

City of Vadnais Heights

2023 Strategic Planning and Goal Setting Report

PROCESS

On February 2, 2023, the Vadnais Heights City Council and Staff Leadership Team convened a work session for the purpose of developing long-term strategies and short-term goals for the organization in 2023.

The process followed up on previous strategic planning efforts, but largely started anew by developing a new long-term vision and examining the present status of the City and organization to develop a workplan for Council and staff consistent with that vision. The participants engaged in discussion around a series of questions to consider areas of strength and weakness, along with potential impacts and opportunities on the horizon.

The City Council will now consider the results of the session through the process of adopting its 2023 Strategic Plan.

VISION AND CORE STRATEGIES

One of the primary outcomes of the Strategic Planning process is the development of a long-term vision. The vision is a description of the future the participants see for the community and the organization, often expressed in aspirational terms. The purpose of the vision is to establish the long-term direction that can be communicated both within the community and the organization, providing all stakeholders with an understanding of the leadership's direction. The vision is communicated through a series of descriptive and detailed organizational strategy statements, labeled core strategies. These statements can be both the embodiment of the areas the organization values and the direction of its leadership. Accomplishing progress on the core strategies will bring the organization closer to achieving its vision and provide the areas in which more manageable, short-term goals can be derived.

Prior to the session, participants were asked to consider the characteristics and qualities they hoped would describe Vadnais Heights and the organization in 2050. Participants individually shared their thoughts in writing in advance. The comments and input were collected and shared anonymously with the group in the first exercise of the session. The participants were given the opportunity to discuss the results of the pre-session work, identifying areas where they agreed, were surprised, and/or didn't agree with the ideas for the long-term vision of the City and organization. The participants then worked through small-group exercises to develop core strategies and strategic objectives based on the input from this activity.

The core strategies are action statements that identify the organization and City's long-term key areas of focus. The strategies provide consistent and stable organizational priorities for the years to come, and serve as organizational guideposts for day-to-day action, policy formation, and program decision-making. It is anticipated that the core strategies may be modified over the long-term, but generally all agreed as to the key priorities of the leadership team.

The core strategies are supported in this plan by strategic objectives. These objectives provide more specific action areas that the City's leadership team believes are integral to achieving success with the core strategies. Each objective addresses an internal or external area of action or improvement. The strategic objectives, combined with the core strategies, provide direction for all areas of leadership.

Following the small group work to develop a series of core strategies and strategic objectives, the full group reviewed the body of work and had the opportunity to discuss the proposed statements of the Leadership Team's vision. Without objection and subject to further modification prior to adoption, the group agreed to the following draft core strategies and strategic objectives:

Long-Term Vision
Core Strategies and Strategic Objectives

1. Resilient systems

- a. Robust and sustainable buildings and infrastructure - streets, utilities, storm water, parks, trails
- b. Foster and support neighborhood groups and community organizations
- c. Multi-modal transportation systems - including interconnectedness of trails, walkability, and public transportation
- d. Proactive and responsive public safety

2. Sustainability in design and leadership

- a. Infrastructure systems designed to conserve
- b. Actions and policies that encourage sustainable practices through communication and education around climate change

3. Building inclusive systems for a cohesive community

- a. Shared spaces and connectedness to create community spaces
- b. Ongoing connections between all stakeholders in the community
- c. Welcoming and inviting, infrastructure and services to allow all to thrive
- d. Regenerative sense of place, residents find connection through strong families, neighborhoods, and community
- e. Engaged public processes and decision-making (both opportunities and responsibilities)

4. Livability

- a. Safe, affordable housing for all, regardless of income
- b. Reinvestment and redevelopment across all land uses
- c. Amenities and programming to meet needs of residents of all ages and abilities
- d. Well maintained parks and green/open spaces
- e. Mobility options meeting needs of all residents

5. Strategically resourced

- a. Strategic budgeting and financial planning to meet service and infrastructure needs now and in the future
- b. Engaged with community to effectively evaluate expenses with revenues
- c. Right-sized and competitive

6. High Performing Organization

- a. Appropriate tools and resources to provide reliable service
- b. Forward-thinking, adaptable, and versatile
- c. Valued, appreciated, and fairly compensated staff

