

Passero said he sees need for human services director in New London

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New London — Mayor Michael Passero pitched the idea of hiring a director of human services Thursday during a discussion about the top priorities for his administration.

Passero touched on three major topics — economic development, quality of life and education — during a keynote address in what was the first in a series of roundtable discussions hosted by the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition.

About 50 people attended the forum, which was held at the Fort Trumbull Conference Center.

Passero said the human service director position is needed to coordinate the network of social services agencies and nonprofits in New London, which he called a “big part of our economy,” handling a host of “human issues.”

There was at one time a similar position in the city that Passero said never survived budget cuts.

Passero will ask the City Council on Tuesday to create the position, which he said would have no impact on the current budget.

Passero, in an interview earlier this week, said the city needs to be at the table when it comes to social issues that include things like aggressive panhandling, heroin overdoses and the general burden on city ambulance and police services.

“These problems have to be managed,” Passero said. “We can’t keep our heads in the sand. I think we can help improve the quality of life for everybody.”

How the position, with an estimated \$100,000 annual salary, would be funded is something that needs to be discussed, Passero said.

Passero on Thursday also spoke about the need to grow the city’s tax base, the potential for Fort Trumbull and support for the work of the Renaissance City Development Association.

He said the National Coast Guard Museum Association is expected soon unveil updated designs for the museum (<http://www.theday.com/article/20160108/NWS09/160109318>), a catalyst for updates in the city’s infrastructure and renewal of the waterfront area.

He also said the city would be examining parking, traffic patterns and the series of sometimes frustrating one-way roads for possible changes as part of the planning for the museum.

Construction of new school buildings as part of the transition into an all-magnet school district also will help to attract outside investment into the city.

The cultural coalition, with more than 380 partners, advocates and fosters relationships between members of the cultural and creative sector with an eye toward support of economic and community development.

Coalition Director Preston Whiteway said the group also hopes to be a liaison to the business community and local government to help influence policy and changes in the city.

The group plans to host a different speaker each month and have broken into four working groups to discuss topics of arts and culture, infrastructure and transportation, educational initiatives and workforce and business development.

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