



City Of Norwich

Office of the Mayor

Peter Albert Nystrom

Mayor Peter Albert Nystrom
State of the City Address – January 2, 2018

Good evening everyone and thank you for coming to tonight's council meeting. Tonight we hope to continue a process that actually started two years ago. We are in a better position to handle the loss of state revenue and the difficult choices still ahead. Our efforts to control and reduce spending and acknowledge the burden that taxes create for our citizens provides for us a blueprint for the near future.

Over the last 2 years, our City Treasurer has managed the cities accounts and investments, generating new income through these efforts, securing savings and lowering the cost of managing these funds. Through the efforts of our City Manager we are continuing to realize savings through stronger negotiations with our employees. It is important that we find additional future savings as we complete the pension agreement pending before this Council with a majority of our unions.

The City Manager, Human Resources and finance departments, as a matter of policy, are reviewing employee benefit packages and are proposing adjustments to make them more financially sustainable each time a union contract is up for negotiations in

the future. Additional efforts by our Finance Department and our Municipal Bond Council found savings of just under a quarter of one million dollars back in March of 2017. This concerned the refinancing of 2009 General Obligation Bonds. During this process Standard and Poors affirmed Norwich's AA Bond rating.

The past City Council made it a priority to put properties back on the tax rolls. These efforts are continuing. Further review of all city department budgets and city consolidation must be on the table. Recently we moved the Human Services Department to City Hall and have successfully marketed 80 Broadway which helps our Grand List. Recently in the Norwich Bulletin the Norwich Community Development Corporation reported significant investment occurring in our downtown. Their analysis showed that up to \$10 million dollars has been invested in downtown through the efforts of a local bank, restaurant expansions, and private investments targeting new residential opportunities. At the heart of this effort is the opening of new offices of NCDC and their successful incubator business known as Foundry 66. It should be noted that in a very short time, the available space for additional new small businesses will grow as the second floor is slated to open.

At this time I want to also acknowledge the seamless transition at our Norwich Police Department as former Chief Louis Fusaro retired and Patrick Daley assumed the role of Chief, followed by the promotions of other officers to Deputy Chief, Captains, and Lieutenants. On a special note, the city of Norwich made the

top 101 safest cities in the United States and ranked #3 in CT according to Safehome.org. This is a direct result of the efforts of our Police Department, our community policing models, and their outstanding service. This finding is a result of a combination of FBI reports and other law enforcement demographics including population density, unemployment rates and income levels. To learn more go to www.safehome.org/safest-cities/CT/

Tonight we begin this journey together as a new Council and I am confident that our members will work together. While services are needed and must be provided to our citizens, we cannot lose sight that they, our taxpayers, are the ones paying the bill. During the recent campaign I talked about the promise of a new Norwich that prepares itself to be ready to accept challenges. Tonight I'll outline some of those.

First I'd like to speak about preparing the City of Norwich for further private sector investment and how that investment will promote the view of Norwich as a regional asset. Perhaps some small towns could contract for services for a fee from departments such as Public Works, Police, and Fire. It is worthy to note that our Paid and Volunteer Fire Departments through municipal aid currently work as a regional asset.

Norwich's role as the municipal utility provider for the development of the Preston Riverwalk will undoubtedly provide additional revenue, helping to grow the 10% payment to the city by the Norwich Public Utilities. But we must also

acknowledge that this is years away. It is just one example of the city identifying new sources of revenue as we continue to deal with the politics of Hartford and the continued loss of State revenue. For example, I would urge the City Council to support a resolution where the state would authorize cities like Norwich the right to collect a daily occupancy fee in the city's hotels. Additional new revenue may be found as the prior City Council gave notice and voted to notify that the city would be looking for 12% from NPU this year. This will have to be negotiated with the NPU Board and Commission.

In addition to our municipal role here, it is imperative that we focus on economic opportunities to ensure that our downtown and our city grow. As an example, the investment of the new development on the 320 unit Ponemah project shows the city has supportive infrastructure work to do as well as guiding further private development there. In total, between Phase 1 & 2 this project will be at least \$80MM by the time it is complete.

In 2010 the voters of our city passed a municipal bond providing for a private sector partnership for investment in downtown which is one of the main reasons why we are seeing private investment now. Looking ahead those three programs, which included grant, rental rebate and loan components, need to be renewed and expanded. As this new plan unfolds, we will have to follow our Plan of Conservation and Development. Therefore I am proposing additional areas of our city be included in the downtown bond program, for example the area of Greenville, focusing on the North Main and Central Avenue

sections and the west side of Norwich, including lower West Thames Street, High Street, Mechanic, West Main Street, and upper Shipping Street.

The goal of this is to build on what we have learned about a focused effort to encourage private development with well designed programs identified in the POCD. This will first require a complete examination and explanation of the pros and cons of the program over the last 7 years and how those benefits can be expanded. The final authority of this proposal, however, rests with the voters, as this concept must go to referendum in November of 2018 for their approval.

Another opportunity for self investment is focusing on our waterfront. Previously in my last term as mayor, I began discussions with highway transportation people at the Federal level to change the highway designations through downtown, re-designating Route 2 as Scenic Route 2A. Route 2 as it is now known, would change and would flow over 395S and route 2A east reconnecting in Preston. This change would allow us to expand and enhance access to the waterfront and its uses. It would also remove thousands of vehicles, large and small, whose sole purpose is just to pass through our city, resulting in less damage to our roads and bridges and improving the air quality as well. All of these discussions are focusing on making Norwich a destination instead of a pass-through city. Focusing on reducing and slowing traffic down is a key component in improving the quality of life downtown and surrounding areas.

Just as an aside, the State's redesign of Route 82 is still pending. Our strong opposition to a rotary expansion experiment is still on the table and is still our responsibility. Working with the State of Ct DOT the new design must incorporate features that enhance development and investments in our city, not harm it.

We should also be aware that as the upgrades to the rail lines continue from New London to Palmer, MA our city should emphasize new business opportunities for companies located along the rail lines in the city of Norwich. Open discussions with them and how we can improve their own business models could enhance growth for them and additional jobs for our city. Even with the EPA floodway designation of Shipping Street, the active rail lines could still provide business opportunities above the floodway demarcation.

The City Council and the Board of Education should discuss the potential savings realized by the consolidation of the number of elementary schools that we operate. We can use the information gained from the past consolidation effort. I am proposing that the council and the Board of Ed create a building consolidation committee. A greater emphasis must include a committee comprised of teachers from every elementary school as we look to redesign our school system.

During the fall, much discussion often focused on the City's role in providing access to recreation programs and healthy choices for children after school. Therefore, I would ask people from the private and public sector for their ideas in forming a

scholarship program. The scholarship program would provide assistance to those children who otherwise would not have access to Norwich based programs such as PAL, Norwich Little League,

Norwich Recreation programs, etc. As part of gaining access, some component of community service might be considered as entry into the program. Existing examples currently operate in our local schools and could be adapted as a model. Tonight I would ask our Recreation Director and our Recreation Advisory Board to oversee this concept and report back to the City Council.

My statement tonight is intended to acknowledge a number of assets we have in our city. Those include two active rail lines, our beautiful waterfront, the Industrial Park including Dodd Stadium, current private investment occurring in downtown, the role that the NPU continues to play, not just in the city of Norwich, but in the future site in Preston. Perhaps our greatest asset for current and new residents and businesses is our commitment to holding the line on spending and reducing taxes by our actions not just our words. Further enhancement of public/private partnerships can be cornerstone for new opportunities for our citizens. Together it can lead us to enhanced revenue, a larger tax base and a better quality of life for all of our citizens. Thank you and good night!!!!