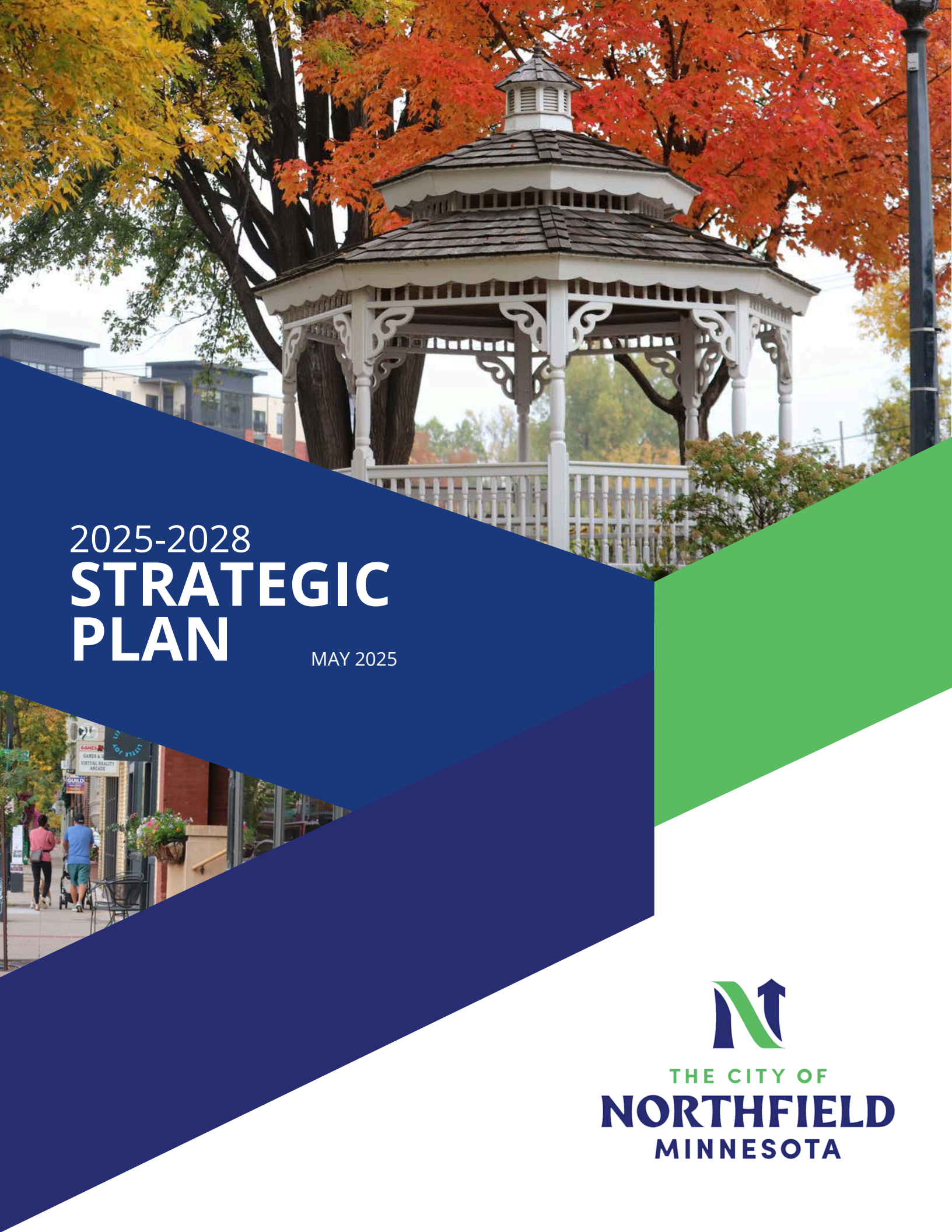




2025-2028 **STRATEGIC PLAN**

MAY 2025



THE CITY OF
NORTHFIELD
MINNESOTA



RAPP CONSULTING GROUP

May 2025

RE: 2025-2028 Strategic Plan – City of Northfield

Mayor Zweifel and City Council,

I am pleased to present the 2025–2028 Strategic Plan for the City of Northfield. This plan provides a clear and actionable roadmap for achieving the City's priorities, aligning services with community expectations, and supporting continuous organizational improvement.

Throughout the process, the City demonstrated a thoughtful, engaged approach to strategic planning with a strong commitment to long-term value and accountability. The plan reflects that focus and is designed to guide meaningful progress over the next three years.

