City of Northfield, Minnesota

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STRATEGIC & WORK PLAN

2015

Month, 2015

Strategic Plan Sections

The sections within the strategic plan are:

I. Northfield, Minnesota

II. Strategic Planning

III. Strategic Planning Process

IV. Organizational Foundation

V. Strategies

VI. Details – Strategies and Goals
- Citizen Enrichment
- Economic Vitality
- Financial Security
- Organizational Leadership
- Distinctive Services

VII. Implementation

Northfield, Minnesota

Northfield is a steadily growing, independent full-service community of over 20,000 people. Located in Rice and Dakota Counties, a few short miles from interstate 35 and adjacent to State Highways #3 and #19. Forty-five miles from downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Northfield community offers residents a desirable combination of small town living with easy access to the amenities of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Northfield's charm and proximity to the Twin Cities contributes to the area's new developments and business growth. The City has a strong and vibrant residential, commercial, industrial and agriculture base.

In 2014 Northfield was recognized by *Livability* as the second best small town in the country. The City enjoys a committed and involved citizenry, many of whom actively participate in local government affairs and offer perspective and insight to city leaders. Community members participate on a host of commissions and task forces that add a distinctive grassroots element to local policy-making with wide influence in plans and policies. The City is led by an elected Mayor and six City Council members with four wards and two at-large positions. A City Administrator manages the day-to-day operations of city government.

Northfield residents enjoy higher income levels and a sense of community pride unmatched in the region. Proximity to several hospitals, including the Mayo Clinic, great schools, an abundance of parks, farmers markets, high community engagement and excellent cultural amenities make Northfield an attractive area to live. The town's natural beauty extends to the Cannon River, which bisects the city as it flows through historic downtown.

Landmark structures such as the Archer House, Scriver Building and the Grand Event Center exemplify the historical architecture found in Northfield. Vendors selling baked goods, vegetables, artwork and crafts set up along the Riverwalk each Saturday between June and October. It's common to see anglers of all ages kayaking, canoeing or fishing for bluegill, walleye and northern pike in the Cannon River. The surrounding countryside is dotted with farms, apple orchards and small lakes.

Both St. Olaf College and Carleton College provide programs that Northfield residents enjoy such as Christmas festivals, lectures, theaters, art galleries and continuing education opportunities. Cowling Arboretum on the grounds of Carleton College provides the townsfolk with an excellent place to hike, run, ski and fish. A 15-mile trail system in the arboretum was ranked by *Runner's World* magazine as one of the best places to run in the country. railroad. Winter snowfall brings the opportunity to cross-country ski on trails at Carleton College or the nearby River Bend Nature Center.

Northfield prides itself on the many partnerships that exist within the community. From schools, to colleges, to non-profits, as well as businesses, the City flourishes within a collaborative and collective conscious. Northfield is bursting with vibrant culture, esteemed academics, celebrated arts, progressive technology, and a cherished history.

Strategic Planning

A strategic plan is a means to organize all of priorities of the city into one document. A strategic plan is complementary to the Comprehensive Plan and the other planning tools used by city leaders. A strategic plan organizes the priorities, programs and services into common themes and then presents strategies and goals to ensure there is a clear road map for the future. Strategic planning is an effective tool to provide a means for the Council, staff and community to ensure that their resources are applied and used in an optimal manner. The methods used in strategic planning are a means to an end; the City's process was designed to identify the most important priorities and goals of the City and community. There are many benefits to strategic planning; the top five primary outcomes for the City are:

- Create an organizational vision and coalesce the elected officials around a common direction
- Provide a *written road map* to record and document the direction
- Improve the Council and staff's ability to focus on the most important priorities and issues
- Provide a means to ensure that resources are allocated optimally and wisely
- Improve accountability and capacity to measure performance and outcomes

The intent of the planning process is to integrate and organize all relevant information from various sources of city documents into an overall strategic plan. The strategic plan supports the governance work of the City Council and the administration and operation of the City staff with four clear qualities: decision-making, leadership, management and a communication tool.

