



*From the desk of: Steve Thornbury, Council Representative - Ward 2*

## ***The Fine Art of Unreasonable Optimism.***

What, do you suppose, is the ratio of pessimists to optimists in the general population? Let's be more specific. How many of you would describe yourself as being "optimistic" vs. "pessimistic" about Norwood's future?

I confess to being something short of "wildly" optimistic. It's a sentiment, however, I know I need to temper these days now that I cast one of seven votes that can affect future spending by our city. Otherwise I'd be voting to have every street and sidewalk in the city resurfaced next week.

And yet, how can you not be optimistic about Norwood's future? How can you look at everything that's going in our city today and be of the opinion that we're doomed to failure? Let's try. Let's list some of the positive news about Norwood and see how the pessimists out there might interpret it.

### **#1. The News: Revenue Growth**

Norwood is experiencing healthy growth in income. Payroll taxes have grown by nearly 15% in 2007 when compared to 2006 and are continuing to grow at a similar rate this year.

**The Optimist's View:** That means we can now begin to plan for the future rather than react to the moment. That we finally have the resources to think more proactively about how we want Norwood to look five or ten years from now rather than being forced to make the most expedient decisions based on harsh economic realities and impossible budget shortfalls. We even have the ability to do all that and still establish the legendary "rainy day fund" so often promised in campaign literature.

**The Pessimist's View:** It's an aberration. A fluke. Don't be fooled. Businesses (and residents) are fleeing Norwood in record numbers. Any increases are temporary and come from mandatory filing and won't continue. Thus, Norwood must forever live and budget based on a model that has us consistently losing revenue rather than gaining.

### **#2. The News: New Development**

New development is happening in every corner of the city, up and down "The Pike," (Montgomery Road). From Linden Pointe in Ward 4 to the renovated Surrey Square in Ward 2 all the way down to Xavier Square (and, cross-your fingers, Norwood Plaza) in Ward 1.

**The Optimist's View:** The stage is set for even more revenue to flow into city coffers over the next three to four years. And in each case, there is great potential for a halo effect that can boost the fortunes of small business owners up and down Montgomery Road who are savvy enough to take advantage of it. All we need to make it happen is smart planning and visionary leadership on the part of our government officials and some gutsy local business owners.

**The Pessimist's View:** The real estate and office space markets in Norwood are tanking and show no signs of having hit bottom. Linden Pointe is four-fifths empty, Surrey Square is doomed to be nothing more than a big strip mall and Xavier Square, despite all the fancy talk, will be end up a student ghetto with low wage service jobs. Besides, in fifteen years all of them (just like our city itself) will be failed properties.

So... how many of you reading this find yourself leaning toward the points made by The Pessimist? I hate to say it but based on conversations from the last few years with a fairly broad cross-section of Norwood residents, I'm afraid there are more of you out there than there are optimists like me. Yet still I remain optimistic.

Some of that, I confess, is purely genetic. But much of it, I would argue, is based on a sober analysis of what is really happening. Because, for the first time in over fifty years, what is happening in the world outside Norwood is finally working to benefit us rather than punish us:

- Trends like “new urbanization” which have utterly transformed cities like San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Chicago, Atlanta, Boston and other major cities over the last twenty years, is finally affecting cities like Indianapolis, Louisville, St. Louis, Nashville, Cincinnati and (thus) Norwood.
- The Suburbs” have hit a psychological wall. The promise of nirvana that lured so many to communities like West Chester and Mason has run smack up against the reality of having to actually pay for the infrastructure needed to support the massive growth in residents. And it’s only going to get worse.
- The thirty-minute commute to downtown is getting old (and longer) and much more expensive. The long-term effect of higher gas prices (does anyone seriously believe we’ll ever see gas below \$3 again?) will be greater demand for housing that minimizes commuting time and for the development of transit options beyond the “one-person/one-car” paradigm. Granted, both will only happen slowly but they will happen over the next twenty years, each of which bodes well for the long term prospects for Norwood.

And that’s just the beginning. Other stars are aligned to bring positive, possibly dramatic change to communities like ours. But we need all the help we can get, starting with our own citizens. We need to start thinking a little differently about our city and ourselves.

“Norwood Pride” has long been a cliché in these parts. Until now, it seems to me, it’s tended to mean something like this: “Yeah, were hurtin’, we’re down on our luck, everybody makes fun of us, but we’re strong and proud of our tattered little city... so get lost!”

What we need now is — you guessed it — optimism. We need boosterism. We need the power of positive buzz. Don’t think you can do it? Still convinced we’re a city headed for extinction? Tough. Suck it up. Pretend Norwood is your favorite grandchild who, despite the facts, is still a perfect angel in your eyes. Your reward will be waiting for you ten/fifteen years from now when you go to sell your home.

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