

NEW LONDON GREEN PARTY 2015 PLATFORM — CITY COUNCIL

Any city's single greatest asset is its people, and New London is no exception. As New London's diversity is precisely what makes it a vibrant community, any discussion about priorities must start with an eye towards improving the quality of life for all New Londoners. We must retain our current population while also attracting new residents, in order to sustain our local businesses, fill downtown office spaces, support walkability, and enrich our city culturally and politically.

Public Safety

Feeling safe in one's home and neighborhood is undeniably important to the appeal of any city; however, most cities address their public safety needs narrowly, through police and fire departments. We support a broader approach that prioritizes prevention and does not focus solely on emergency response.

Law Enforcement

Throughout the country, we are seeing unjust and counterproductive law enforcement practices: racial profiling, use of excessive force, and incarceration rates that are the world's highest. Police departments have become heavily armed, thanks to easy access to cast-off military equipment. It's time to rethink the purpose of policing and return it to its original intent to "protect and serve" the public. We also call for a halt to war on drugs and the practice of civil asset forfeiture, which encourage corruption and frequently victimize the innocent.

Fire and Emergency Response

In the past 40 years, the number of fires has dropped nationwide as well as in New London, with roughly 3 times as many fires in 1977 as in 2013. As a result, fire departments have shifted away from fire response towards prevention and emergency medical services (EMS). However, the organizational structure of New London Fire Department has not substantially changed to reflect this trend. We propose assessing our department's resources to increase efficiency and effectiveness, based on the current needs of residents and businesses.

Preventive Practice for Public Safety

We call for the adoption of positive community policing practices, where officers are trained to be sensitive to trauma, skilled at diffusing threats without violence,

acquainted with city citizens in all our neighborhoods, and held accountable for any actions that cause injury or death. To this end, we support the adoption of department policies that are just and equitable, prioritize de-escalation, and encourage positive police-public interaction by increasing foot and bicycle patrols while reducing time spent in cars.

City Government

The shift from an appointed city manager to an elected mayor has made city government more accessible and accountable to the citizenry, yet structures of the old system still persist alongside the new. Further reform is needed to complete our city's transition to a more democratic, responsive local government.

Boards & Commissions

New London's boards and commissions were created with the intent of increasing community involvement and input in city government. However, to the extent that they shift power from elected officials to appointed ones, some boards have in practice diluted the power of average citizens to guide the city's priorities.

We believe that reducing the number of boards and commissions would result in more efficient use of volunteer and staff time. Most of New London's boards and commissions were formed and empowered by city ordinance; therefore, we suggest that City Council examine them in order to eliminate those that merely add layers of bureaucracy, consolidate others to increase efficiency, and ensure that representation on all of them comes from all quarters of the city and rotates in accordance with meaningful term limits.

Neighborhood Representation

Another vestige of New London's former form of government is a city council made up entirely of at-large councilors. If each councilor represents the city as whole, as the mayor does, are they all shadow mayors? Much of the conflict we have seen between the council and the mayor may result from this overlap of representation and the absence of clarity between executive and legislative roles.

Reforming the charter so that councilors are elected on a neighborhood basis would inspire more competitive elections and encourage a greater diversity of candidates. We believe that the shift to district representation would encourage greater participation by both voters and candidates, and that, once in office, councilors elected by district would be more responsive to the concerns of their constituents and knowledgeable about their neighborhoods' assets and needs.

Infrastructure

While government cannot guarantee any particular outcome, we believe that it can and does influence how a city develops and grows. Rather than continue to pin its hopes on large redevelopment projects, the city should focus first on its infrastructure: fundamental elements which affect how hospitable the city is to ALL its residents, visitors, businesses, and institutions.

Streets

Redevelopment efforts of the past 50 years—which prioritized mobility over access—were brutally effective in facilitating vehicular traffic into and out of our city, but damaged New London’s street grid to the detriment of residents, businesses, and neighborhoods. Moving forward, we can make our compact city more walkable and bikeable by implementing modest changes to existing roads: improving roadway markings, planting sidewalk trees, and employing traffic calming measures. Opportunities exist throughout the city, on major arterials (like Broad, Williams and Bank Streets, Pequot and Montauk Avenues), as well as the numerous side streets located within neighborhoods throughout our city.

Public Spaces

Public spaces—meeting places for people from all walks of life—are vital to any city. Despite its small size, New London has a rich inventory of parks, fields and plazas that provide recreational opportunities for residents of all ages. We are concerned, however, that funding for parks has prioritized active uses like organized sports, while neglecting passive spaces that encourage residents to enjoy the outdoors as they choose. Recent investments made to improve the Parade Plaza and the Waterfront Park have left us with stark spaces suitable for organized public events, but offering little shade or inviting seating for everyday use. Let us shift our focus to improving and maintaining appealing natural spaces that encourage daily use and connect our city residents to the unique New England landscape.

Public Education

While education isn’t traditionally considered an element of public infrastructure, we believe that a strong public education system is critical to ensure a vigorous democratic society. As such, we believe that public education should rank high as a city funding priority, and that resources allocated should directly benefit our students and teachers to the greatest extent possible.

Neighborhood Investment

Fair and effective economic development shifts the focus from a handful of big projects to broader investment throughout the city. Just as all residents deserve responsive political representation, they are similarly entitled to public investment in the pedestrian (in both senses of the word) concerns of their neighborhoods.

Development

In light of the tens of millions of public dollars invested in New London in recent decades—with too little to show for it—we need to re-examine the government's approach to economic development. Micromanaging development is ineffective, as it's near impossible to predict the success of individual projects. We need less emphasis on large developments, which are expensive and may be out of scale with their surroundings. Instead, we should focus on basic improvements that will encourage infill development and lay the foundation for a secure prosperity that will benefit all New London residents and businesses for decades to come.

Zoning Reform

A city with an older building stock such as New London's must rely on the creative and unimagined re-use of old spaces. By focusing on the uses of private property, our current zoning codes discourage entrepreneurial and innovative owners, resulting in a surfeit of empty storefronts and residences. We believe that New London should explore the adoption of form-based codes, which focus on placemaking and have been demonstrated to improve walkability, increase housing and business opportunities, promote historic preservation, and maintain attractive streetscape design.

Taxes

Our current tax code is both ineffective and at odds with our values. Property owners who make improvements are penalized with a higher tax bill, while those who let their property decline pay less. For reasons of both fairness and efficacy, the method of calculating property taxes, especially downtown, should be adjusted to place greater emphasis on location and less on buildings.

It is equally unfair and unproductive when developers of large new projects receive tax breaks. Other taxpayers, including longtime residents and business owners, must shoulder a higher burden. The desired economic boost is rarely realized, and beneficiaries of the subsidies move on to their next project.