
THE CITY of *Altoona*

2021 Strategic Planning Session Report

Introduction

On Thursday, December 17, 2021, Altoona City Administrator Mike Golat and Wisconsin League of Municipalities Executive Director Jerry Duschane, facilitated a strategic planning session with the Altoona City Council and City Leadership Team.

The agenda included four general sections:

- Overview of strategic planning.
- Review of missions, values, vision.
- Update SWOT Analysis.
- Focus on strategic planning goals.

The following ground rules for the retreat were established:

- Everyone's opinion counts.
- Disagreements are addressed constructively.
- Sharing of ideas is what is important—everyone was encouraged to chime in.

Overview of Strategic Planning Process

The facilitators provided participants with an overview of strategic planning and its importance. Strategic planning is a vital tool for local jurisdictions to ensure that the priorities set by the City Council are conveyed in the organization's goals, that strategies are clearly developed to meet the goals, and that overall city government is accountable to meeting community needs.

Strategic plans define measurable checkpoints to see if we've been successful in achieving our goals and drive the development of the budget, work plan, policies, ordinances, and administrative processes that contribute to development of the City comprehensive plan. Strategic Plans are a tool to help us focus on our goals, define who we are, define who we serve and assess where we are.

Challenges with creating and managing a Strategic Plan include:

- A City's mission is not well-defined like a business (many competing stakeholders).
- It takes time and effort.
- Getting and keeping buy-in.
- Shifting priorities.
- Ability to achieve goals (scarce resources).
- Defining best ways to measure success.
- Mandates.

What is to gain by establishing a Strategic Plan?

- Creating energy around things we want to accomplish.
- A document to show people (accountability).
- Provides for more efficient use of our time and resources.
- Facilitates team building.
- Provides a tool for buy-in from staff and constituents.
- Creates proactive rather than reactive behavior/management.

The following considered starting points for a Strategic Plan:

- Inventory of City’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Mission—Why do we exist?
- Values—What do we value as an organization and community?
- Vision—Where do we want to be in 5 years, 10 years?

Updated SWOT Analysis

The facilitators then led participants through a SWOT analysis, identifying and discussing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the City of Altoona, both organizationally and in the community. Overall values and strategic priorities were established from the SWOT analysis.

Below is an inventory of the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Identified Strengths

The location and accessibility of the River Prairie Development draws visitors from near and far	Altoona has many excellent Parks, Trails and Open Spaces
Community members are generally supportive of City Government initiatives	Altoona’s School System is strong and has been recognized for its excellence
The City is the right size – small enough but large enough, and listens to public input	The City is committed to affordable housing
Altoona is a safe community	The City has a strong community engagement program including an excellent social media presence
Altoona has good leadership on staff and on Council and focuses on employee development	The City works well with our regional partners
The City is fiscally responsible	The City is committed to thoughtful / sustainable growth

Identified Weaknesses

The City is deficient in IT Staff	It is difficult, given financial constraints, to add enough staff to keep up with growth
There exists a lack of participation by the public in many City issues and actions	Growth and development may detract from small town feel
The City struggles to keep up with infrastructure needs – capital projects	State aids to City’s have not kept pace with need and rising costs – levy/shared revenue
The City does not have a single source of communication for community events– Community Calendar	There is a lack of retail/ fast food establishments in Altoona
The City is physically disconnected geographically/ railroad / HWY 53 / Lake	The community has not decided on the optimal mix of rental VS. owner (63%) right
The City needs to expand bus routes to better serve its residents	Free & reduced lunch numbers indicate significant level of poverty

Identified Opportunities

Expansion of broadband	Affordable Housing Fund / Affordable Housing Plan (TID Money)
Passenger rail	Strengthen ties to elected officials
Annexation	Library – make more people aware/promote
Outdoor recreation – growth/winter activities	School partnerships / co-op
Partnerships with organizations / recreational opportunities	Additional federal funding
Grant opportunities	

Identified Threats

Sewage treatment rates	Staffing challenges
Inflation	Political environment
Climate change and impact on storm water management	Bid climate – capacity
Lake Altoona water quality	COVID
Ground water quality	Not being able to communicate well with all citizens due to generational differences
Disruptive technology	Cyber security
Housing costs & prices	

Review of Missions, Values and Vision

The facilitators then led participants through a review of the Mission, Values and Vision of the Organization and the City Council. All departmental mission statements were reviewed by the facilitators.

The identified core mission of the City is to:

- Protect public health and safety.
- Protect the human and natural environment.
- Facilitate commerce.
- Build and maintain infrastructure.
- Promote cultural and recreational opportunities.

Participants identified the following as the core mission of the City Council:

- Policy Body.
- Fiscal Stewards.
- Representatives of the Community.
- Promoting Goals of the City.
- Establish Plans.

During this section, participants formed subcommittees to establish City and City Council mission statements. Members of the City Mission Statement subcommittee include Library Director Arin Wilkin, Council Member Matt Biren, City Administrator Mike Golat and Assistant City Administrator Roy Atkinson. Members of the City Council Mission Statement include City Council Members Sue Rowe and Matt Biren. The subcommittees will meet in the first quarter of 2022 to complete their tasks.

Core Values

Next, the facilitators led participants through an exercise to identify and rank important core values. This exercise led to a dot exercise. Participants established general preferences by placing stickers on each listed item they thought was important: each participant was provided five dots.