We appreciate the opportunity to assist with this initiative and thank the City of Northfield for the trust placed in the Rapp Consulting Group.

Respectfully,

Craig R. Rapp
President
Rapp Consulting Group



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Transmittal Letter	
Executive Summary	01
Strategic Plan Summary 2025-2028	02
Strategic Planning Process	03
Enviromental Scan SWOT Analysis	04
Stakeholder Feedback	06
Setting Direction: Vision, Mission, Values	11
Strategic Priority 1: Improve Financial Strength	13
Strategic Priority 2: Increase Housing Availability	14
Strategic Priority 3: Achieve Infrastructure Sustainability	15
Strategic Priority 4: Enhance Service Delivery	16
Strategic Planning Participants	17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From October 2024 through April 2025, the City of Northfield engaged in a strategic planning process. The process yielded a strategic plan covering 2025-2028.

The plan consists of four **strategic priorities** — the issues of greatest importance to the City over the next four years. Associated with each priority is a set of **desired outcomes**, **key outcome indicators**, and **performance targets**, describing expected results and how the results will be measured. The plan also includes **strategic initiatives** that will be undertaken to achieve the targeted outcomes.

The planning process began with an All-Boards and Commissions session on October 22, 2024, to gather input from advisory groups. In the following months, Council interviews, plan reviews, and coordination meetings were held. In January 2025, the Council and staff leadership team launched their work with a team-building session on Effective Governance.

From January to March, community input was gathered through focus groups and a community survey. These results, along with an environmental scan and organizational profile, were presented on March 11. On April 5, the leadership team held a strategic planning session to define priorities, outcomes, and performance targets.

Based on this work, the City's management team developed strategic initiatives and began action planning. A summary of the priorities, outcomes, targets, and initiatives follows.



strategy

The Plan

Four Strategic Priorities

- 1 IMPROVE FINANCIAL STRENGTH
- 2 INCREASE HOUSING AVAILABILITY
- 3 ACHIEVE INFRASTRUCTURE SUSTAINABILITY
- 4 ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY

STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY 2025-2028

City of Northfield

Strategic Priority	Desired Outcome	Key Outcome Indicator	Target	Strategic Initiatives
Improve Financial Strength <i>A financially responsible organization</i>	Increased Commercial-Industrial tax base	- Net new C/I Valuation - C/I Permit Valuation (new)	- \$50M net increase-C/I valuation 2025-2028 - \$50M net increase-C/I permit valuation 2025-2028	a) Develop and implement Northwest Area Shovel Ready and Recruitment Plan b) Strategies to develop high potential CI properties c) Create a Revenue Diversification Program (new & updates) d) Implement a coordinated 2-year Budget and Aligned Financial Management Plan e) 5-year Financial Management Alignment with Service Level Strategy.
	Increased revenue diversification	Change in \$ value of new non-tax/non-intergovernmental revenue	10% increase in non-tax/non-intergovernmental revenue 2025-2028	
	Taxation responsive to community needs & expectations	- Annual tax levy - Annual tax rate	Tax levy at or below __% over Estimated Market Value (EMV) growth	
Increase Housing Availability <i>Addressing the City's affordable housing needs</i>	Expanded availability of single-family housing	# of single-family housing units added annually	Add 50 single-family homes annually through 12/2028	a) Develop and implement single-family home expansion strategy & recruitment plan b) Implement new and existing housing stabilization programs c) Create a strategy to reduce homeownership disparity d) Create development subsidy standards and policy e) Create a plan for publicly owned high priority redevelopment sites
	Expanded availability of multi-family housing	# of multi-family housing units added annually	Add 50 multi-family homes annually through 12/2028	
	Preservation of housing quality and affordability	- # of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) units preserved	30 NOAH units preserved/rehabbed by end 2028	
Achieve Infrastructure Sustainability <i>Infrastructure that supports community needs</i>	A flood resistant community	- Flood plan adoption - Flood plan implementation	Flood plan fully implemented by 2028	a) Implement downtown flood improvements b) Implement neighborhood flood improvements c) Implement City-wide pedestrian crossing improvement plan d) Create Pedestrian and Biking Crossing Improvement Plan for TH-3 e) Create a safe street for all plan f) Create a dam removal strategy
	Improved pedestrian safety	- #__ of upgraded pedestrian crossings installed - #__ of pedestrian plan improvements completed	- 10 new pedestrian crossings installed 2025-2028 - TH3 pedestrian & biking plan improvements completed by 12/2028 - Safe Streets for All Plan complete 12/2028	
	Dam-free river	Dam removal decision	Dam removal completed by 12/2029	
Enhance Service Delivery <i>A community that cares about its residents</i>	Capacity to meet desired service levels	# of capacity improvements implemented	Full implementation of critical capacity-building measures across Administrative Services, PD, and Streets & Parks by 2028	a) Identify long-term service delivery needs b) Defined service levels in core services c) Review & update Communications Plan d) Develop a survey framework e) Create a downtown managed parking plan
	Community input guides service improvements	Completion of a city-wide quality of life survey	Conduct a city-wide community survey every other year starting in 2026	
	Downtown parking needs are met	- Managed parking plan adoption - Parking need assessment	Comprehensive downtown managed parking solution in place by 12/2026	