- d. Clear leadership on policy priorities and aligned resources for implementation

7. Community-aligned Organization

- a. Transparent, engaged, and connected
- b. Engaged with all areas of the community, including those disconnected by physical and cultural barriers
- c. Listens and adapts to changing community needs based on strategic engagement and consensus
- d. Processes that facilitate and encourage community connectedness

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The second significant exercise of the session was conducting an environmental scan of the City and organization. This activity is designed to consider the present state of the community from a variety of perspectives. Again in small group settings, participants were asked to consider its strengths, challenges, and explore trends and issues that face the City in the coming years. The scan provided the basis for the group's efforts later in the work session to develop the goals that will guide the organization in the coming years.

In its first assessment activity, the group was asked to consider all of the things that identify as strengths of Vadnais Heights, both as a City and the organization itself. Participants were encouraged to think of projects, services, actions, and policies. After discussing the strengths, participants turned their attention towards reviewing City and organizational areas that need improvement. These items are areas that presently challenge the organization and City.

Following the assessment of its strengths and challenges, the group moved on to the final brainstorming activating - anticipating emerging trends or issues that may impact the City. Forecasting potential external changes or impacts is a key step in the process to help leadership anticipate pressures and opportunities that may arise. To guide this process, the participants followed a STEP model of analysis, thinking about trends and external impacts in the areas of socio-cultural, technical, economical, and political. Thinking about the ongoing opportunities and challenges in each of these areas provides a variety of important perspectives for the City in the coming years.

The results of the environmental scan have been provided as an appendix to this report.

SHORT-TERM GOALS

The third portion of the Strategic Planning process was to develop a short-term goals platform and workplan to guide the organization in the coming year. Participants were offered the opportunity to present draft goals that addressed any of the following objectives - short-term actions that , goals to address weaknesses, opportunities, or potential impacts discussed during the assessment process, or other goals that individual members viewed to be important for the City. The process encouraged the brainstorming of SMART goals - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (1-3 years) - and objectives that would support the core strategies and vision.

Following the brainstorming process, a prioritization process was used to develop the following list of high priority and priority goals. Participants were given the ability to choose a limited number of brainstormed goals as their top priorities. As each participant's choices were collected, the draft goals were bunched into three categories. The categories and prioritization followed these guidelines:

- High Priority Goals - goals that were identified by a majority of the Council as top priority and also received support from City Staff.

- Opportunity Goals - that fell short of a Council majority but were identified as a top priority by at least two members of the Council or one Council member and two or more staff members.
- Other Goals - goals that did not have an initial priority ranking by more than one member. (Included as an appendix to the report.)

Proposed 2023 Short-Term Goals

High Priority

1. Evaluate staffing levels related to goals and new initiatives
2. Improve and refine the Capital Improvement Plan
3. Develop a Parks, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan and establish a long-term funding source to meet the plan's needs
4. Prioritize workforce and senior housing aimed at affordability
5. Increase proactive City involvement in economic development, including implementing a proactive redevelopment strategy for NE Quadrant
6. Sustainable Operational Practices and Processes

Opportunity

7. Establish a policy regarding the regular review of compensation and benefits packages; complete a review of current levels
8. Develop a dedicated funding source and increase levels of funding for construction projects
9. Engage more citizens:
 - a. Inform and support common good initiatives
 - b. Update roles and duties of Commissions, including identifying areas that might be missing
 - c. Develop and implement at least one planned event with County Road D neighborhood
10. Implement a proactive strategy for Vadnais Boulevard trail

NEXT STEPS

The next step in the goal setting process is to work within each of these short-term goals to develop action plans and the establishment of benchmarks to measure progress. One of the discussion items during the workshop involved the identification of measurables, or benchmarks, to effectively evaluate the City's accomplishment of each goal. Developing measurable outcomes for each goal will also help in the development of action plans to reach the desired outcome. The goals should then be revisited from time-to-time as an accountability measure for both the Council and staff.

Additionally, finding ways to integrate the goals into the organizational processes also helps to develop success. Building on the methods in which Vadnais Heights has been successful in the past is recommended, along with exploring new methods of keeping the goals on the forefront of the leadership team's efforts. It was an honor to assist your team in the process of establishing its Strategic Plan for the coming years.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Kern
Facilitator