Timing

The timing for introduction a comprehensive strategic planning process within the City is excellent with five major factors driving the City's motivation:

- Northfield is a community of projects and activities: "There is always something happening in Northfield." The process provides a timely opportunity to discuss the many important issues facing the City.
    - The list of 2014 projects is "significantly lengthy" and includes projects in human resources, facilities, capital projects, connectivity and policy areas among a long list.
- Implement the transition goals of the new City Administrator.[1]
- Enhance the decision-making and governance work of the City Council.
- The need to prioritize the many ongoing and new projects envisioned for the City.
- To ensure that city leaders capitalize on the existing strengths and solid foundation of the City.

The City of Northfield has a history of goal setting, but not effective strategic planning. Direct input and testimony from the City Council noted that historically the City has not followed or officially organized and used as a guide the results from their annual goal setting sessions. The City will prepare a document that combines the present and the future with a practical and fiscally prudent plan. The City Administrator intends to develop a layered planning methodology to include a Council plan, a staff plan and a working tool that provides the opportunity to measure, evaluate and ensure accountability.

[1] Three specific goals are related to strategic planning: facilitate the development of a shared vision; help the Council in policy-making and administration of services; and assist the Council in developing protocols for enhancing and streamlining the decision-making process.

Strategic Planning Process

The process was authorized by the City Council and organized and structured by the City Administrator. The fundamental goal of the process is to develop a three-tiered strategic planning outcome: a City Council strategic roadmap; a detailed city administration work plan, and individual department work plans.

Two Saturday morning planning sessions were held with the City Council and city staff: February 21 and March 7. Both sessions were very well attended and were held on the campus of St. Olaf College.

The February 21 work session focused on the introduction of the process, the practices of strategic planning, and the identification of major concepts and ideas central to the core vision and mission of the City. A total of 25 independent ideas were identified. Highlights from the February 21 work session include pointing out the distinctiveness and pride of the City; reviewing the value and purpose of strategic planning, including its strengths, barriers and purpose; discussing the history of strategic planning in the City; understanding trends and variables in municipal government that impact the City; and identifying major concepts and ideas for the present and future of the City.

From the list of original concepts and ideas four primary themes emerged: 1) Communications and Connections; 2) Community and Economic Vitality; 3) Premier City Government; and 4) Build Strong Infrastructure. This information was provided to city officials as a launching point for the development of specific goals and activities which formed the foundation of the March 7th session. A roundtable forum was used to solicit a large number of specific goals and activities within each of these four themes. Highlights from the March 7 work session include discussing characteristics of premier city governments; reviewing roles and responsibilities of city officials; and identifying specific projects and goals within the four overall themes.

The two work session were characterized by inclusive and participatory discussions, an open invitation to introduce any idea or topic, and a sincerity of purpose and intent.

Major Process Steps

- Ongoing and active communication with the City Administrator.
- A pre-planning questionnaire administered to Department Heads with the following seven questions:
    1. Why is this an opportune time to engage in strategic planning?
    2. What are your department's top three short term priorities (1-4 years)?
    3. What are your department's top three long term priorities (5 plus years)?
    4. What do you believe are the City's top three short term priorities?
    5. What do you believe are the City's top three long priorities?
    6. How would you describe the City Council-City staff working relationship?
    7. Identify two or three objectives you want to accomplish from this process.
- The information from Department Heads was collected, organized and briefed by each staff member attending the work session.
- Individual phone conversation and discussion with the Mayor and City Council members

- First work session held on February 21, 2015 on the campus of St. Olaf College[2]
- Identify, organize and develop the four major themes
    1. Communications and Connections
    2. Community and Economic Vitality
    3. Premier City Government
    4. Build Strong Infrastructure
- Second work session held on March 7, 2015 on the campus of St. Olaf College
    1. Over 31 different ideas and projects were identified during the work session
- A working draft of the strategic plan was discussed with the City Administrator on March 31
- **To be continued and finished in the final plan……**

[2] Copies of the agenda, supporting material and notes from the meetings are available in the City Administrator's Office.