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Strategic planning enables leaders to examine current conditions, determine a desired future state, establish priorities, and define a set of actions to achieve specific outcomes. The process is designed to answer four key questions: (1) Where are we now? (2) Where are we going? (3) How will we get there? (4) What will we do? The process is divided into a development phase and an implementation phase, depicted below:



Initiating the Process: Setting Expectations, Charting the Course

Northfield's strategic planning process began in October 2024 with a meeting of the consultant and City administration. The meeting included development of the strategic planning calendar and preparations for facilitating the City's all-Boards and Commissions training session on October 22nd. The effort continued in November and December with an examination of progress on the previous strategic plan, and discussions with senior management regarding current organizational challenges and other operational issues.

Interviews with the Mayor and City Councilors were conducted to gather perspectives on community and organizational issues. A final timeline for the strategic planning effort was adopted, along with directions for preparing the environmental scan, a process for conducting a SWOT analysis, and details regarding implementation.

Assessing the Environment: Environmental Scan

To answer the question “Where Are We?” the City developed an Environmental Scan, which provided a comprehensive overview of the key trends, challenges, and opportunities that will shape strategic planning over the next three years. In Northfield, it is projected that modest population growth will be accompanied by increasing cultural diversity, a rise in young families, and an aging population. These shifts will demand services that are inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to all. Economic pressures, including inflation, housing affordability, and workforce shortages, are expected to affect both residents and the community organizations that support them.

It is noted that technological advancements are positively transforming service delivery, while simultaneously creating challenges such as gaps in digital access and cybersecurity risks. Additionally, environmental concerns, such as climate change and extreme weather, highlight the need for more resilient and sustainable planning. The City affirmed its steadfast commitment to collaboration, community-driven design, and actively listening to lived experiences, to ensure its services meet evolving needs.



Assessing the Environment: SWOT Analysis

An important part of the strategic planning process is an organizational review of the current operating environment and the challenges confronting the community. This was accomplished via a SWOT analysis—a process that examines the organization’s internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats in the external environment. The results are displayed below.



Assessing the Environment: Stakeholder Feedback

The strategic planning process included stakeholder outreach and feedback. This was done to collect information on community needs and expectations, as well as organizational issues that impact service delivery. This provided useful information to the City Council, helping them make informed choices. Stakeholder feedback was received from:

- City Boards & Commissions
- Focus groups, representing a cross-section of the community
- A community survey

Boards and Commissions Session

The Annual City of Northfield Board and Commission Training was held on Tuesday, October 22nd. The purpose of the training was to gather broad input through a structured, SWOT-like discussion format. A summary of participants' comments and opinions is provided below.

Community Strengths:

The group identified a highly engaged and supportive population, strong public schools and school choice, and the city's walkability, parks, and natural beauty. Participants highlighted the arts and cultural scene, a historic and vibrant downtown, strong local healthcare, and the presence of two colleges with global reach. Northfield's proximity to the Twin Cities and the aesthetic appeal of the riverfront further contribute to its unique character.

Opportunities for improvement:

Comments focused on several key areas:

- Expanding mixed-use spaces beyond downtown
- Enhancing public recreation (e.g., amphitheaters, playgrounds)
- Providing innovative childcare solutions and mental health supports
- Activating the riverfront and increasing downtown housing density
- Rethinking downtown traffic flow, especially pedestrian access
- Increasing affordable, multi-generational housing options
- Improving public lighting, infrastructure maintenance, and sustainable transit

Key limitations:

The group identified a number of limitations inherent in the community including: a constrained tax base, limited career industries, and internal challenges such as unclear processes and underutilized partnerships with local colleges. Concerns were also raised about a shrinking school district and persistent status quo thinking—especially regarding housing and land use.

