

FALL 2011

# New Rochelle News

from MAYOR NOAM BRAMSON

Dear Friends,

Even as New Rochelle — like cities throughout America — wrestles with near-term fiscal challenges, we must still keep an eye on the future and take steps today to lay the foundation for a better tomorrow. Good planning provides multiple benefits:



- enhanced capacity to attract private investment and economic development;
- improved access to grants, some of which explicitly require a planning component;
- broader community involvement in civic goal-setting;
- rational and proactive allocation of scarce resources, especially for infrastructure; and
- better decision-making by the City Council and Administration.

Prior newsletters described our GreenNR Sustainability Plan and a Bi-State Regional Planning Consortium. In this issue, I look at an update of New Rochelle’s Comprehensive Plan, a fresh examination of Davids Island, a detailed assessment of the West End, a newly completed downtown parking study, and a neighborhood-college committee empanelled to consider student housing options for Iona. By focusing on these priorities now, we can position ourselves to hit the ground running when the national economy recovers.

You can read more about these subjects and also sign up to receive news bulletins at my website: [noambramson.org](http://noambramson.org).

Please feel free to contact me with questions, comments and ideas, or for assistance with City services of any kind.

Sincerely,

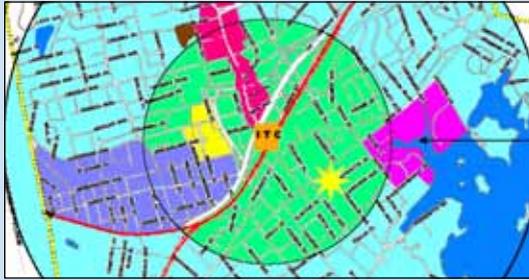
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## INSIDE

Planning for Our Future .....	2
Iona & City Launch Joint Planning Process .....	4
Sustainability Plan Moves Toward Implementation.....	6
Improvements Planned for Snow Removal.....	8
News Briefs .....	10

# PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SET FOR UPDATE



A good Comprehensive Plan is part vision-statement and part practical guide to action. Focused primarily on matters of land use, it describes a community's current conditions and charts a course to a desired future. Once completed, a Comprehensive Plan serves as the basis for subsequent decisions on zoning, infrastructure, development, and preservation.

Even the most thoughtful Comprehensive Plan cannot anticipate all of the factors that shape a city's options, and so such plans are intended to be living, flexible documents that change in response to new conditions and opportunities.

New Rochelle's current Comprehensive Plan is fifteen years old. And while it has been updated periodically on a piecemeal basis, it is now time for a full re-draft.

This summer, Planning Director Eleanor Sharpe presented to the Council the essential principles and procedures that will shape this effort. The process is expected to unfold over approximately 18 months and to involve extensive public input.

You can view the Planning Director's presentation online at [bit.ly/comp-plan](http://bit.ly/comp-plan).

## WEST END ASSESSMENT CONSIDERS FUTURE OF VIBRANT MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOOD

The City recently completed a planning analysis of the West End, one of New Rochelle's oldest and most densely populated neighborhoods. Funded by the federal community development block grant (CDBG) program, this analysis was shaped by several public meetings, as well as expert assessment of land use patterns, mobility issues, and physical conditions.



The final report makes many recommendations for future improvements. Some measures are already moving forward, such as the restructuring of the Union Avenue parking lot to expand neighborhood parking options and the enhancement of pedestrian access to Columbus Elementary School. Other recommendations might be implemented in conjunction with a streetscape project surrounding Sound Shore Medical Center. And some may be dependent on the receipt of additional grants in the years to come.

The West End Assessment is likely to be embedded in the City's updated Comprehensive Plan. It's a good example of how

