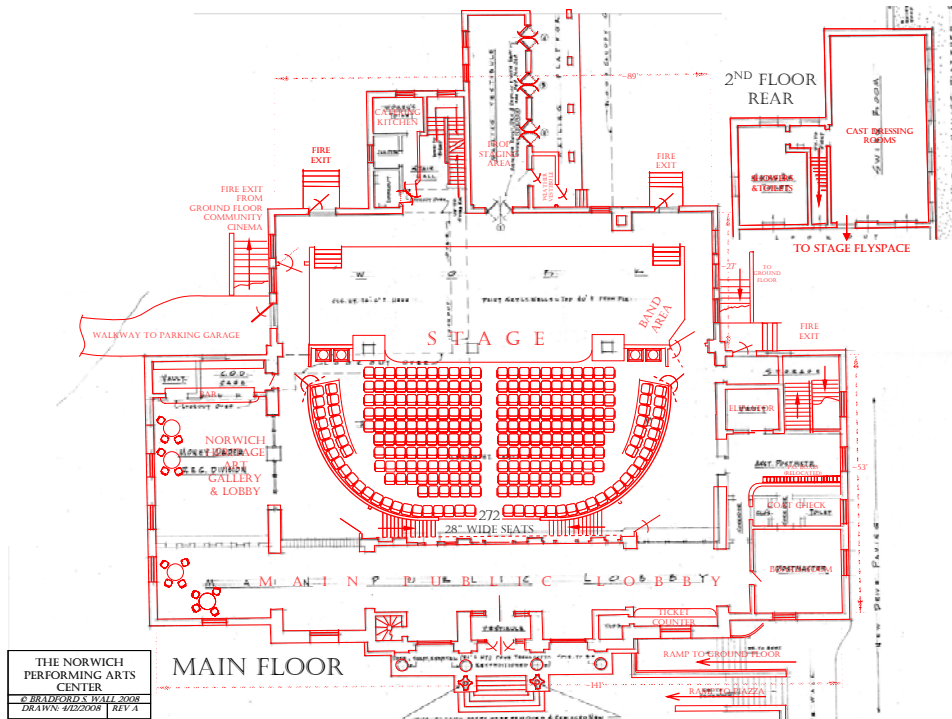
75) Public Art Initiative. Public art makes neighborhoods more interesting. Cities like Cleveland, Ohio, have used public art to *“create opportunities for gracious urbanity - not just in the city's downtown, but in . . . neighborhoods as*

SECTION TWELVE: Help grow the arts and entertainment sector

well.” The Chelsea Arts District should be more than a geographic designation. We should commission works of art and art exhibits and we need to develop a Public Art Infrastructure – sculptures in public places and on the streets that creates interest in the City and its various neighborhoods. Think “Willimantic Frogs” and our own Christmas lights.

76) Begin serious explorations of the viability of getting the underutilized US Post Office on Main Street declared as surplus Federal property, with the aim of establishing a new performing arts center and/or community cinema within it. This would be a long-term plan and would take a lot of work, but it could be an incredible boost to putting “feet on the street” in downtown.

As the campaign progresses, I will provide more information about this exciting conceptual proposal. For now, contemplate the possibilities, and dream of a Norwich with such a place in its future! A hint of what this might look like is shown below:



SECTION THIRTEEN: **Real Estate Development**

Overview

This plan began with the premise that City Hall must move beyond trying to broker real estate development deals. But real estate development is still extremely important to the city and the region.

The “built” environment – housing, retail shops, and infrastructure like roads, helps define our quality of life. The better the quality of life enjoyed in our area, the more likely we are to retain and attract residents and entrepreneurs.

Strategy

For the most part, City Hall plays a support role in putting together real estate deals. City Hall needs to be prepared to respond to proposals quickly and fairly. The rules governing real estate must be clear and uniformly applied.

What can we do?

77) City Hall should support the Marina Hotel project. The Marina Hotel project has the potential to transform downtown Norwich into a hub of tourist-oriented activity. It would create hundreds of local jobs and a convention venue to attract visitors from throughout southern New England and beyond. Great care should be taken in the design phase of the project to ensure that the hotel is ascetically compatible with the existing downtown.

78) We should support the restoration of historic homes. With the current real estate market, there are real opportunities to refocus our local real estate development efforts on restoration. While we may not see many condo or apartment buildings built in the next few years, City Hall can help local property owners maintain, improve, and restore some of the city’s older housing stock.

79) Buy the Norwich Hospital property and market it internationally. The City of Norwich should purchase the Norwich Hospital Property immediately. We should then work with realtors and the Norwich Community Development Corporation to market the property nationally and overseas. Cooperation and coordination with Preston will be necessary.

80) We should explore the possibility of “condo-izing” groups of buildings in downtown Norwich. The upper floors of downtown building are largely vacant because, given the costs of renovation, code compliance, and current rental rates, it doesn’t make economic sense for building owners to invest in upper floor restoration.

One way to deal with that may be to allow owners to “go condo” and sell off just a portion of their buildings. If the owner of a building is willing to sell the top floors, s/he would realize an immediate profit, and this could create the conditions under which downtown property values (including the value of the ground floor condo unit) increases.

Buyers of the upper floor could have a greater incentive to make needed repairs because, for a relatively small investment, they can become homeowners. Further, if enough people participate, the new downtown condo association could levy association fees similar to any other condo association for the purpose of maintaining common areas (like building facades, roofs, and fire escapes). This sort of ownership is common in places like New York.

SECTION FOURTEEN: **Moving toward meaningful regionalism**

Overview

Connecticut's political geography is unusual. The entire state is smaller than some counties in other states. Indeed, Maricopa County, Arizona (where Phoenix is located) is twice as large as the entire state of Connecticut. New London County is geographically about the same size as the Las Vegas and Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan areas.

Our local economy really extends county-wide and includes portions of Windham County and Western Rhode Island. As we move forward, it's imperative we develop stronger working relationships between and among the local regional governments to better support the inter-community linkages that sustain our business community.

Strategy

We need to better foster communication, cooperation, cost-sharing between and among the region's municipalities. We also need to promote legislative and regulatory harmonization across town lines.

What can we do?

- 81)** Invite the Groton and New London City Councils to join the Norwich City Council for (at least) three joint meetings every year. One session could be held in each of the three cities. The sessions would be dedicated to matters of mutual concern to each city or matters where regional cooperation would be helpful.
- 82)** Continue to work with the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SECOG) and its members.
- 83)** Call for an annual regional economic development seminar (hosted by the area Chambers of Commerce or SECOG) designed to address economic challenges and opportunities likely to face the region in the next year and the next five years.

Conclusion

Norwich is an amazing city with resourceful and talented people. If we're willing to focus on building a better economy, we will succeed.

Our best chance of making things better quickly is to work together, put aside our concerns about "what can't be done" and focus on what we *MAY* be able to do.

We have to be willing to experiment, to try new things, fail, and try again. There are no guarantees, except for this: if we keep doing what we've been doing, we'll keep getting the same results we've always gotten.

I've been careful to avoid the temptation set a timeline for implementation of the various ideas and proposals contained in this draft plan. I think it's important that the entire community participates in setting the priorities for economic development over the next few years.

This isn't the end. As Winston Churchill said, this isn't even the *beginning* of the end, but it is a beginning, and if we work together we should be able to make something of it.

Change is not easy, but it isn't nearly as hard as we sometimes imagine.

Together, we **CAN** build a better Norwich!



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June 2009
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Paid for by Friends of Zarnetske - Shirley Taylor, Treasurer