

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



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February 02, 2024 1:51 pm • Last Updated: February 04, 2024 2:05 pm

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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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