Long-Term Challenges:

Looking ahead, participants identified major long-term challenges:

- Expanding and diversifying the tax base
- Responding to climate change and insurance risks
- Addressing childcare shortages and youth retention
- Maintaining aging infrastructure
- Navigating demographic shifts and transportation safety issues (notably Hwy 3 and Hwy 19)

The Boards and Commissions emphasized several strategic priorities: Implementing actionable strategies, strengthening public transportation, fostering cross-sector collaboration, promoting sustainability, and enhancing communication and community engagement.

Focus Groups

In February 2025, the City of Northfield conducted four focus groups gathering perspectives from a diverse cross-section of residents, youth, business leaders, college representatives, and advisory board members to inform strategic planning for the next three to five years, summarized below:

Key Community Values

Participants consistently highlighted Northfield's strong, welcoming community spirit as its defining asset, valuing the neighborly culture and inclusive nature. The walkable historic downtown with locally owned businesses was universally praised for its unique character and central role in community life.



Priority Areas for Action

Housing

Focus groups identified housing as both a critical challenge and top priority, citing rising costs and limited availability. Youth and college representatives supported innovative solutions like ADUs, while business leaders emphasized increased density and long-term residents expressed concern about property tax impacts on affordability.

Transportation & Sustainability

While road maintenance received positive feedback, participants emphasized better communication about infrastructure projects. Environmental initiatives received broad support, particularly rain gardens, EV charging stations, and preserving the Cannon River, alongside improved public transportation options.

Community Assets & Public Safety

Residents valued Northfield's parks, schools, and public safety services, while suggesting increased downtown speed enforcement and more outreach to diverse communities. Advisory board members connected declining school enrollment to the need for attracting more families through housing and job opportunities.

Economic Development & Communication

Business leaders encouraged active city involvement in business retention and attraction, while college representatives emphasized institutional partnerships. All groups called for more transparent communication during project implementation, noting that follow-through on initiatives often lacked consistency.

Top Priorities for the Future

The consensus priorities emerging from these discussions include:

- Expanding affordable and innovative housing options
- Strengthening economic development and diversifying the tax base
- Advancing environmental sustainability initiatives
- Improving public transportation and Highway 3 corridor development
- Enhancing communication while maintaining downtown vitality



Community Survey

The City of Northfield conducted a community survey in March 2025 to gather resident perspectives on quality of life, city services, future priorities, and emerging needs. With over 650 participants, the responses reflect a community that values its identity and is engaged in shaping its future.

Key Takeaways

- Northfield residents reported a high level of satisfaction with life in their city. The average rating for overall quality of life was 7.9 out of 10, and over 75% of respondents said they feel "very safe" living in Northfield. The likelihood of recommending Northfield as a place to live was also high, with many respondents giving scores of 8, 9, or 10.
- Several key themes emerged when residents were asked what the city should focus on over the next five years:
 - **Housing:** A top concern was the need for affordable and diverse housing options, especially for young families, seniors, and essential workers.
 - **Downtown & Riverfront:** The charm of the historic downtown remains one of Northfield's most beloved features. Residents want to preserve that character while encouraging development along the Cannon River.
 - **Infrastructure & Roads:** Residents pointed to aging roads, pedestrian and bike safety, and the need for thoughtful infrastructure investments - especially along key corridors like Highway 3.
 - **Recreation & Public Spaces:** There was strong support for expanding recreational offerings, including trails, parks, and updated community centers.
 - **Environmental Sustainability:** Residents expressed continued support for Northfield's Climate Action Plan, calling for investments in energy efficiency, EV infrastructure, native landscaping, and green building practices.
 - **Public Communication & Transparency:** A recurring theme was the desire for clearer, more consistent communication from the City, particularly about project timelines, budget decisions, and opportunities for public input.
 - **Public Safety:** Public safety received positive marks, with most residents reporting feeling secure in their neighborhoods.
 - **Schools:** Highlighted as a strength, though some noted concerns about long-term funding and enrollment trends.
 - **City Services:** Snow removal, garbage collection, and parks maintenance generally received favorable feedback.

