



2023 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

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Introduction

In an era marked by growing environmental concerns, the imperative for cities to prioritize sustainability has never been more pressing. Sustainability serves as the cornerstone of responsible urban development, encompassing a multitude of interconnected factors that collectively shape the quality of life for residents, the health of ecosystems, and the resilience of local economies.

First and foremost, prioritizing sustainability within cities is an essential response to the escalating environmental challenges our planet faces. Urban areas are significant contributors to carbon emissions, resource depletion, and pollution. By adopting sustainable practices such as efficient public transportation systems, green building standards, renewable energy integration, waste reduction, and green spaces, cities can significantly curb their environmental footprint. This not only mitigates climate change but also conserves vital natural resources and safeguards biodiversity, creating a healthier and more balanced environment for both people and wildlife.

Furthermore, sustainability is closely linked to economic vitality. Cities that invest in sustainable infrastructure and practices are better equipped to attract businesses, foster innovation, and create job opportunities in emerging green sectors. These cities become magnets for forward-thinking industries and a skilled workforce, promoting long-term economic growth while reducing vulnerability to resource volatility. Sustainable urban planning can also lower operational costs for businesses and residents alike, stemming from energy efficiency measures and reduced waste management expenses.



Equity and social cohesion are integral aspects of sustainability in cities. When cities prioritize sustainability, they often consider equitable access to resources and services for all residents, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. This inclusivity leads to improved public health outcomes, as cleaner air, safe drinking water, and accessible green spaces positively impact physical and mental well-being. Moreover, sustainable transportation options, such as biking lanes and efficient public transit systems, enhance mobility and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable populations who may not have access to private vehicles.

Resilience is another critical element. Sustainable cities are better prepared to withstand and recover from natural disasters and other shocks, thanks to well-designed infrastructure, efficient emergency response systems, and a strong sense of community engagement. By incorporating green infrastructure like permeable pavements, rain gardens, and flood-resistant buildings, cities can mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events, reducing the potential for catastrophic damage and costly recovery efforts.

In summary, prioritizing sustainability in cities is an effort that aligns environmental responsibility, economic prosperity, social equity, and disaster resilience. By adopting sustainable practices, cities can pave the way for a harmonious coexistence of people and nature, creating thriving urban centers that are adaptable to the challenges of the future. As global citizens, we have a collective duty to prioritize sustainability and work towards a more sustainable and inclusive urban future.



Progress to Date

The City of Norwalk has acknowledged the importance of sustainability for many years. Several strategic plans served as successful umbrella documents providing a citywide vision complete with strategic goals and actions. Many strategies have been advanced or completed by residents, nonprofits, government agencies and businesses.

Key Accomplishments

- On September 13, 2018 on behalf of the Institute for Local Government's Beacon Program, the City was presented a Gold Level Award for achieving a 12% Community Greenhouse Gas Reduction.
- The City continues to implement the State Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWEL) which sets minimum landscape water efficiency standards for certain landscape projects.
- The City continues to promote water conservation measures (ex. high efficiency clothes washers, high efficiency toilets, rain barrels and limited outdoor water use) that reduce dependency on imported water.
- In 2022, the City partnered with Athens Services to implement a curbside organics collection program.
- In response to periods of excessive heat, the City utilizes city facilities, including the Norwalk Senior Center, as a designated cooling center for residents.
- The City is actively supporting transit oriented development near the Norwalk Metrolink Station with the Norwalk Transit Village Specific Plan that will accommodate a new park and trail system, housing, and businesses.
- In 2021, the City unveiled nine electric buses made possible by Federal Transit Administration grants. The buses utilize electric charging stations within the Norwalk Transit service yard.
- In 2022, the City Council approved the Norwalk Bicycle Master Plan, which establishes the City's vision and comprehensive approach to improving bicycle infrastructure in Norwalk.



Purpose

The 2023 Sustainability Plan represents a step forward for the City. The plan uses an equity lens, a transformative tool to improve planning, decision-making, and resource allocation leading to more racially equitable policies and programs. Using the Leed for Cities framework as a basis, the Sustainability Plan includes new topics, more intentionally addressing all three legs of sustainability: people, planet and prosperity.

Accountability

Advancing the goals of this plan requires more than just a commitment to act, it requires a commitment to be held accountable. A way for us to reach our equity goals is to ensure that we are learning from our failures and our successes. Tracking our progress and monitoring our ability to advance equity and sustainability goals are essential components of the plan.

Community

The Big Picture

More connects us than separates us as members of a community. Our common connections are foundational to support common causes, work collectively to address complex issues and protect ourselves from discomfort and conflict. In order to strengthen our bonds with neighbors and our community, we encourage inclusive and equitable actions. With community at the center, meaningful and genuine engagement can be the engine that produces and drives change.

