A collaboration between the City of Norwich, Norwich Community Development Corporation (NCDC), and the Chelsea Groton Foundation resulted in the creation of the Global City Norwich (GCN), a multi-year project supporting the revitalization of downtown Norwich. By hosting festivals and local events that represent local and surrounding communities, Norwich was able to bring business activity to the vacant storefronts in the downtown area and increase cultural appreciation.

Since 2018, GCN has brought cultures and communities together in an effort to engage and attract residents, visitors and businesses to the Downtown area in Norwich. GCN has collaborated with church groups and schools to bring people together at their events such as a cup of nations soccer tournament, a welcoming America celebration, and a big Polish festival as well as a successful Peruvian Festival. At this event, the culture of Peru was showcased via dances, singing, food, and flag-showing. At least 2,000 people attended (at least 20,000 Peruvians live in the surrounding areas of Norwich) and many Norwich residents weren’t aware of the Peruvian population and its culture until this festival.
The Chelsea Groton Foundation, an organization formed from the mutually-owned Chelsea Groton Bank, donated $100K for the establishment of Global City Norwich. This grant assists multicultural entrepreneurs and small business owners interested in moving their business to the downtown area or who are looking to grow. In addition, the City of Norwich provided in-kind services and funding for program infrastructure, such as electrical improvements for outdoor events and program security, while the NCDC provided administrative support.

“This initiative has helped us get to know each other and share common interests,” said Jill Fritzsche, a community manager in Norwich. GCN secured funding again in 2019 from the Chelsea Groton Bank and Corporate Executive Officer, Michael Rauh hopes that the momentum will continue to attract more residents and businesses to Norwich. According to Fritze, four businesses have opened in Norwich, due to these festivals, and Norwich is guiding small entrepreneurs in its Small Business Academy to prepare them to operate in downtown Norwich.

Jason Vincent, president of the NCDC, says programs like GCN take some time to gain traction, since it takes time to build relationships and programs like this also aren’t typical in economic development. Vincent said many entrepreneurs interested in moving to downtown Norwich face additional barriers to starting a business, such as lack of access to working capital and they may not be credit tenants. The project’s success also relies on the resource-intensive process of developing people’s capabilities.

However, Vincent notes, many immigrants are entrepreneurial and this program gives them an opportunity to invest in the community. Vincent advised municipalities to understand the local economic environment, including if there is a lack of supply or a lack of demand. Norwich lacked demand as there many vacant storefronts in the downtown area. The program has created a pipeline of potential businesses for formerly vacant spaces.

Jason Vincent, Director Norwich Community Development Corporation