The following were identified as Core Values for the City of Altoona (tallies for the dot exercise are included):

- Effective, transparent communications in every aspect of operations and being good stewards of the City's finances. (13)
- A well-trained, professional workforce that provides excellent customer service to Altoona's residents. (12)
- Being open, honest and ethical in dealing with each other, the Public and our cohorts. (5)
- The City's duty to care for our assets including buildings, streets, utilities, parks, rolling stock and equipment and pursue this duty diligently. (12)
- Safe neighborhoods for all Altoona residents and excellent response from Altoona's public safety professionals. (11)
- Altoona's children and the importance of providing quality education to all of Altoona's youth. (10)
- Thoughtfully planned, sustainable and resilient, residential, and business development. (10)
- Collaborative, team-based, decision making that includes residents, Council members and staff. (7)
- Practical, evidence-based, decision making. (3)
- Investing in amenities and events to enhance the quality of life of Altoona's residents and visitors. (3)
- A welcoming community for all and a culture of kindness. (2)
- Local and regional partnerships, with businesses, non-profits and other governmental agencies. (2)
- Innovation, creativity, and continuous improvement (2)
- Community strength, health, and sustainability (2)
- Altoona's rich history. (1)
- Access to all forms of art to enhance the quality of life of Altoona's residents. (1)
- The City's natural assets and resources. (0)

Altoona's Top Identified Core Values

1. Effective, transparent communications in every aspect of operations and being good stewards of the City's finances.
2. The City's duty to care for our assets including buildings, streets, utilities, parks, rolling stock and equipment and pursue this duty diligently
3. A well-trained, professional workforce that provides excellent customer service to Altoona's residents.
4. Safe neighborhoods for all Altoona residents and excellent response from Altoona's public safety professionals.
5. Thoughtfully planned, sustainable and resilient, residential, and business development.
6. Altoona's children and the importance of providing quality education to all of Altoona's youth.

City Vision

The facilitators then led participants through a review of Altoona's community vision statement which was established in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.

"We are a full-service community with a balanced mix of residential, industrial, and commercial properties. Residents of all ages have adequate opportunities for employment, education, recreation, affordable housing, and enjoyment of area parks. The community values its proximity to the Eau Claire River and Lake Altoona and development within the community is designed to safeguard area natural resources.

Altoona maintains its unique identity as a vibrant city welcoming new professionals, families, and entrepreneurs wishing to call Altoona home. The City maintains strong public infrastructure and a healthy economy serving the needs of both residents and visitors. Local leaders continue to work with adjoining towns, the City of Eau Claire, and Eau Claire County to manage development and the delivery of services for the betterment of the region."

Top City of Altoona Strategic Priorities

After the core values exercise, the facilitators led another dot exercise to further define the top strategic priorities of the City.

When it comes to Strategic Planning Goals and Objectives, it is important to note that:

- Goals are broad; objectives are narrow.
- Goals are general intentions; objectives are precise.
- Goals are intangible; objectives are tangible.
- Goals can't be validated as is; objectives can be validated as is.
- Goals are long-term; objectives are short term.

The following were identified as the top Strategic Priorities for the City of Altoona (tallies for the dot exercise are included):

- **Repair and replace aging infrastructure. (15)**
- **Hire additional personnel to keep pace with growth. (14)**
- **Assure Financial "House is in Order" (Long Range Fiscal Plan; TIDs, Bonding, staffing plan, tax implications). (12)**
- **Identify the next opportunity for economic growth and implementing an economic development plan. (10)**
- **Implement Space Needs Program for City Facilities. (9)**
- **Focus on staff development and accountability to foster a high-performing work environment (evaluation system, pay-for-performance, etc.) (6)**
- **Invest in quality-of-life amenities and opportunities. (5)**
- **Develop and implement a Housing Plan. (5)**
- **Evaluate technological needs and implementing solutions as identified. (4)**
- **Improve Public Outreach and City communications (surveys, public engagement, social media strategy). (4)**
- **Focus Efforts on Long Range Planning with an emphasis on planning for specific places or spaces (3)**
- **Establish sustainability priorities and opportunities. (3)**

- **Establish organizational equity, diversity, and inclusion priorities and goals. (2)**
- **Implement an active Forestry program (Emerald Ash Borer, street trees, oak wilt, etc.) (2)**
- **Maximize Cooperation with other agencies and private entities. (1)**
- **Activate and program Altoona City Parks. (0)**

Altoona's Top Strategic Priorities

- 1. Repair and replace aging infrastructure.**
- 2. Hire additional personnel to keep pace with growth.**
- 3. Assure Financial "House is in Order" (Long Range Fiscal Plan; TIDs, Bonding, staffing plan, tax implications).**
- 4. Identify the next opportunity for economic growth and implementing an economic development plan.**
- 5. Implement Space Needs Program for City Facilities.**

Conclusion

Specific tasks that arose from the strategic planning session were the formation of subcommittees to establish City and City Council Mission Statements. The subcommittees will meet in the first quarter of 2022 to complete their tasks.

The City's implementation of the strategic plan will span over the next several years. Ensuring the strategic plan's alignment with the City's budget process, capital improvement plan, important policy decisions, economic development initiatives and public safety priorities will all be key measures of success.