

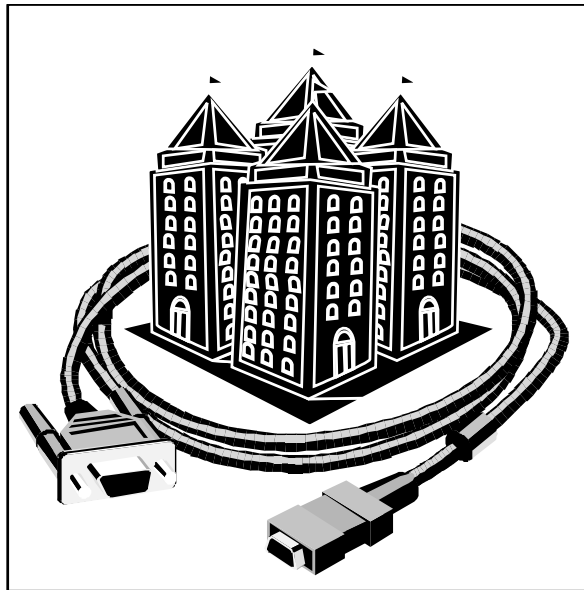
# JOHN NORQUIST'S LEGACY

JOHN M. HAGEDORN

In the debates among Milwaukee's mayoral candidates, the name John Norquist hasn't been mentioned very much. Our mayor was in office for fifteen years, so why does this ardent group of would-be mayors avoid even dropping his name? Put another way, do they think Milwaukee is better off now than we were in 1988 when Norquist's reign began?

Unlike the mayoral hopefuls, I'm not afraid to express my opinion. I've long been on the mayor's "enemies list" mainly because I have publicly expressed grave reservations about what I see as the decline of my hometown. A city that is on the rise doesn't have repeated scares about its under-funded major league sports teams threatening to leave. I've also repeatedly said that the demise of Milwaukee is *not* inevitable and that strong leadership *can* turn our city around.

But the academic literature on turning declining cities around is unanimous that recognition of the seriousness of the problem always comes before action. To pretend Milwaukee is not in trouble is a prescription for disaster. While it is easy to be impressed with riverwalks, holding the line on property taxes, and condos downtown, I think we need



to have a more sober view of the Norquist legacy.

## The Mayor of Missed Opportunities

In the first years of Norquist's regime, the information economy was rising into prominence and some Midwest cities seized the opportunity to restructure their economies and remake their images. Pittsburgh cast off its manufacturing garb and blue-collar

image, and became a center of software for the Defense Department. Minneapolis morphed into a major technology center for the entire midlands. Chicago watched its industrial base crumble, but rebuilt its image as the world leader in futures trading. Its stockyards and steel mills were pushed backstage as the Loop expanded upwards and outwards into the bright lights of international trade and finance.

Meanwhile, the first years of Norquist's mayoralty were spent trying to preserve Milwaukee's manufacturing economy and not aggressively joining the competition for high

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tech businesses. Aside from GE Medical Systems, whose engineering facilities are located outside the city, Milwaukee has no discernable, world-class information business. Norquist denied what every savvy observer has known for the past decade — manufacturing generally has a dim American future. Some, like the University of Chicago's Saskia Sassen, point out that U.S. manufacturing's future is not with durable goods, but mainly in the production of high-end luxury goods. This is one reason why Harley-Davidson is thriving and most other Milwaukee manufacturers, like Masterlock, now hire workers who speak Spanish, Korean, and Chinese.

To understand the gravity of the plight Milwaukee is in, we need to look more carefully at the academic literature on why some cities are healthy and some declining. First, cities that are healthy today have a strong university connection, particularly for research and as a spur to entrepreneurial innovation. No city has revitalized without relying on at least one major university. In Chicago, both Mayor Daleys have pushed for funding for the University of Illinois-Chicago as a public supplement to that city's already large number of top-flight private universities. As further examples, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, and Columbus boast world-class academic institutions, while Detroit — and Milwaukee — do not.

In Milwaukee, a new chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), Nancy Zimpher, spent several years trying to give a jump-start to UWM. Her efforts, now seen by most as more window-dressing than substance, were also given no more than lip service by the mayor. Norquist missed the crucial opportunity to give a high profile to UWM and push Zimpher to add some hard stuff to a weak brew.

