

Norwalk, Connecticut’s Pedestrian Plan for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2014, Norwalk, Connecticut Mayor Harry Rilling formed the Norwalk Bike/Walk Task Force, comprised of local residents and business owners, charged with helping to make our streets and sidewalks safer for everyone. In 2017, the Common Council created the [Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission](#), transforming the Bike/Walk Task Force into an official government entity that will remain in effect across administrations. The Commission supports bicycling and walking as safe, accessible, and sustainable forms of transportation and recreation that increase the City of Norwalk's livability and economic vitality and improve public and environmental health. While the Norwalk Health Department, a key supporter of the Bike/Walk Commission, has worked to promote walking in Norwalk, primarily through editing and promoting the "NorWALKer" routes, the Bike/Walk Commission has focused on bicycling in Norwalk. In late 2017 a task force was formed (see the membership list on the following page) to develop a draft pedestrian plan to promote the walking component of the Bike/Walk Commission's work. The plan will be used by the Bike/Walk Commission to enhance its walking initiative. Moreover, [the Bike/Walk Commission's charter](#) stipulates that it "review, promote, and update the City of Norwalk's Pedestrian Plan." The commission thus needs to have a plan that it can update in the future. Finally, Norwalk is in the process of developing its Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), a ten-year, State-mandated planning document: the pedestrian plan is intended to inform that process and document.

Goals and Priorities for Fiscal 2018/2019

The task force has developed 9 key goals for the fiscal year running from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019. These are listed below for emphasis and appear again on page 8. Specific action steps to accomplish these goals have also been suggested by the Task Force on pages 9 and 10, and may be selected by the Bike/Walk Commission. The underscored goals (#'s 3, 5 and 8) are those that the Pedestrian Task Force believes should be first year priorities.

The goals are:

1. Expand the NorWALKer program of regular volunteer led walks using the NorWALKer routes.
2. Increase awareness in the Norwalk Public Schools of the benefits and techniques of safe walking, and brainstorm on future programs (e.g., gym classes, clubs).
3. Develop a short-list of priority pedestrian trouble spots or connectivity opportunities in Norwalk (e.g., cross walks and sidewalks), working with DPW to identify planned improvements. Also, identify areas where pedestrian connectivity to places of work, shopping and recreation can be improved.
4. Develop relationships with City/community leaders with a stake in safe walking and running.
5. Understand design components of safe and pleasant walking and running.
6. Identify and follow-up on pedestrian funding sources based on priorities.
7. Review existing applicable federal, state and local regulations in order to formulate Norwalk's pedestrian access policies.
8. Identify guidelines or scorecards for measuring the extent of walking/running and select or develop a scorecard for measuring walkability in Norwalk.
9. Review and recommend improvements to walking routes to all train and bus hubs, assuring safe mass-transit accessibility by non-automotive commuters.

2017/2018 Pedestrian Plan Task Force Participants

Theresa Argondezzi: Norwalk Health Department
Brad Craighead
Kevin Kane
Bobbie Kinn
Kaitlin Latham: Norwalk Health Department
Deborah Lewis (task force chair)
Nancy Rosett: Chair, Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission
Sabrina Church: Norwalk Redevelopment Agency

Previous Walking Initiatives in Norwalk

- 2002: The Norwalk Health Department secured a three-year grant from the Connecticut Department of Public Health to establish 10 walking routes in various City neighborhoods. These routes were celebrated throughout Norwalk with volunteer led walks. This marked the start of the NorWALKer program.
- 2003 - 2006: Dozens of NorWALKer routes were created with community input. They were audited and launched for public use via printed maps and on-line. Maps were displayed at the Health Department and handed out at community events.
- 2013: The Greater Norwalk Health Living Workgroup, a community coalition, began auditing all the walking routes and redesigned the NorWALKer program.
- 2015: The audits of the NorWALKer Routes were completed, and the map redesign was in progress. A micro-grant from *America Walks* was secured to partially cover the maps' printing costs. Mayor and Mrs. Rilling began the *Walk with Us* program, walking a NorWALKer route each Saturday.
- Summer, 2016: Newly redesigned NorWALKer maps were launched at a community kick-off event, making more than 40 routes in 17 neighborhoods available to the community via printed maps, the Norwalk Health Department website, on fitness apps, and via community partners.
- October, 2016: The first monthly volunteer led community walk was held in Silvermine and these are ongoing. Since then, walks have also taken place in East Norwalk, West Norwalk and South Norwalk/Rowayton, and the summer concert series have started. Mayor and Mrs. Rilling have continued the *Walk with Us* series of weekly walks.