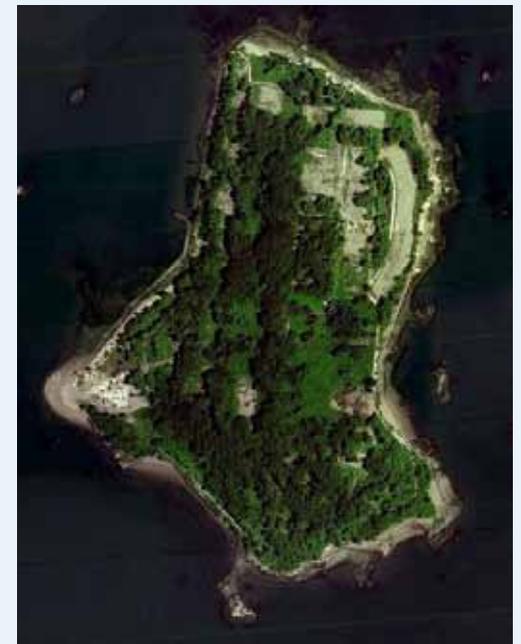
Cities everywhere are facing serious budget challenges. But even as we address urgent near-term economic needs, we must also continue planning for the future. You can read about New Rochelle's financial circumstances and strategies online at [noambramson.org/topic/budget-finance/](http://noambramson.org/topic/budget-finance/)

## Dauids Island Task Force To Release Findings In October

Dauids Island has both enchanted and bedeviled our community for nearly two generations — stimulating plenty of debate, but little in the way of tangible progress toward public use and benefit.

A year ago, the City convened a Task Force to take a fresh look at Dauids Island and assist the City Council in establishing a homegrown vision for the site's future. Composed of neighborhood representatives, community leaders, environmental advocates and development experts, the Task Force assembled a huge amount of information, conducted a public meeting, and enlisted the volunteer assistance of some of the world's leading planning professionals.

The Task Force is now poised to submit its findings during our City Council meeting on October 11th. I look forward to the group's input, and then to a more fully informed conversation about the potential of one of New Rochelle's most interesting and exciting assets. Stay tuned!



**Dauids Island is just half a mile from the New Rochelle mainland. We should pursue a viable reuse plan that balances economic and environmental objectives and that permits our entire community to benefit from this unique asset.**

the Comprehensive Plan's broad outlines will be linked firmly to specific actions and initiatives in targeted neighborhoods. Over time, this process permits a more rational allocation of scarce resources for infrastructure and other needs, especially with

respect to federal dollars, the use of which is restricted to areas with socio-economic challenges.

Read the full West End "Needs Assessment" report online at [bit.ly/west-end](http://bit.ly/west-end).

# IONA & CITY LAUNCH JOINT PLANNING PROCESS

Visit my website for ongoing posts and updates on this topic:  
[noambramson.org/topic/planning-development/](http://noambramson.org/topic/planning-development/)

## Iona College Withdraws Dormitory Application While New Options Are Considered

The relationship between a college and its surrounding community is almost always a complicated one, with points of friction and discontent balanced against opportunities for mutual assistance and progress.

The relationship between Iona and the City of New Rochelle is no exception. Iona is among New Rochelle's largest employers, a planning and economic anchor for the North Avenue corridor, an attractor that draws thousands of people, and an engine of upward mobility for its students, many of whom become permanent residents

after graduating. At the same time, the neighborhoods near Iona are often impacted by student behavior (or misbehavior), traffic volume, and parking demands, as well as by growth patterns that can dramatically reshape the physical character of an entire block.

Most people recognize that college and community interests are ultimately bound together, and that we can benefit most fully by working side by side in a climate of mutual respect and understanding. But too often we become trapped in-

### City To Seek Voluntary Payments from Large Tax-Exempt Institutions

For several years, New Rochelle has confronted its budget challenges through a wide range of strategies to cut costs — a smaller workforce, frozen salaries and benefits, program deferrals and cancellations, and much more.

But focusing on spending cuts alone is not a balanced approach — after all, the need for municipal services like Police, Fire, and Public Works does not diminish in a recession. Meanwhile, increasing revenue through higher property taxes is a bad option that puts too much pressure on families facing this same difficult economy. So finding new and alternative revenue sources has to be a priority.

In this spirit, the City is reaching out to the large not-for-profit institutions in New Rochelle with a reasonable, albeit nontraditional, request: help pay for the municipal services you use with voluntary annual payments to the City.

These payments would be entirely voluntary, and it would be premature to count on them in our budget. City Hall has no authority to determine the taxable status of property — Albany sets the rules that determine which institutions are tax-exempt.

But there are examples of cities around the country where arrangements like this are in place. And there is certainly no harm in asking. At a minimum, the conversation may help achieve a better understanding of the ways in which these institutions contribute to — and draw from — our community as a whole.

stead in rigid, reactive debates, as in the battle surrounding Iona's plans for a new 10-story dormitory on Mayflower Avenue. What should ideally be a common effort to achieve common solutions becomes a zero-sum fight.