VISION

Striving for excellence, committed to service

Organizational Foundation

MISSION

The City of Northfield is dedicated to providing effective and responsive public services to develop and enhance a livable, vibrant community.

STRATEGIES

Define the essential public policy priorities and coordinates and organizes the goals.

Citizen Enrichment	*Economic Vitality*	*Financial Security*	*Organizational Leadership*	*Distinctive Services*

GOALS

A specific and measurable project, activity and/or public policy priority

Strategies

Major Themes

From the first work session four overall themes emerged as leading concepts and ideas to use as a foundation for the strategic plan. The list of original ideas from the February 21 work session was grouped into one of these four categories. They were used as a basis for discussion on March 7.

- *Communications and Connections*
- *Community and Economic Vitality*
- *Premier City Government*
- *Build Strong Infrastructure*

Strategic Priorities

Upon further review and refinement five strategic priorities are recommended for the foundation of the plan. These five elements translate the lists, ideas, and priorities into specific objectives and goals. Simply, they are action-oriented to ensure their intent becomes a reality. These elements are in no particular order of priority or preference.

- *Citizen enrichment* – creative communication and inclusive community engagement
- *Economic Vitality* – business recruitment, retention and collaborative community development
- *Financial security* – strong balance sheet supported by contemporary fiscal policies
- *Organizational leadership* – best practices through effective and efficient customer service
- *Distinctive services* – preserve, expand and advocate for core services and infrastructures

City Goals

This is a placeholder to locate the goals that are identified within each strategy. They will be listed in this section.

Strategy: Citizen Enrichment

Creative Communication and Inclusive Community Engagement

Description

Northfield is not just the name of a community, but a reference of distinction and pride. It is well established that communities with engaged citizens thrive and flourish. In our city, citizens are engaged in a passionate volunteer culture in their neighborhoods, service clubs, and the numerous city boards and commissions. The diversity and character of the community is recognized and celebrated. The City fosters the education and enrichment of its citizens, and strong networking through creative communication and policies that support inclusive community engagement.

Qualities and Characteristics

- Boards and Commissions
- Community engagement practices
- Diversity
- Communications
- Pride
- Potential
- Website
- Changing Demographics
- Networking
- Policy influence
- Collaborations
- Sense of place
- Recruiting leaders
- Senior services
- Service clubs
- Energy/enthusiasm
- Opportunities
- Welcoming to all ages
- Partnerships with schools
- Volunteer culture

Listing of Goals

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Strategy: Economic Vitality

Business Recruitment and Retention and Collaborative Community Development

Description

The lifeline of a successful municipal government is the expansion of the tax base through planned and organized growth and development. Northfield benefits by its location and connection to the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The City has an opportunity to shape and influence the development by its land use policies, ordinances and regulations. Priorities will include the retention of our current businesses and the recruitment of new business. Economic development, at all levels, is a competitive field and successful models are grounded in partnerships and collaborations with businesses, other public agencies, and community groups and associations.

Qualities and Characteristics:

- Arts culture
- Economic development plan
- Business retention
- Partnerships
- Green Steps
- Comprehensive plan
- Redevelopment
- Environmentally friendly
- Recreation/tourism
- Transportation
- Chamber of Commerce
- Parking
- Climate change
- Employment
- Enterprise Parks
- Location of jobs
- Land for development
- Housing
- Incentive policies
- Land use and zoning
- Managed growth
- "Village Feel"
- Downtown

Listing of Goals

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Strategy: Financial Security

Strong Balance Sheet Supported by Contemporary Fiscal Polices

Description

One of the fundamental responsibilities of city leaders is to ensure the financial stability of the city government. Yet this role and fiduciary responsibility is often understated. In the complex world of managing a municipal government, the city's financial obligations require expert talent, strong systems, and recognition of the value and importance of its linkage to the entire city. The City is working on strengthening its business and financial practices. Through effective planning, transparent budgeting, up-to-date policies and strong financial systems, the City will maintain and enhance its current strong balance sheet for the long term future.