In Norwalk

People in Norwalk value their neighbors and want to work together to improve their neighborhoods. Throughout all parts of the city, people are finding camaraderie and forming their own “villages” of neighbors who become friends through block parties, walking groups, cookouts, or sports leagues. Some neighbors band together to do restorative projects, such as cleanups and community murals. Others show up at health fairs, join community or planning meetings, or gather as part of faith-based organizations. Activities that foster cross-cultural conversation and togetherness help strengthen the bonds neighbors share, and can provide opportunities for empathy and an increased understanding of each other.

As the city evolves, giving people a voice—and a place to have that voice heard—is a necessary step toward becoming an equitable and inclusive city.



City Programs and Initiatives

- In 2023, the City began the One-Ways Revitalization Program, which targets investment and engagement into one of the city's most underserved neighborhoods. Residents receive weatherization improvements intended to improve living conditions.
- Continue to engage, promote, and support voices who may not be traditionally heard, including youth, seniors, non-English speakers through traditional and innovative communications methods.
- Continue to support resident dialogue and social capital building by using outreach such as social media campaigns and other community-based, phone friendly tools to share knowledge and information. Distribute electronic and paper program guides widely, and translate program marketing materials for non-English speakers.

Future Actions

- Develop an Environmental Justice Element of the General Plan
- Develop an Extreme Heat Action Plan
- Provide staff training on environmental justice



Energy

The Big Picture

The energy that powers our lights, heats our homes, and fuels our transportation comes almost exclusively from fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas. When we use less energy, we burn less fossil fuels, leading to lower emissions of carbon dioxide which is the primary contributor to climate change. Investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy and alternative fuels save money long-term, catalyze local reinvestment and jobs, and protect human health and the environment. To ensure low-income residents are not left behind as technology advances, cities are working to lower the upfront cost of renewable energy and energy efficiency, expanding car-sharing options, and increasing charging stations in high-poverty areas so residents might capitalize on cost-saving benefits of electric vehicles.

In Norwalk

Norwalk has significant needs, costs, and challenges in terms of serving the energy needs of low-income residents. High energy costs are a burden on cash-strapped families and older adults, who are juggling tough choices between energy bills and basic necessities like food, shelter, or medicine. Additionally, older, unmaintained housing is often leaky and less energy efficient, leading to higher energy bills. Improving the energy efficiency of housing stock is not only a cost-effective intervention, but also delivers valuable benefits to support an equitable clean energy economy by making homes comfortable and healthy, and boosting grid reliability.

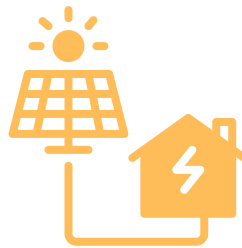
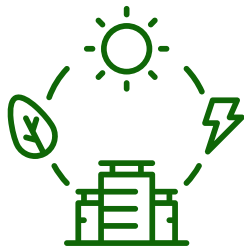


City Programs and Initiatives

- On September 13, 2018 on behalf of the Institute for Local Government's Beacon Program, the City was presented a Gold Level Award for achieving a 12% Community Greenhouse Gas Reduction. These reductions were the result of the City's success in reducing energy use in City facilities, through improvements including replacement of all lights with LED lighting.
- In 2020, the City joined SoCalREN to gain access to a wide variety of energy efficiency opportunities to save energy and money.

Future Actions

- Expand energy efficiency, conservation and renewable energy education programming to reach homeowners and renters with a specific focus on low-income populations.
- Conduct an updated energy audit of all municipal buildings.
- Seek increased financing for energy programs including home efficiency and improvement programs, energy assistance, and weatherization, solar, battery storage, and alternative vehicles.
- Increase the supply of clean, renewable electricity and battery storage, including community solar and rooftop solar opportunities for low-income homeowners and renters.



Nature

The Big Picture

Connecting to nature can stimulate our imaginations and rejuvenate us. Nature activates our senses—we can see, hear, smell, and touch the natural world. In cities, contact with nature can range from the view of a few trees through a window to a stroll through a large, wooded park. Consider, for example, the importance of trees. A leafy, green canopy acts as an air conditioner for the city, as their shade counteracts the “heat island” effect of concrete surfaces absorbing sunlight. Raising awareness about the important role of nature, and fostering the connection between people and nature is important. Through our determined commitment, we can protect our natural systems and ensure they can be enjoyed by all.