That is why the recent breakthrough in talks between Iona and municipal and neighborhood leaders is such a positive and significant development.

The City and Iona have commenced a joint planning exercise, with the goal of meeting the College's student housing and growth objectives, while also advancing the broader community's interest in protecting residential quality of life and promoting beneficial commercial investment. Neighborhood representatives will be direct participants, as members of the planning committee.

Until at least the conclusion of this joint planning process, Iona will voluntarily withdraw its application for the Mayflower dormitory. Meanwhile, the City has temporarily raised the local occupancy standards for Iona's existing dormitories for the next two academic years.

As we move forward, all sides will have to demonstrate an open mind, appreciation for different points of view, and a spirit of compromise. It won't be easy, but I am optimistic about our prospects.



Council Member Barry Fertel, Greg Varian, Iona President Dr. Joseph Nyre, Mayor Noam Bramson, Council Member Marianne Sussman, and City Manager Chuck Strome

## New Downtown Parking Study Completed

Well-managed parking facilities are important to our local economy and quality of life. Especially in the downtown area, parking must serve several different constituencies with distinct interests and needs, including employees, shoppers, diners, residents, and commuters. Parking should also generate sufficient revenue to provide for maintenance and capital improvements, without reliance on taxpayers.

Several months ago, the City, in partnership with the downtown Business Improvement District (BID), commissioned an in-depth analysis of parking regulations, infrastructure, technology, and administrative oversight. The final report, presented to the City Council in September, included these recommendations:

- establish more flexible and cost-effective parking permit options;
- introduce credit card and pay-by-cell capacity for on-street meters;
- adjust rates and hours to maximize the availability of convenient parking;
- launch car and bike share programs;
- expand overnight parking options; and
- centralize administration and oversight of parking operations and enforcement.

Beyond this outline, the report drills down to a fine level of detail and includes very specific suggestions for each parking facility.

The report's recommendations will now be converted into legislation that can be presented for the Council's consideration and action.

You can read the parking study online at [bit.ly/parking-study](http://bit.ly/parking-study).

# SUSTAINABILITY PLAN MOVES TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

## Short-Term Actions Presented to City Council

In March, the City Council approved New Rochelle's first-ever Sustainability Plan, GreenNR — a twenty-year blueprint for economic and environmental initiatives intended to improve the vitality and quality of life in New Rochelle, while also saving money.

This summer, the City Administration and our Sustainability Coordinator, Deborah Newborn, presented a memorandum detailing an implementation strategy for GreenNR's short-term recommendations. The staff's implementation strategy prioritizes actions for 2011, 2012, and 2013, identifies primary departmental responsibility for each activity, and notes which initiatives would benefit from volunteer participation or public-private task forces.

In light of the immediate fiscal difficulties confronting New Rochelle — and all cities — the short-term implementation strategy focuses heavily on measures that either



require no additional costs or will achieve immediate savings. Other initiatives may depend on receiving outside grants, which New Rochelle has already been aggressively pursuing as a way to invest in our local infrastructure without further burdening local taxpayers.

Writing the Sustainability Plan was a challenge, and implementing its recommendations will be a challenge, too. But the effort will be well worth our time and energy, and will help New Rochelle better achieve a positive vision for the future.

Read the short-term implementation memo here online at [bit.ly/greenr-rec](http://bit.ly/greenr-rec).

### HOW DOES YOUR ENERGY AND WATER USE STACK UP?

Most of us want to be more efficient when it comes to our household energy and water use. Less consumption is better for the environment and also better for our wallets. But sometimes it's difficult to judge how well we are doing.

Here's a tool that could help. The City's green page now contains a link to the service "Sage Steps." By entering information about your own utility use, you can receive a score that compares your efficiency to that of residents of the same zip code in similar housing. If your resource use is greater than average, chances are you've got some good opportunities to achieve savings.

Compare your usage online at [sagesteps.com/newrochelle](http://sagesteps.com/newrochelle).