A second characteristic of healthy cities is strong regional and international transportation links. Where was the mayor when the opportunity arose for Milwaukee to become Chicago's Third Airport? If ever a "We'll build it and they will come" strategy would have worked it was in addressing Chicago's mas-

sively over-crowded air traffic problem. Mitchell Field could sorely use more than its present daily total of 400 flights — Pittsburgh, by comparison, has more than 600. Chicago is a global city with an economy that has plenty of traveling business to share. Milwaukee's airport, with high-speed train links between it and O'Hare, could have been a crowning achievement of the Mayor, but is now only another missed opportunity.

Strong tourist and recreation sectors are major indicators of city health and are a Milwaukee strength with Summerfest, the art museum, and our many theatres downtown. The lack of interest by the mayor in re-locating the Potawatomi Casino downtown, however, may have been a fatal error. Potawatomi is the area's undisputed leader in bringing in top acts and it has real money to spend on improvements. Why do we have a cozy Borders bookstore on the river, with me and few other customers, when we could have lit up our riverwalk with the bright lights of Potawatomi? No other single action I can think of could have revitalized what has to be the most depressing downtown this side of Gary.

### **The Mayor of Not-Getting-It-Done**

The mayor *has* got some things done. The riverwalk is really quite beautiful, though one of its best features, it's often said, is that it is seldom crowded. The demolition of the Park East Freeway opened up downtown to the north — even though there aren't enough new or re-locating businesses to fill up the Grand Avenue Mall, much less expand. Downtown still has a 16% vacancy rate, twice the city average. Our city has Miller Park, the Midwest Center, and several beautiful theaters. There are condos going up downtown and the Calatrava addition is an architectural wonder, if sparsely attended and in financial difficulty.

The mayor didn't seem interested in moving the Potawatomi Casino downtown, but he tried mightily to get Miller Park built within easy walking distance of city hall. This would have been a major victory for the revitalization of the city — but the mayor, like Casey, struck out. In Detroit, Tiger Stadium was rebuilt

downtown. St. Louis, Indianapolis, Minneapolis and other cities have succeeded in centralizing sports with downtown rebirth. We also have to remember it was during Norquist's watch that a new baseball-only stadium was built and Milwaukee lost its prestigious hosting of the Green Bay Packers.

The demolition of the Park East Freeway was part of the rebuilding downtown strategy and the plan to build a Harley Museum was a great idea. What other event has so captured Milwaukee recently than the Harley Centennial? However, the demolition of the freeway hadn't even started when the Mayor's rationale for it, the Harley museum, was revealed as, well, how should I put it . . . a bit misleading. The business-savvy Harley people knew that downtown Milwaukee simply doesn't have enough tourist traffic to make a major museum pay. They too have watched the fiscal difficulties of the Art Museum and sports teams. The mayor believed in the concentration of cultural, sports, and tourist facilities downtown, but his efforts have consistently fallen short.

Why? Even before a Clintonesque sex scandal cut short his reign, the mayor demonstrated the lack of temperament, character and inter-personal relations to make the big deals. The same tyrannical behavior that so effectively cowed those dependent on city contracts backfired on everyone else.

#### **Garden City Mayor**

The mayor has moved on to the presidency of the Congress on New Urbanism. The theory of "new urbanism" has its roots in the "Garden City" of a century ago. One problem with new urbanist design is that by prettying up downtown areas with shrubs, riverwalks, and fancy dwellings, the larger problems of

the city, like disinvestment, poverty, and race, tend to be reduced to an "out-of-sight out-of-mind" status. New urbanism is the twenty-first century version of New York City erecting facades along their freeways to cover up the ghetto during their 1964 World Fair.

In this sense, Milwaukee's ballyhooed downtown condo boom, like Detroit's gentrifying its depressed Cass Corridor, may be as much part of the problem as solution. The idea of prettying up downtown *can* be part of a city-wide revitalization, *or* become a web of gated communities built to exclude the minority poor.

Milwaukee, despite the fanciful claims of UWM studies, is still as segregated a city as any in the country. In the 1990s, Milwaukee's experienced the sixth largest decline in population among U.S. cities and has fallen by 20% since 1960. Milwaukee's 1990s loss of white population ranked fifth in the entire nation, while even Chicago saw a net population gain in the decade. Among the many measures of inequality, Milwaukee ranks 47th out of the top 50 US cities in the percentage of black middle class homes.