Other walking initiatives in Norwalk have included:

- The Pokémon GO NorWALKer maps, developed shortly after the Game's release in 2016.
- Walk to School Day established and implemented in 2012.
- Development of the *South Norwalk Walking Map* in December, 2016.
- Development of the *Discover Norwalk Self-Guided Walking Tour* in October, 2016
- Completion of sections of the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) in Norwalk and Wilton. The NRVT has been in existence as a formal entity since the original grant was received in 2012.
- Development of the Norwalk Harbor Loop walking path, which is ongoing.
- The Merritt Parkway Trail initiative. When completed in 1934, the Parkway was envisioned to have trails. The Merritt Parkway Trail was initially proposed in a study done in 1994 by the Regional Plan Association. The Trail will comprise the local section of the East Coast Greenway, the 3,000-mile biking and walking route. On road bicycling routes for the Greenway have been completed in Norwalk, but segments of the off-road trail itself have not yet been completed.
- The Livable Norwalk initiative on Facebook has become a proponent of walking and other "livability" issues.

Walkability Overview

Components of Walkable Communities

The Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission, if it adopts the goals in this plan, will review various scorecards and criteria for walkable communities, and adopt or amend them for Norwalk's particular needs. That said, there are generally agreed upon definitions of "walkability" and its components. Walkability is an important concept in sustainable urban design. It's a measure of how friendly an area is to walking, and what influences an individual's decision to walk. It should be pointed out that while "walkability" is the commonly accepted terminology, we also include running in our definition of walking for the purposes of this plan. Some key factors influencing walkability include:

- The presence of quality of footpaths, sidewalks and other pedestrian rights-of-way.
- Pedestrian crossings (crosswalks, signals, lighting, median refuge, sight lines, curb cuts, lack of obstacles).
- Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.
- Connectivity of walking options.
- Voluntary (non-state roads) and mandatory (state roads) adherence to Complete Streets* design principles and street design that works for walking (and bicycling), not just cars.
- Traffic volume and road conditions that enhance pedestrian safety.
- Buffers to moving traffic (planter strips, on-street parking or bike/walking lanes).
- A low motor vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle accident rate.
- Car independency (i.e., degree to which it is possible to walk from one's home to errands and leisure activities); nearby local destinations accessible on foot.
- Access (presence and distance) to mass transit.
- Outside environment's esthetics, greenspaces, lighting, air quality, shade or sun in appropriate seasons, trees and vegetation, street furniture, art, trails, benches.
- Surrounding "built environment: " residential and commercial density, diversity, design, destination accessibility, attractive building fronts, and pocket parks.
- Public education and walking programs.
- Wayfinding and maps including downloadable maps.

* Connecticut's Complete Streets bill was signed into law in 2009. The law mandates that "accommodations for all users shall be a routine part of the planning, design, construction and operating activities" of all state highways. Beginning October 2010, 1% of transportation funding is dedicated to construction of complete streets elements. While the law does not address non-state highways, it has influenced planning that embraces all users, including pedestrians, bicycles, and cars, even on non-state roads.

Increasing Walkability

The 2015 Community Wellbeing Survey, which was one piece of the Greater Norwalk Community Health Assessment and Improvement Initiative, revealed overall positive perceptions of the pedestrian environment in Norwalk, but room for improvement. For example, 73% of Norwalk residents agreed or strongly agreed that many neighborhood amenities were located within easy walking distance, and 71% said there were sidewalks and crosswalks on most streets in their neighborhood. However, 29% of respondents reported not feeling safe walking in their neighborhoods at night.¹

In order to increase walkability in Norwalk, stakeholders will examine the components of walkable communities listed earlier, determine priorities specific to Norwalk, and develop an action plan for implementation. This process has begun with the development of this plan and the goals outlined here, but it also will likely include assessing and measuring walkability with a walkability measurement tool and undertaking a walking audit. Several tools are available for measuring the walkability of particular streets and communities as a whole. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the US Environmental Protection Agency both have audit tools available to the public. Others include Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS), Walk Score, Context Walkability, Walkability, Walkonomics, RateMyStreet, Walkability App, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) checklist, and State of Place. Additional resources on this topic can be found in the Appendix.