Qualities and Characteristics

- Capital improvement plans
- Budget development
- Facility maintenance schedules
- Market values
- Transparent financial reporting
- Cash management plan
- Financial policies
- Fund balance policy
- Investments
- Service sharing
- Bond rating
- Tax levies
- New financial software

Listing of Goals

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Strategy: Organizational Leadership

Best Practices through Effective and Efficient Customer Service

Description

Northfield is addressing a multitude of complex simultaneous challenges including ensuring the city services are efficient and effective, meeting citizen expectations, and sustaining and maintaining mandating programs. Conventional wisdom implies that business as usual will not get the job done. The City will continually evaluate its business models and systems to ensure peak performance throughout the City. This commitment starts at the top with an emphasis on the work of the elected officials. The City will be willing to take prudent risks and make changes when needed to ensure they are performing best practices through effective and efficient customer service.

Qualities and Characteristics

- Staffing analysis
- Workplace culture
- Council relationships
- Council roles
- Decision-making
- Policy development
- Professional development
- Strive for excellence
- Succession planning
- Leadership training
- Confidence in city hall
- Create a theme based presentation
- Cities/Counties & Townships
- Flexible and nimble
- Interactions with staff
- New Administrator
- Branding/Image

Listing of Goals

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Strategy: Distinctive Services

Preserve, Expand and Advocate for Core Services and Infrastructure

Description

The City's primary obligation is to ensure the core services are well-funded thus reliable. Through feedback and reputation, by all measures, the City of Northfield is doing a good job. Yet financial pressures, many competing interests, levy constraints and the rising cost of infrastructure repair and replacement are placing a greater burden on the core services. Providing core services and infrastructure often becomes a matter of funding; how to pay for it? City leaders recognize the connection between preserving and expanding essential services and the importance of growth in the tax base through economic development. In Northfield, the policy options are many; the choices are what make this community distinctive.

Qualities and Characteristics

- Vision/plan for trails
- Bike-pedestrian
- Stormwater mgmt
- Parks vision
- River corridor
- Legislative and policy advocacy
- Long range planning
- Hospital structure
- Leverage technology
- Broadband
- Grants
- Public facilities
- Highway 19 corridor
- Pavement management
- Sustainable
- Public safety
- Accessible
- County/State partners

Listing of Goals

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Goal:

Action Steps	Assigned	Deadline
a.		
b.		
c.		

Implementation

The following outline identifies the essential roles of the city leaders in the implementation of the strategic plan.

Mayor and City Council

The role of the City Council in implementation of the strategic plan includes the following key principles:

- Champion and take ownership in the plan
- Formally take action to adopt the Plan
- Communicate the plan to public and stakeholders
- Advocate for a culture change
- Include plan in new Council orientation processes
- Ensure resources are allocated for action steps
- Identify accountability measures
- Periodically review the Plan

City Administration

The role of Administration in the implementation of the strategic plan includes the following key principles:

- Assign and delegate responsibility for goals
- Develop a second tier plan with greater department detail
- Develop a progress update template or reporting tool
- Communicate the plan with the staff
- Lead a culture change
- Incorporate goals into future budgets
- Provide regular informal updates
- Conduct a formal review of the Plan

City Staff

The role of the staff in the implementation of the strategic plan includes the following key principles:

- Understand the value of strategic planning
- Support the City Council
- Accept responsibilities derived from the plan
- Integrate goals into the department operations
- Immerse the plan and process in the culture
- Provide regular updates to the administrator and Council