# BRINGING JOBS AND INVESTMENT TO OUR CITY

## Pearlgreen Moves to New Rochelle

Bringing new businesses and jobs to New Rochelle is an essential priority. And while towers and shopping centers usually attract the most attention, the City's commercial base depends on a balanced portfolio of economic activity. That's why last month's official opening of the new headquarters of Pearlgreen Corporation is welcome news.

Pearlgreen is a 75-year-old family business that manufactures building maintenance and contractor supplies as well as sports equipment like netting and batting cages.

The industrial building they now occupy was the abandoned former home of the Bakers Pride Oven Company. Pearlgreen has upgraded the facility significantly, in-

cluding energy-saving features supported by grants from Con Edison and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. The move relocated more than 55 full-time, permanent employees to the site, created about 120 temporary construction jobs, added ten new manufacturing jobs, and added approximately \$7 million in new investment to the city.

The New Rochelle Industrial Development Agency (IDA) was instrumental in persuading Pearlgreen to move to New Rochelle, providing assistance to help defray the cost of relocating. It's a good example of how IDA incentives, used judiciously, can be effective tools in promoting economic activity to the benefit of taxpayers.

### Step Into The Way-Back Machine — Set For 1995



Sometimes it is helpful to be reminded of just how far we have come in a little over a decade. This aerial photograph of the New Rochelle Train Station and its surroundings is dated August 21, 1995. It displays quite a dramatic contrast

from present conditions. No Transit Center. No Library Green. Open lots on the Trump Plaza and Avalon sites. The crumbling Mall garage just visible on the far right. Huge changes.

Sustainable economic development near our Transit Center and within our downtown is a critical priority for New Rochelle. When the economy is weak, as it has been for several years, the pace of visible progress slows. And, to be clear, we still have a long way to go and lots of problems to solve. My point is only that the process of enhancing an entire business district requires a long-term view, backed up by patience and persistence.

# LOOKING AHEAD TO WINTER

## Improvements Planned for Snow Removal

After a year of blizzards, earthquakes, and hurricanes, it's almost painful to focus on other weather-related challenges; but early preparation is always helpful, so New Rochelle is looking ahead now to the snow season. Short-term improvements suggested by our new Commissioner of Public Works include:

- **Guide and Track Operations**  
DPW is generating new route maps with priorities, responsibilities, and challenging locations more clearly defined. These route maps will also contain checklists to facilitate a seamless transition between shifts and help supervisors better monitor operations.
- **Consolidate Information**  
The City will establish a single phone number to which snow comments, complaints, and requests can be directed.

This will help minimize the redundancy and occasional confusion that result when information is received and relayed by multiple parties.

- **Provide Better Training & Instruction**  
New drivers have acquired an understanding of the importance of plowing closer to the curb line and of regulating salt usage more efficiently, instructions that will be reiterated by supervisors.

These relatively simple steps should make a difference, but it's important to acknowledge candidly that there are other serious problems, such as aging equipment and strained manpower, that will be costly to solve and can only be addressed in the medium to long-term. For now, our intent and responsibility is to do the very best possible job with the resources available.

## Third Annual ArtsFest Is Huge Success



Early this fall, the New Rochelle Council on the Arts held its third annual ArtsFest, a full weekend of activities, displays and performances at more than twenty local venues. Hundreds of people attended, many making use of the free trolley that linked every site.

The arts can inspire, bring pleasure, educate, and help define the character of a community. The arts also contribute to our economy by attracting visitors and encouraging business. So a big thank you to the organizers who devoted countless hours to arranging ArtsFest and to the many local artists who contributed their talents.

You can learn more about our city's cultural offerings at [newrochellearts.org](http://newrochellearts.org).

## Election Day Is November 8

The entire City Council is up for election this year, as is the Westchester County Board of Legislators. Our community benefits when all people participate in the important decisions that shape our future, so please take the time to vote.



### REGISTER TO VOTE

If you are not registered to vote, you must submit a voter registration form to the Westchester County Board of Elections by October 14. Voter registration forms are available online in English and Spanish at:

<http://citizenparticipation.westchestergov.com/register-to-vote>

Voter registration forms may be returned by mail or in person to:

Westchester County Board of Elections  
25 Quarropas Street  
White Plains, NY 10601



### ABSENTEE BALLOTS

If you are unable to make it to the polls, you should request an absentee ballot. Applications for absentee ballots are available in English and Spanish at:

<http://citizenparticipation.westchestergov.com/absentee-ballots>

Absentee ballot applications must be postmarked no later than one week before Election Day or hand-delivered to the Board of Elections no later than the day before Election Day. The absentee ballot itself must be mailed to the Board of Elections no later than one day before Election Day or hand-delivered by the close of polls on Election Day.