The Case for Walkable Communities

Walkability can enhance Norwalk's safety, equity, environment, economics, and the health of all who live, work, learn, and play here. Research demonstrates that smart planning and design that protects pedestrians improves safety for everyone: drivers, cyclists, *and* walkers. Strong pedestrian infrastructure can encourage more people to leave their cars at home, reducing traffic, air pollution, and reliance on fossil fuels. Walkable communities are vibrant communities, drawing tourists and businesses and improving social connection and community cohesion.² In fact, homebuyers are increasingly looking for walkable communities. In a 2017 survey from the National Association of Realtors®, 70% of respondents said walkability and related qualities were important when deciding where to live³. Investments in walking can benefit all members of the community equitably, allowing people without cars to access more opportunities and resources. Finally, specific changes to a community's built environment (e.g., bike lanes, crosswalks, traffic calming measures, community connectivity, etc.) can help increase physical activity and improve the health of NorWALKers⁴.

In its 2011 Guide to Increase Physical Activity in the Community,⁵ the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists high-priority strategies to increase physical activity in communities. They recommend improving street lighting, ensuring sidewalk continuity, enhancing traffic calming, improving connectivity of streets, sidewalks, and adding bike lanes among its highest priority strategies. The CDC explains that one of the most frequently cited barriers to physical activity is lack of safe areas, and that improved pedestrian (and cycling) infrastructure may promote physical activity by making walking and cycling more appealing, easier, and safer.

In addition, the American Public Health Association has joined a call to action with the American Planning Association, American Society of Civil Engineers, National Recreation and Park Association, and several other organizations to implement many of these same strategies⁶. In 2016, the US Community Preventive Services Task Force issued similar recommendations based on evidence from a systematic review of 90 studies⁷.

Pedestrian Plan Mission, Vision, Goals for Fiscal 2018/2019

Mission statement: Norwalk's Pedestrian Plan will get more people walking and running by creating an environment and a culture that are more conducive to safe and enjoyable walking and running. The pedestrian plan does not seek to replicate previous studies; rather it seeks to identify specific, measurable actions to create a City whose citizens embrace walking and running. It will be integrated over time with the Bike/Walk Commission Strategic Plan but is intended to stand alone initially as a means of giving increased attention to walking and running in Norwalk.

Vision: Create in Norwalk an expanded walking and running environment within the City of Norwalk that is well-connected, safe, attractive, and ADA compliant.

Nine key goals have been identified for the fiscal year running from July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019. These goals fall into the overlapping categories of program, infrastructure, policy/funding, and measurement. The Task Force has also suggested specific action steps, which are contained in the next section, and which the Bike/Walk Commission may choose to adopt.

Goals and Priorities:

The underscored goals (#'s 3, 5 and 8) are those that the Pedestrian Task Force believes should be first year priorities.

10. Expand the NorWALKer program of regular volunteer led walks using the NorWALKer routes.
11. Increase awareness in the Norwalk Public Schools of the benefits and techniques of safe walking, and brainstorm on future programs (e.g., gym classes, clubs).
12. Develop a short-list of priority pedestrian trouble spots or connectivity opportunities in Norwalk (e.g., cross walks and sidewalks), working with DPW to identify planned improvements. Also, identify areas where pedestrian connectivity to places of work, shopping and recreation can be improved.
13. Develop relationships with City/community leaders with a stake in safe walking and running.
14. Understand design components of safe and pleasant walking and running.
15. Identify and follow-up on pedestrian funding sources based on priorities.
16. Review existing applicable federal, state and local regulations in order to formulate Norwalk's pedestrian access policies.
17. Identify guidelines or scorecards for measuring the extent of walking/running and select or develop a scorecard for measuring walkability in Norwalk.
18. Review and recommend improvements to walking routes to all train and bus hubs, assuring safe mass-transit accessibility by non-automotive commuters.