Setting Direction: Vision, Mission, Value Proposition

On April 5, 2025, the City Council and senior staff held a retreat to develop the strategic plan. To address the question "Where are we going?" the group started with a review of their Vision, Mission, and Values statements.

The vision is a description of where the City is going, sometimes referred to as an expression of "a clear image of a desirable future". Upon review, the group determined that the current vision statement (p.12) accurately reflected their desires for the future. The mission statement (p.12), which describes the organization's purpose and what it exists to achieve, was also judged to be aligned with group expectations. The City's five values (p.12) were also examined and, like the vision and mission, were determined to accurately reflect the beliefs of the organization.

As part of the vision, mission, and values discussion, the group was challenged to articulate its value proposition. A value proposition is how an organization chooses to deliver its services and provide value to its customers (citizens, stakeholders). The leadership group considered the three primary value propositions commonly acknowledged across all sectors of the economy (see at right).

In practice, organizations choose a primary value proposition in order to align organization-wide performance, while identifying threshold standards for the other two.

During an extended discussion, it was acknowledged that value propositions and service approaches varied by department and circumstance. It was concluded, however, that operational excellence has been foundational and will continue to be important for stability across the organization. For that reason, operational excellence was chosen as the primary value proposition, with customer intimacy the secondary focus, allowing for departmental flexibility.

THREE VALUE PROPOSITIONS

Operational Excellence

Core Idea: Reliable, low-cost, efficient, standardized service

Motto: No frills, no fuss, just results

Product/Service Leadership

Core Idea: Innovation, cutting-edge offerings, differentiation

Motto: Ahead of the curve, every time.

Customer Intimacy

Core Idea: Deep relationships, tailored solutions, loyalty-building

Motto: Personalized service. Trusted partner.



Setting Direction: Establishing Priorities, Outcomes, Targets

Following a review of the City's vision, mission, and values, the leadership group assessed the current operating environment using a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) conducted in advance of the planning session. This analysis was supplemented by an environmental scan and insights gathered during stakeholder engagement.

Through a facilitated process, the group identified a series of organizational challenges and strategic issues that helped shape the direction of the new plan. As a result, four strategic priorities were established—down from six in the previous plan. This reduction was driven by two key considerations:

1. A desire to focus on a manageable number of high-impact objectives; and
2. A decision to integrate rather than isolate key commitments, specifically Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Climate Change. These areas, which were previously addressed as standalone priorities, have seen meaningful progress. However, recognizing their continued importance, the leadership group opted to embed DEI and Climate Change into each of the four strategic priorities to ensure they are treated as cross-cutting commitments rather than siloed efforts.

Each strategic priority defines a major area of focus for the next three years. For each, the leadership team identified:

- **Desired Outcomes** – the future conditions the City aims to achieve;
- **Key Outcome Indicators (KOIs)** – the metrics used to monitor progress; and
- **Performance Targets** – the specific performance levels to be reached.

To move from strategy to action, the management team convened on April 8 and 15 to define strategic initiatives and develop detailed action plans aligned with the new priorities.





OUR VISION

Northfield will be an open, safe, welcoming community, recognized for its world-class colleges and historic riverfront downtown, and is dedicated to sustainably enhancing and preserving its vibrant culture, celebrated arts, strong economy, and an excellent quality of life where all can thrive.



OUR MISSION

The City of Northfield works for the common good of our residents and businesses and the improvement of our community by providing excellent, innovative municipal services that carry out the City's vision for a high-quality of life for all.



OUR VALUES

INTEGRITY

- Provide outstanding customer service
- Be open, honest, respectful, kind, and accountable
- Demonstrate fiscal responsibility
- Act and communicate in authentic ways

EXCELLENCE & INNOVATION

- Serve by leading and lead by serving
- Focus on clearly defined outcomes to achieve best results
- Commit to continuous improvement building on lessons learned
- Seek creative solutions for difficult problems

CELEBRATION

- Welcome diversity, inclusivity, and welcoming broad perspectives
- Commemorate our unique and rich cultural sense of place
- Recognize others and their contributions
- Celebrate and acknowledge accomplishments

TEAMWORK

- Actively participate in cooperative and collaborative approaches
- Commit to equitable treatment and the elimination of discrimination
- Utilize the experience and expertise within our organization and community