The problem of high rates of violence in Milwaukee is inextricably linked to the inability of the mayor to reduce racial inequality and stem community disinvestment. Norquist can blame the police chief all he wants but policing style does little to prevent homicides. Despite the smoke and mirrors of new urbanist rhetoric, all the condos, riverwalks, and shrubbery downtown don't automatically mean relief for poor northwest side residents. Norquist has pushed Milwaukee's black ghetto west by northwest, not diminished it. The torrent of violence shows no sign of abating.

When Norquist took over in 1988, Milwaukee's homicide rate was at about 15 per 100,000. That was about twice the national

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average, but still about half that of Chicago or New York City's. While Milwaukee's murder rate has dropped from the early 1990s, it still stands about 20 per 100,000, quite close, for the first time, to Chicago's rate and three times higher than New York City's. As Harvard's Michael Porter says, Milwaukee's crime rate is a "show stopper."

### Conclusion

On the positive side, Milwaukee after fifteen years of John Norquist hasn't become Gary or Detroit, but neither is it Minneapolis or Pittsburgh — or even Cleveland. The combination of the mayor's late start in wooing high-tech firms, his inability to get big things done, and his sprucing up downtown while the ghetto smolders with violence has rendered our city's prospects precarious. What are the main issues facing Milwaukee as we choose a new mayor?

First, while some may consider this blasphemy, ***Milwaukee's future is no longer in our own hands, but lies basically with our economic relationships with Chicago and Madison.*** Regional economies are becoming more important world wide, particularly around global cities like Chicago. The more vibrant and larger urban economies can spin off both jobs and housing markets to smaller cities like Milwaukee. One of the two main issues confronting Milwaukee is how — not if — it will integrate with the Chicago metropolis. Madison, with its world-class university, is slated to eclipse Milwaukee as the state's main site for high tech businesses and start-ups.

Links to Chicago and Madison mean improved transportation. Chicago still has not resolved its airport problems and it may not be too late to link Mitchell to O'Hare with high speed, non-stop trains. This project is too important to be left to timid county planners. The Amtrak trains between Chicago and Milwaukee need to be increased in numbers, sped up, and more amenities added. We need a train that will link Madison and Milwaukee in less than an hour.

Many of the needed links must be made through Milwaukee-Madison-Chicago academic networks. Improving public education and turning the brain drain into a brain gain is obviously important. Norquist was right to favor choice, charter, and other educational reforms. What is also needed, however, is much more attention to links between the elementary and secondary schools, city hall, and the universities. The mayor needs to be in the forefront of promoting and getting higher levels of funding for the schools of business and education of both Marquette and UWM. Without much better universities, immersed in high-tech business generation and educational reform, Milwaukee can't escape long-term decline.

Second, ***race and poverty are the demiurge haunting the mayor's new urbanism.*** Today, the main manifestation of racism and the principle victim of new urbanism is our city's northwest side. It seems to me that how Northridge is replaced may be the key to the economy and well being of that depressed area. The deserted shopping center would be a great place for a university, perhaps a northwest campus of UWM. It could attract students from the suburbs as well as the northwest ghetto. It could link campus and community, sponsor entrepreneurial and educational innovation, and offer a sliver of hope for a near-by population sinking into despair. Northridge cannot be allowed to become a vacant lot.

There are models of economic development other than a one-sided focus on the central business district — for example, Frankfurt, Germany. We need to listen carefully to Harvard's Michael Porter who is trying to focus Milwaukee business on the riches of labor power in the inner city. He has identified several low wage sectors of Milwaukee's economy that would benefit by investment in the central city.

On the other hand, in this era, we do not have examples of cities turning around that are not led by the information sector. One of Milwaukee's main problems is a lack of capi-

tal, and that is directly related to our still backward technology sector. Capital is attracted to high-tech businesses because of their rate of profit and potential for growth. For example, Manuel Castells reports that one third of all venture capital in the U.S. is invested in the San Francisco Bay area. Our city's lack of capital can clearly be seen in our inability to come up with the money to field competitive sports teams.

The silence of our mayoral candidates on the Norquist legacy is not a good sign that we will be electing a bold new leader to shake things up. We can't afford another mayor of missed opportunities.