Implementation Suggestions for the Fiscal 2018/2019 Walking Plan Goals

1. Goal: Expand the NorWALKer program of regular volunteer led walks using the NorWALKer routes. Action steps:
 - Identify a volunteer leader in each of 4 neighborhoods, who will be responsible for scheduling a monthly walk in their neighborhood. (In year two, the plan would target an additional 4 neighborhoods, and so on until each neighborhood in the City over time has a regular walking program.)
 - Publicize monthly walks before and after using print and social media.
 - Continue summer walks at Calf Pasture Beach.
 - Create and publicize a calendar of regular monthly walks in Norwalk, including the neighborhood walks, summer walks at Calf Pasture Beach, and Mayor and Mrs. Rillings' "Walk with Us" initiative. Use social media such as Facebook to publicize the maps and also provide downloadable versions.
 - Train leaders in safe walking.
 - As resources allow, extend Spanish translation of NorWALKer routes.

2. Goal: Increase awareness in the Norwalk Public Schools of the benefits and techniques of safe walking, and brainstorm on future programs (e.g., gym classes, clubs). Action steps:
 - Conduct four meetings with school staff: the executive level and elementary, middle and high school physical education staff to explore how to encourage more students to walk to school including improving infrastructure and programs to encourage walking.

3. Goal: develop a short-list of priority pedestrian trouble spots or connectivity opportunities in Norwalk (e.g., cross walks and sidewalks), working with DPW to identify planned improvements. Also, identify areas where pedestrian connectivity to places of work, shopping and recreation can be improved. Action steps:
 - Review police reports and UConn data available online.
 - Review "NorWALKer" assessment reports.
 - Identify existing goat paths.
 - Review DPW's planned improvements.
 - Review private developments for connectivity opportunities.
 - Update status of recommended improvements in Pedestrian & Bikeway Transportation Plan adopted in 2012.

4. Goal: develop relationships with City/community leaders with a stake in safe walking and running. Action steps:
 - Conduct meetings with City Department leaders and staff, and dovetail with City relationships developed through the Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission.
 - Conduct special outreach to the Board of Education, which is not currently represented on the Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission.
 - Conduct meetings with community leaders.

5. Goal: Understand design components of safe and pleasant walking and running. Action steps:
 - Understand the status of current sidewalk maintenance in Norwalk, and study precedents/best practices in other cities.
 - Understand the status of crosswalks adjacent to and near schools and senior housing in Norwalk, and study precedents/best practices in other cities.

6. Goal: Identify and follow up on pedestrian funding sources based on priorities. Action steps:
 - Identify funding sources and apply for three grants, working with the City of Norwalk and the Redevelopment Agency for assistance with grant applications at the State and City level. Examples of funding sources include Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, City funding (e.g., DPW capital funding for sidewalks, footpaths, crosswalks), and State funding (e.g., DEEP outdoor recreation grants).
 - Identify developers and other private funders for future cultivation and fund-raising.

7. Goal: review existing applicable federal, state and local regulations in order to formulate Norwalk's pedestrian access policies. Action steps:
 - Identify and understand existing applicable federal, state and local regulations.
 - Recommend changes to local ordinances and regulations pertaining to pedestrian access.
 - Address issues related to sidewalk ownership, liability and upkeep.

8. Goal: Identify guidelines or scorecards for measuring the extent of walking/running and select or develop a scorecard for measuring walkability in Norwalk. Action steps:
 - Compile and assess guidelines or scorecards of cities similar to Norwalk.
 - Select and amend a scorecard to suit Norwalk.

9. Goal: Review and recommend improvements to walking routes to all train and bus hubs, assuring safe mass-transit accessibility by non-automotive commuters.
 - Identify and assess walking routes to train and bus hubs.
 - Recommend improvements to walking routes to train and bus hubs that assure safe mass-transit accessibility by non-automotive commuters.

Appendix: References and Walking Resources

References

1. DataHaven. Community Profiles: Norwalk (2016). Available at: <http://www.ctdatahaven.org/profiles/norwalk>.
2. Walk-Friendly Communities. Benefits of being walk-friendly. Available at: <http://walkfriendly.org/benefits/>
3. National Association of Realtors®. 2017 Community & Transportation Preference Survey (Infographic). Available at: <https://www.nar.realtor/infographics/infographic-2017-community-transportation-preference-survey>
4. Walljasper, Jay. National Summit Showcases Health, Economic, and Social Justice Benefits of Walkable Communities (July 5, 2017). Available at: <https://www.communitycommons.org/2017/07/national-summit-showcases-health-economic-and-social-justice-benefits-of-walkable-communities/>
5. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Guide to Increase Physical Activity in the Community (2011). Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/PA_2011_WEB.pdf.
6. Promote Healthy Communities: Joint Call to Action. For members of the American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association, American Public Health Association, American Society of Civil Engineers, American Society of Landscape Architects, National Recreation and Park Association, U.S. Green Building Council, and Urban Land Institute (2012). Available at https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/environment/promote_healthy_communities.ashx.
7. US Community Preventive Services Task Force. Physical Activity: Built Environment Approaches Combining Transportation System Interventions with Land Use and Environmental Design (2016). Available at: <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/physical-activity-built-environment-approaches>

