

NEW LONDON GREEN PARTY PLATFORM STATEMENT 2011

A Green perspective is about more than just caring about the environment, about solar panels and Priuses, about Co-ops and Green Jobs, although all of those are worthwhile enough. As Greens, we believe that we ignore the logic and limits of nature at our peril. This perspective bears special relevance to urban issues because a city, like nature, is an example of organized complexity. It is built up by many hands over an extended period of time. It is not amenable to centralized, all-encompassing planning, which seeks to impose a specific order on all people for all time. Rather, it evolves, in ways both predictable and surprising, as its inhabitants, pursuing their individual and varied interests, develop among themselves connections of increasing density and efficiency.

Government has a critical role to play in fostering this evolution, but it is a limited one. It is one participant among many - not the prime mover.

It is much easier, especially for a government, to destroy a city than it is to create one. In the name of urban renewal, blocks can be razed as quickly as trees can be clear cut. Yet a vibrant neighborhood, like old growth, is the work of generations. Perhaps there ought to be a Hippocratic oath for politicians and planners, just as there is for doctors, and our new mayor, upon being sworn into office, should then swear that, first and foremost, he or she will attempt to do no harm.

Too often in the past, New London's government has acted with impatience and hubris, attempting to transform sections of the city, down to the last detail, in one fell swoop. The predictable failure of these plans have led, not to a questioning of basic assumptions, but a redoubling of efforts so that today New London's government is involved in a wide variety of endeavors - real estate development, marketing, property management, non-profit coordination, the endless hiring of consultants and commissioning of studies. All the while, roads are in disrepair, the public education our children receive is subpar, and invaluable parkland is being sold off.

With the switch to an elected mayor with broad powers, there is hope in some quarters of the city that these varied efforts, now under the direction of a single hand, will finally come to fruition. Yet their failure has not been due to poor leadership. It stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of a city. The most important task for the new mayor may be to fundamentally re-examine the role that government should play in the city, and to reestablish the line between the public and the private realms.

Some areas the next mayor should focus on include:

Roads

In the critical downtown, New London's road network is an asymmetrical mishmash of varying gauges. It frightens pedestrians, frustrates drivers, and confuses tourists. Before urban renewal, New London, like almost any other city in human history, had a simple grid of small streets. From the initial settlement between Shaw and Winthrop Coves, a rough rectangle of streets extended south and west to what is now Garibaldi Square. Another rectangle extended north and east to Hodges Square. The Parade, the de facto town square, was shaped like a simple triangle, a wedge to fit the two standard rectangles of streets, which could have been lifted from almost any city at any time, to the unique contours of the Thames River.

It should be the work of this generation to rebuild this grid so that the next can once again walk from Hodges to Garibaldi Square across a network of safe streets that are part of vibrant neighborhoods. Such an endeavor will take decades, but the next mayor should initiate it, both by articulating it and building public support, and by converting Bank Street and Eugene O'Neill Drive to two-way streets between State and Tilley, and by narrowing Bank Street from Tilley to Howard.

Parks

The most critical ingredient for a successful park is people. To attract people there must be access, things to do for the active, and places to sit for the sedentary. New London has treated its parks like monuments. The \$30 million invested in the Parade and the Waterfront park have yielded not a single shade tree under which one might comfortably sit, no skate ramp for the young or bocce court for

the elderly. Instead signage tells you what you can't do. They are expensive slabs, used on a daily basis mostly by those who have no other place to go, and on an occasional basis for heavily marketed events.

With this misguided perspective, it is no wonder the city wants to sell Riverside Park, because it is under the mistaken impression that the key to a successful park are the expensive design features only it can provide. By this account, Riverside Park, with its acres of undisturbed woodland has little to offer and would cost a fortune to make presentable. Yet the primary thing that Riverside Park lacks is access. As the network of streets is rebuilt over the coming decades, this access will be restored. As the city's population continues to grow, the demand for this irreplaceable open space will grow. Any candidate for mayor should be able to articulate why the sale of the Park is a bad idea.

All parks require maintenance and the quick address of occasional problems. In New York City, each park and playground is assigned a park keeper, a member of public works whose name and number is posted on a sign at its entrance. That sign sends a very different message than the customary list of prohibitions. New London ought to institute such a program, which could serve as a model for other areas of government. If something is not working, do not add layers of oversight. Rather assign responsibility to a single person on the ground and make that person accessible to the public.

Police and Public Safety

No matter how large its police force, all communities rely on the participation of the citizenry for their public safety. It is therefore critical that there be good relations between the police and the citizenry. This relationship can be fostered by getting more cops out of patrol cars and walking beats, especially downtown. Specific cops ought to be assigned specific beats, which they would walk on a regular basis so they and the neighbors could get to know and trust each other.

The pursuit of non-violent drug offenders ought to be the police's lowest priority. Such efforts waste resources and diminish respect for the law, especially among the young and poor, who see themselves and their friends jailed for a habit in which a sizable percentage of the adult and the affluent, including our last three Presidents, have indulged without legal repercussion.

Schools

As a non-voting member of the Board of Education, the next mayor will have a bully pulpit to ask some fundamental questions about education. Why do we add layers of management to a dysfunctional system rather than devolving resources and responsibility to principals and teachers? Why is the ratio of administrators to teachers greater than the ratio of teachers to students? How can we foster responsibility among teachers and students without resorting to the heavy hand of management and police?

More important than a stance on any particular issue are the fundamental values that will inform how our next mayor will confront the endless decisions, many of which we cannot at the moment foresee. Our next mayor should be:

Compassionate - Respectful to others, especially the marginalized, the despised, and temporary political adversaries.

Curious - More important than any credential or educational background. Technical expertise can be hired. Judgement and the ability to sniff out the trendy and the spurious cannot be outsourced.

Dedicated - This platform describes a limited area of endeavor. Yet within it there is enough work to occupy many people for many years. Any good idea eventually degenerates into lots of hard work. The next mayor must be willing to put in the hours.