In Norwalk

In Norwalk, we have more than 113 acres of parkland with 12 parks, over 17,000 trees and two greenbelt areas. It is important to recognize that over the years, our natural systems of streams, forests, and wildlife have been altered as the city has developed. As these natural systems transition to urban and suburban uses, we are actively creating and linking green spaces to each other, for both people and wildlife. When open spaces are designed and maintained in partnership with neighbors, ensuring equitable access and avoiding resident displacement, they offer opportunities for relaxation, recreation, and rejuvenation—and can help to build a more resilient city.

City Programs and Initiatives

- The City continues to implement the State Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWEL) which sets minimum landscape water efficiency standards for certain landscape projects.
- The City of Norwalk is committed to a tree planting program that promotes a safe, healthy, and attractive urban forest. Trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, help with energy conservation, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen and provide habitat for wildlife.
- The City is preparing to install a new regional stormwater storage facility at Hermosillo Park.
- Prop 68 grant will provide funding for existing park amenities to be completely renovated featuring new sports courts, playground, splash pad, and a community building with restrooms.
- The City continues to promote water conservation measures (ex. high efficiency clothes washers, high efficiency toilets, rain barrels and limited outdoor water use) that reduce dependency on imported water. In partnership with Liberty Utilities and Golden State Water, rain barrel distribution events are very popular and highly utilized by the community.

Future Actions

- Update the Urban Forest Management Plan and expand the call-to-action to plant and care for trees. Engage more residents, businesses and local organizations into a unified approach.
- Develop and implement organic land care policies and/or plans, requiring the use of safer, non-chemical alternatives to chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, and increasing use of organic land care.
- Remediate polluted sites to support reuse for parks, open space and other community needs.



Waste Reduction

The Big Picture

The best way to prevent waste is by buying less, reusing what you have, and then recycling and composting, a concept known as “zero waste.” This concept is increasingly guiding cities and individuals to limit the amount of waste going to landfills and incinerators—which are expensive, contribute to environmental degradation, and are disproportionately located near low-income neighborhoods affecting people of color. They compound existing health risks and negatively influence property values. Above and beyond reducing landfill strain, zero waste is an approach that can help keep money in your pocket and support local, resilient economies: Composting programs, creative deconstruction of buildings and salvage, and reuse of wasted materials create jobs—and literally turn waste into community wealth.

In Norwalk

Norwalk is working to become a cleaner city while reducing landfill waste. We can revitalize our neighborhoods by reducing our consumption, repurposing our purchases instead of throwing them away, and building our local, green economy. For example, Citywide mechanical street sweeping has led to more streets swept and more tons of trash collected, reducing the trash in our streets and the environment. The Mini Mr. Sun program events collect an average of 13 tons per month of trash from the community. Non-recyclable materials like plastic bags, polystyrene containers, and beverage containers make up as much as half of the litter polluting local streets.



City Programs and Initiatives

- To reduce construction and demolition waste, the City implemented the California Green Building Standards Code (CALGreen). The CALGreen Code requires recycling and/or salvaging for reuse a minimum of 65% of the waste generated from certain construction-related projects.
- In partnership with Athens Services, the City hosts annual free mulch/compost distribution to residents.
- For many years, the City has hosted an annual waste collection event whereby residents can dispose of e-waste, document shredding and medication.
- In 2022, the City partnered with Athens Services to implement a curbside organics collection program.



Future Actions

- Develop and phase in organic waste reduction requirements in accordance with CalRecycle mandates (SB 1383), including municipal code updates, customer education and outreach materials, food recovery capacity, compliance & enforcement protocols, monitoring and reporting, etc.
- Develop a program to eliminate single-use plastic products in city facilities, programs and events



Climate and Resilience

The Big Picture

Natural hazards and extreme weather events are unavoidable. And in the coming years, these kinds of disasters—already markedly stronger and more frequent—are projected to increase in severity because of climate change. It is critical for cities to become more resilient to these events. This means strengthening buildings, utilities, and emergency response systems, as well as fortifying social systems and resident safety nets, so everyone is able to recover quickly.

In Norwalk

Norwalk is vulnerable to flooding, extreme heat, high winds, and winter storms. Combined with projected increases in temperature, these hazards will continue to more deeply affect our city than they have in the past. Natural hazards cause property and economic damage, and threaten Norwalk's citywide utilities, transportation systems, and sewage treatment plants; they also endanger public safety. These hazards have the potential to cause the most strain for low-income residents, who have fewer resources and face greater barriers to safety, adequate medical aid, and economic recovery after a storm. Norwalk has taken steps to integrate equity into all-hazards mitigation, and climate adaptation planning and implementation to support our most vulnerable.

City Programs and Initiatives

- In response to periods of excessive heat, the City utilizes city facilities, including the Norwalk Senior Center, as a designated cooling center for residents.