General Resources

Walk-Friendly Communities: <http://walkfriendly.org/>

Walk-Friendly Communities Community Assessment Tool: http://walkfriendly.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/WFC_Assessment_Tool.pdf

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center: www.pedbikeinfo.org

Creating Walkable and Bikeable Communities:

http://ppms.trec.pdx.edu/media/project_files/IBPI%20Master%20Plan%20Handbook%20FINAL.pdf

Bike/Ped Plans for Smaller Communities:

http://www.greenwaycollab.com/EducationTrainings/RecentPresentations/HCAT_Ohio_BikePedPlans.pdf

Nationwide Plan Examples

Lawrence, KS: <https://lawrenceks.org/mpo/pedplan/>

Santa Monica: <https://www.smgov.net/Departments/PCD/Plans/Pedestrian-Action-Plan/>

Fort Collins: http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/pdf/PlanDesign_SamplePlans_Local_FortCollins2011.pdf

Duck, NC: <https://www.townofduck.com/community-development/comprehensive-pedestrian-plan/>

Macon, NC: http://www.kerrtarcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/final_macon_ped_plan_ann2.pdf

Provo, Utah (population, 116K): <http://www.provo.org/departments/public-works/city-engineer/transportation-bicycle-and-pedestrian-planning>

Portland OR (not yet complete): <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/72504>

Connecticut Plan Examples

Norwalk's Previous Work: <http://ct-norwalk.civicplus.com/1156/Pedestrian-Bikeway-Transportation-Plan>

CT DOT: <http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?a=1390&q=259656>

CT Bike/Ped Plan (in-progress update of the 2009 CT DOT plan above): <http://www.ctbikepedplan.org/>

Bike Walk CT List of municipal plans (list is 3 years old): <http://www.bikewalkct.org/complete-streets-resources/links-to-ct-municipal-bike-ped-plans>

- Milford POCD: <http://www.ci.milford.ct.us/sites/milfordct/files/file/file/finalpocdddec2012.pdf> (check pages 130-132).
- New Britain: has a city-wide [Bicycle Connectivity Master Plan](#) and a [Complete Streets Master Plan for Downtown New Britain](#) which addresses both bicycle and pedestrian issues.
- Meriden: <http://www.bikewalkct.org/complete-streets-resources/meriden-comprehensive-sidewalk-analysis-and-strategy-report>
- Old Saybrook (2006): http://oldsaybrookct.org/Pages/OldSaybrookCT_Planning/PC_plans/Sidewalk%20PLAN.pdf
- Stratford: [http://www.townofstratford.com/filestorage/39879/40866/Housatonic Greenway Plan-Revised 7 20081.pdf](http://www.townofstratford.com/filestorage/39879/40866/Housatonic_Greenway_Plan-Revised_7_20081.pdf)

Others:

- Bridgewater: <https://westcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Bridgewater-2008-Pedestrian-Plan-resized.pdf>
- Darien Pedestrian Infrastructure Advisory Committee: <http://www.darienct.gov/content/28021/35731/35756/default.aspx>
- Hartford Complete Streets Committee: <http://www.hartford.gov/dds/232-development-services/2306-pz-completestreets>
- Simsbury (in progress): <https://www.simsbury-ct.gov/simsbury-pedestrian-and-bicycle-master-plan>
- Fairfield Group: <http://fairfieldct.org/bikeped>; Fairfield Plan: [http://fairfieldct.org/filestorage/10736/12067/18736/20066/Fairfield Bicycle %26 Pedestrian Plan B OS Endorsed 6-19-13.pdf](http://fairfieldct.org/filestorage/10736/12067/18736/20066/Fairfield_Bicycle_%26_Pedestrian_Plan_B_OS_Endorsed_6-19-13.pdf)