If you are unable to pick up your ballot or receive it through the mail, you have the right to designate someone to pick it up for you. (You will still need to sign the ballot yourself in order to cast your vote.)



### FIND YOUR POLLING PLACE

Election Districts, City Council Districts, and County Legislative Districts were all adjusted this year after population figures were released by the Census Bureau. You can confirm your polling place by checking your address online at:

<http://citizenparticipation.westchestergov.com/find-polling-place>

## MAJOR RENOVATION PLANNED FOR REMINGTON BOYS & GIRLS CLUB



The Remington Unit of the Boys and Girls Club is a well-used community center located just south of Lincoln Park. Every week, countless youngsters visit Remington for sports, play, and activities of many kinds. Remington also serves as a venue for occasional civic events and volunteer projects. Although owned by the City, it is managed and operated by the Boys and Girls Club of New Rochelle, a private not-for-profit organization.

The leadership of the Boys and Girls Club has presented to City Council an ambitious plan to renovate the Remington Unit and greatly increase its value to the community.

The plan envisions: the creation of a Kids' Cafe, which will provide nutritious food and instruction in culinary arts; renovation of the entry from the Prince Street parking area, which is technically the "back-door" but functionally serves as the front; comprehensive energy improvements to promote efficiency; a general upgrade of the interior spaces; and several other positive features.

The project will be paid for by reserves set aside when the Boys and Girls Club sold their South Side unit to the YMCA, supplemented by private fund-raising and donated materials. No tax dollars will be utilized.

## FORMER LOEWS THEATER SOLD FOR \$2.6 MILLION

The Main Street property that once housed the Loews movie theater has been sold. The site had, not long ago, been approved for residential development in a deal that fell through when the housing market crashed. The new owners are also interested in the development potential of the site, but for now will upgrade the property for storefront retail and small office use.

The history and sale of the building reflects the larger story of cities like New Rochelle: economic decline from the 1950s to the 1990s, progress from the 1990s forward, but slowing in the face of a tough national economy, and now tentative signs of renewed momentum. Though one transaction does not make a recovery, the sale is a hopeful indicator.

## DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF DIMEGLIO PROMOTED

Following the well-earned retirement of long-time New Rochelle Fire Chief Raymond "Doc" Kiernan, City Manager Chuck Strome has promoted Deputy Chief Louis M. DiMeglio to head the New Rochelle Fire Department.

Doc Kiernan is an impossible act to follow — a one-of-a-kind personality who was straight out of central casting as our Fire Chief. But Lou is certainly ready to roll, with the professional experience, community knowledge, and personal dedication to serve with great distinction.

## ALL HAIL NEW ROCHELLE H<sub>2</sub>O!

New Rochelle's water was put to the test against other regional taste-test winners at the New York State Fair in Syracuse just before Labor Day. After surviving a brutal semi-final round against New York City's famous water and being named the best surface-source water in the state, New Rochelle faced down groundwater-source champion Baldwinsville. The tasting was neck-and-neck, but the final victory and statewide championship, by three votes, went to ... New Rochelle!

Just a little something to consider before you buy a bottle of water from some faraway place. (Or before your next bath.)

### SIGN UP FOR EMERGENCY ALERTS FROM CITY HALL



During emergencies, the City's public notification system has been an invaluable tool for sharing important information widely and quickly. For example, in the days surrounding Hurricane Irene, we were able to provide updates on emergency shelters, storm conditions, power restoration efforts and more.

If you don't already receive the City's automated calls, it's worth your while to take a few seconds to sign up at [bit.ly/NRAlert](http://bit.ly/NRAlert).

In addition, please consider signing up to receive bulletins via email or text message, which you can do at the same site: [bit.ly/NRAlert](http://bit.ly/NRAlert).



**City Hall**

515 North Avenue  
New Rochelle, NY 10801  
(914) 654-2150

**Home**

201 Pinebrook Blvd.  
New Rochelle, NY 10804  
(914) 632-4847

[noam@noambramson.org](mailto:noam@noambramson.org)



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