Future Actions

- Plant more shade trees in neighborhoods where concrete and other hard surfaces trap and collect heat creating “urban heat islands.”
- Develop a City Climate Action Plan by 2025, using an equity lens.
- Streamline the installation of rooftop solar for homes and businesses.

Economy

The Big Picture

A local economy is a catalyst for attracting new residents and retaining longtime residents, for fostering job creation and entrepreneurship, and for stimulating new investment. Producing and selling local goods and services strengthens local employment and builds community wealth by ensuring that money spent in a city stays in the city. By pooling capital and human resources and expanding new models of economic development and wealth creation that leverage local assets and spending power, opportunities can be created for local residents and businesses. Growing local economic opportunities that embrace sustainability contributes to economic growth, social equity, and resilience.

In Norwalk

Recent economic changes have impacted Norwalk. Like many cities in Southeast Los Angeles County, Norwalk was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment increased 200% in 2020 but returned to pre-pandemic levels in November 2022. Another important consideration is that education levels are correlated with incomes. As a result, educational attainment in Norwalk is lower compared to the County and State. The average household income in the City of Norwalk is 18% lower and 24% lower than the County and State. Low educational attainment is a barrier to many of the mid-to-high paying job opportunities in growing sectors like healthcare, green energy, construction and financial services. Inclusion strategies by both the public and private sectors provide access to employment. They can also spur investments in early-stage companies, increase programs to develop small-business opportunities, and help minority- and women-owned firms. More needs to be done. Working together, Norwalk's business community can grow living-wage job opportunities for unemployed and underemployed residents. The light manufacturing, transportation, and construction sectors are fields that are economic strengths and hold promise to connect good paying jobs to those without college degrees. Sustaining a strong, growing, local economy lifts the entire city.



City Programs and Initiatives

- Continue the City's Summer Youth Work Program that provides on-the-job training to fill entry-level positions, and to increase opportunities for advancement.

Future Actions

- Expand green job training programs in areas such as clean energy, energy efficiency, energy auditing, green infrastructure, and waste management.
- Support local production, purchasing and exporting strategies.

Transportation

The Big Picture

Everyone needs safe, affordable, and reliable means to travel to work, school, shopping, appointments, or to visit friends. Depending on cars as the primary mode of transport can make travel easy, but it also creates congestion, noise, air pollution, crashes, and increased household expenses. Furthermore, transportation is a major source of greenhouse gases. A sustainable and equitable transportation system offers access to affordable, integrated, and safe options in transit, biking, and walking—and is less dependent on cars. Increased connectivity and access, particularly for those living in historically under-served areas, is necessary for improving social mobility, quality of life, and economic opportunities.

Car travel is not an option for everyone, including households without access to a car or ride-sharing technology, disabled people and older adults (who may also lack walking ability), and youth under legal driving age. Job markets (and employees) suffer when transportation is unreliable, and when commute times exceed 45 minutes. By ensuring that everyone has many dependable transit options, economic and social mobility can increase for those without cars while helping to recruit and retain young talent. A great transit system unlocks the additional benefits of quieter streets, fewer vehicular injuries and fatalities, cleaner air, and more active lifestyles.



In Norwalk

Norwalk has public buses and trains, a Bicycle Master Plan, car-sharing services, and on-demand ride-sharing services. However, not all of these options are widely accessible or reliable. Our single occupancy vehicle-centric system is responsible for almost 30 percent of the greenhouse gases we release into the air. A shift away from this dependence toward reliable, accessible public transit, connected to the region, along with safer routes for pedestrians, and bicyclists can be enormously positive for Norwalk's economic mobility, prosperity, and safety.

City Programs and Initiatives

- The City is actively supporting transit-oriented development near the Norwalk Metrolink Station with the Norwalk Transit Village Specific Plan that will accommodate a new park and trail system, housing and businesses.
- In 2021, the City unveiled nine electric buses made possible by Federal Transit Administration grants. The buses utilize electric charging stations within the Norwalk Transit service yard.
- In 2022, the City Council approved the Norwalk Bicycle Master Plan, which establishes the City's vision and comprehensive approach to improving bicycle infrastructure in Norwalk.

Future Actions

- Install new bus shelters to improve rider comfort and safety.
- Work with regional partners including Metro and Caltrans to implement first/last mile street and sidewalk improvements around the Metro C-Line Station to improve user accessibility and safety.
- Expand the supply of EV charging infrastructure, prioritizing publicly accessible areas and existing parking spaces, in partnership with Southern California Edison.
- Electrify Norwalk's municipal and public transportation fleets with plug-in electric vehicles.



