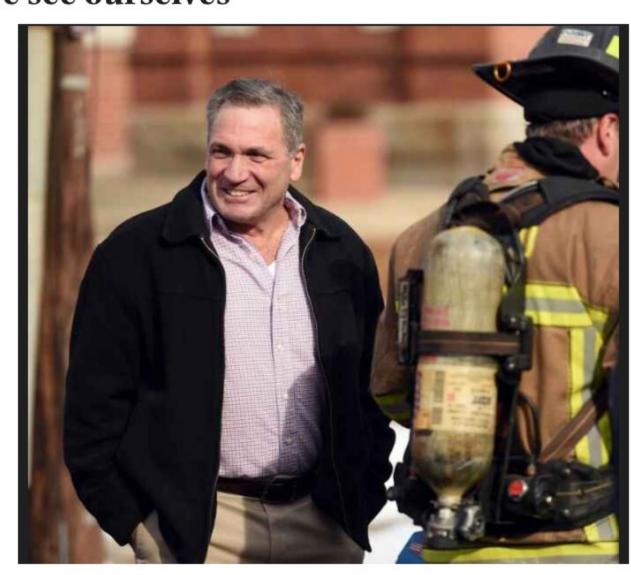
Sunday, February 04, 2024

### OP-ED: Transforming New London starts by changing how we see ourselves















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#### By Michael Passero

New London Mayor Michael Passero arrives as city firefighters mop-up after a fire at 42 School St. in New London. (Day file photo)

There has never been a better time to be in New London. As I begin my ninth year as mayor of this historic city, I marvel at the transformations we've seen.

The proof that we've turned the corner is everywhere around us. We are transforming the image of our urban center from one of poverty, blight, high taxes and economic stagnation to one of entrepreneurial opportunity, creativity, revitalization and pride. The state and federal governments are investing in New London at a rate the city hasn't seen in decades. Life has returned to our downtown streets as long-vacant buildings are being historically restored, new housing is in demand, restaurants are bouncing back from COVID and new small businesses are moving into empty storefronts.

We have moved beyond being perceived for decades as a city that could never quite achieve its potential. We are overcoming the skepticism that has choked off our progress for far too long. Together, we have become a city that has dared to believe in its own success.

I cannot take all the credit for New London's newfound success. We all played a role, from our city councilors and our city workforce, to business leaders and community members. Together, we have changed our city by changing how we see ourselves.

In 2021 I outlined my vision for New London as a city where everyone has a fair shot at well-being. Well-being is about people and communities being whole. We're all hard-wired to seek out connection and belonging; safety; familiarity and predictability; influence over our environment and future; and access to food, shelter and other resources without shame or danger. Through a collaboration with the Full Frame Initiative over the last several years, we began seeing not only the challenges facing New London but the incredible assets through the lens of well-being. As a result, a new set of potential solutions have emerged.

The stories we tell determine how we understand the problems facing our city. They also determine the solutions we choose to invest in. If we make the wrong assumptions about the causes of a problem, they can quickly lead to solutions that benefit some while leaving others behind.

Building a city where everyone has a fair shot at well-being means focusing on what matters most to people. And listening has been crucial to understanding what matters most to New Londoners. Through community meetings, hospital briefings and numerous conversations with residents, we've uncovered many of the barriers getting in the way of people's access to well-being. In listening, we have been able to direct funding differently in order to address root causes — the systemic problems behind our city's most persistent challenges, from homelessness and food insecurity to the opioid epidemic and more.

We declared racism as a public health issue, enabling us to tackle persistent disparities head-on. From our city's seniors and people with disabilities, we learned about how the lack of accessible technology and internet were compromising people's ability to connect and stay healthy. Our work with the Full Frame Initiative and vision for well-being has enabled us to find solutions such as delivering computers to residents and providing digital literacy education.

We are dedicated to shifting how leaders and residents see their roles in transforming our community. It takes all of us to reach our full potential. We're looking forward to engaging residents in imagining what a city where everyone has a fair shot at well-being could look like. This coming year, we are looking toward working with young people — the future of New London — in identifying what matters most to them. Imagine what could be possible when young people champion well-being and help us move New London forward.

Leaders across the country are taking notice of us, including state leaders, the National League of Cities, regional associations and even the White House Office of Management and Budget. New London is becoming a model for how a city thinks of itself and how it drives community change.

Thank you for believing in our city and driving the change that is making our ambitious vision possible. Work remains, and I look forward to moving our city forward together over the next several years.

# Michael Passero is the mayor of New London.

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