STEWARDSHIP

- Protect our physical environment through ecologically sustainable practices and policies
- Maintain, improve, and develop municipal assets
- Invest in others through advancement, mentorships, and professional development
- Nurture personal well-being through physical and mental health initiatives

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Improve Financial Strength



OUTCOME

Increased commercial-industrial tax base

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Net new C/I valuation; C/I permit valuation

TARGET

\$50M net increase-C/I valuation 2025-28
\$50M net increase-C/I permit valuation 2025-28

OUTCOME

Increased revenue diversification

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Change in \$ value of new non-tax/non-intergovernmental revenue

TARGET

10% increase in non-tax/non-intergovernmental revenue 2025-2028

OUTCOME

Taxation response to community needs & expectations

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Annual tax levy; Annual tax rate

TARGET

Tax levy at or below __% over Estimated Market Value (EMV) growth

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. Develop and implement Northwest Area Shovel Ready and Recruitment Plan
2. Strategies to develop high potential CI properties
3. Create a Revenue Diversification Program (new & updates).
4. Implement a coordinated 2-year Budget and Aligned Financial Management Plan.
5. 5-year Financial Management Alignment with Service Level Strategy

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Increase Housing Availability



OUTCOME

Expanded availability of single-family housing

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

of single-family housing units added annually

TARGET

Add 50 single-family homes annually through 12/2028

OUTCOME

Expanded availability of multi-family housing

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

of multi-family housing units added annually

TARGET

Add 50 multi-family homes annually through 12/2028

OUTCOME

Preservation of housing quality and affordability

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) units preserved

TARGET

30 NOAH units preserved/rehabbed by end 2028

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. Develop and implement single-family home expansion strategy & recruitment plan
2. Implement new and existing housing stabilization programs
3. Create a strategy to reduce homeownership disparity
4. Create development subsidy standards and policy
5. Create a plan for publicly owned high priority redevelopment sites

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Achieve Infrastructure Sustainability



OUTCOME

A flood resistant community

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Flood plan adoption; Flood plan implementation

TARGET

Flood plan fully implemented by 2028

OUTCOME

Improved pedestrian safety

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

#__ of upgraded pedestrian crossings installed; #__ of pedestrian plan improvements completed

TARGET

10 new pedestrian crossings installed 2025-2028
TH3 Pedestrian & biking plan improvements completed by 12/2028
Safe Streets for All Plan complete 12/2028

OUTCOME

Dam-free river

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Dam removal decision

TARGET

Dam removal completed by 12/2029

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. Implement downtown flood improvements
2. Implement neighborhood flood improvements
3. Implement City-wide pedestrian crossing improvement plan
4. Create Pedestrian and Biking Crossing Improvement Plan for TH-3
5. Create a safe street for all plan
6. Create a dam removal strategy

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Enhance Service Delivery



OUTCOME

Capacity to meet desired service levels

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

of capacity improvements implemented

TARGET

Full implementation of critical capacity-building measures across Administrative Services, PD, and Streets & Parks by 2028

OUTCOME

Community input guides service improvements

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Completion of a citywide quality of life survey

TARGET

Conduct a city-wide community survey every other year starting in 2026

OUTCOME

Downtown parking needs are met

KEY OUTCOME INDICATOR

Managed parking plan adoption; Parking need assessment

TARGET

Comprehensive downtown managed parking solution in place by 12/2026

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. Identify long-term service delivery needs
2. Defined service levels in core services
3. Review and update Communications Plan
4. Develop a survey framework
5. Create a downtown managed parking plan



STRATEGIC PLANNING PARTICIPANTS

This Strategic Plan was shaped through the dedicated efforts of both the City Council and senior staff.

The Council provided leadership by focusing on the long-term future, identifying key priorities, and community-focused outcomes.

Senior staff contributed essential operational knowledge and recommended strategies for ongoing improvement.

CITY COUNCIL

Erica Zweifel, *Mayor*
Chad Beumer, *Council Member*
Peter Dahlen, *Council Member*
Kathleen Holmes, *Council Member*
Brad Ness, *Council Member*
Jessica Peterson White, *Council Member*
Davin Sokup, *Council Member*

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Jeff Schroepfer, *Chief of Police*
Kurt Wolf, *IT Manager*
Lynette Peterson, *City Clerk*
Michelle Mahowald, *Communications & Human Resources Director*
Natalie Draper, *Director of Library Services*

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