



# The City of Galesburg

# STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

*Full Report*

PREPARED OCTOBER  
**2024**



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
**Center for  
Governmental Studies**

*Outreach Engagement and Regional Development*

# Strategic Plan Process Acknowledgements

## **CITY OF GALESBURG ELECTED OFFICIALS**

**Mayor**, Peter Schwartzman

**First Ward City Council Member**, Bradley Hix

**Second Ward City Council Member**, Wayne Dennis

**Third Ward City Council Member**, Evan Miller

**Fourth Ward City Council Member**, Dwight White

**Fifth Ward City Council Member**, Heather Acerra

**Sixth Ward City Council Member**, Sarah Davis

**Seventh Ward City Council Member**, Steve Cheesman

**City Clerk**, Kelli R. Bennewitz

## **CITY OF GALESBURG ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP**

**City Manager**, Eric Hanson

**Executive Assistant to the City Manager**, Kristin Robinson

**Director of Public Works**, Michael Doi

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**Director of Parks and Recreations**, Don Miles

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**Fire Chief**, Randy Hovind

**Administrative Services Manager**, Cathy St. George

**Human Resources Manager**, Jessica Pease

**IT Manager**, Orlee Lucero

## **CITY OF GALESBURG COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS**

The City of Galesburg would also like to thank all the community members who participated in the stakeholder feedback phase of the process. An effective strategic plan includes feedback from stakeholders to ensure that needs and expectations are shared and understood by leaders of the organization.

Process facilitated by Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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# City of Galesburg Background

Galesburg, located in Knox County, Illinois, sits approximately 45 miles northwest of Peoria. At the 2020 census, its population was just over 30,000. It is the county seat of Knox County and the principal city of the Galesburg Micropolitan Statistical Area, which includes all of Knox and Warren counties.<sup>1</sup> Knox Manual Labor College, now known as Knox College, was the site of the legendary 1858 Lincoln–Douglas debate.

Galesburg's identity has long been tied to the railroad industry, home to one of the largest rail yards in the country. This railroad heritage earned Galesburg the honor of hosting the National Railroad Hall of Fame in 2004 as designated by the U.S. Congress.

Once an industrial hub, the City has since diversified its economy, fostering a range of new businesses while maintaining a forward-looking perspective on growth and development.<sup>2</sup>



## INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning is an effective way to identify and confirm an organization's vision for the future and set organizational purpose and direction by incorporating clear priorities and measurable goals. To this end, the City of Galesburg (the "City") engaged the Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies (NIU-CGS) in January 2024 to facilitate its strategic planning process. From June through July 2024, the NIU-CGS team gathered internal and external stakeholder input that was shared at the strategic planning leadership workshop held in August 2024. The workshop provided an opportunity for elected officials and administrative leadership and staff to discuss a future vision for the City and establish short- and long-term goals. It also provided a positive atmosphere where workshop participants could discuss the best ways to serve the organization and the broader community in the coming years. The value of such processes continues to be recognized by policy-making boards, councils, and executive staff in both private and public organizations (Figure 1).

It is important to keep in mind that the judicious use of the City's limited resources (including financial resources and professional staff time) is key to achieving good results. Only a limited number of goals and objectives can be managed and implemented effectively at any given time. In a very realistic sense, clear and stable priorities must be maintained if the City desires to stretch its resources as far as they can go.

**Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model**



\* Model generally represents the steps that are taken for this type of initiative.

<sup>1</sup>[https://data.census.gov/profile/Galesburg\\_township,\\_Knox\\_County,\\_Illinois?q=060XX00US1709528339](https://data.census.gov/profile/Galesburg_township,_Knox_County,_Illinois?q=060XX00US1709528339)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.ci.galesburg.il.us/index.php>





# Pre-Workshop – Environmental Scanning and Stakeholder Input



The City's leadership recognized the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of their organization and the broader community they serve by gathering input from various stakeholders during the environmental scanning phase of the strategic planning process. This phase involved examining factors that shape the City's activities and mission. To accomplish this, the NIU-CGS team conducted focus groups and interviews involving internal and external stakeholders.

## EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

Incorporating external perspectives into the City's strategic plan is important for capturing the diverse needs and aspirations of the community, ensuring the plan is responsive to the concerns of its residents, businesses, and partners. This approach fosters greater public trust and engagement, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

## INTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

Gathering internal perspectives when developing the City's strategic plan is also crucial, ensuring the plan is informed by the insights and experiences of those who understand the organization's unique operations, challenges, and opportunities. This comprehensive input fosters alignment with the community's needs and goals. To collect these internal perspectives, the NIU-CGS team conducted interviews with the City's leadership team and elected officials, facilitated an in-person focus group with front- and mid-line staff, and conducted a working session with department heads.



**Focus groups** are designed to be a highly interactive approach, allowing for a robust and informative conversation with and between participants.

- **Between June and July 2024, four focus groups were conducted in person with some of the City's external stakeholders, listed below. The number of participants in each group ranged from 9-17.**
  - » Business community
  - » Intergovernmental agencies
  - » Civic organizations
  - » Cross-section of residents



**Interviews** result in highly personalized participation and the in-depth sharing of ideas. The focus of the interview sessions is to gain an initial perspective by building a balanced and informed view of the City from each stakeholder's unique vantage point.

- **Between late June and mid-July, individual interviews were conducted with the Mayor, City Clerk, and Council Members.**
- **In late July, an in-person focus group was conducted with 16 members of the City's front- and mid-line staff. In addition a working session was also conducted with 14 of the City's department heads.**

An analysis of the feedback resulted in the development of theme areas for the leadership team to consider at the Leadership Workshop (Figure 2). Detailed summaries are provided in [Appendix A](#).



**Figure 2. Stakeholder Feedback Themes – Top Priorities for All Stakeholders**

Alignment of all stakeholder feedback (focus groups and interviews)



**Community Development and Beautification**



**Economic Development and Job Creation**



**Community Engagement and Governance**



**Infrastructure and Housing Improvements**

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND BEAUTIFICATION**

- Preserve and market/leverage the City's rich history to attract residents and visitors.
- Undertake downtown and corridor enhancements to restore the downtown with mixed-use housing, provide business incentives to recruit economic development, and beautify the gateways and main corridors.
- Focus on development/redevelopment efforts reducing the north/south divide and revitalize mall area.
- Uphold excellent parks and green spaces for recreational enjoyment and relaxation and overall quality of life.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION**

- Encourage and foster diversity to promote economic stability and growth.
- Utilize current local assets to attract tourism and industry and ultimately realize the City's full potential.
- Attract industries offering quality and well-paying jobs to enhance the tax base and overall quality of life.
- Adopt a growth-oriented and forward-thinking mindset to collaboratively develop innovative solutions and foster a harmonious atmosphere.
- Improve local education and vocational training to develop a skilled local workforce.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

- Promote collaboration among council, staff, residents, and businesses to establish a unified vision and strategic direction.
- Enhance civic engagement and community pride by increasing awareness of local elections and improving communication about local resources and success stories.
  - » Help overcome negative perceptions
- Deliver essential community services, including a community center for residents of all ages, mental health resources, childcare services, and recreational opportunities.
- Promote proactive and diverse leadership to cultivate forward-thinking strategies that effectively address the diverse needs of residents, businesses, and partners over the long term.
- Host and market community events to bring people together.

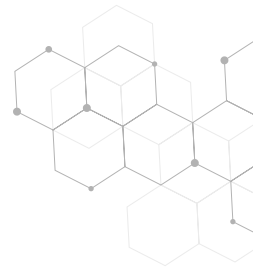
## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS**

- Improve roads and sidewalks to enhance connectivity, walkability, and community appeal.
- Develop programs and incentives for housing rehabilitation and new development.
- Expand public transportation and ensure reliable high-speed internet to attract remote workers and businesses.
- Advocate for funding/grants to improve infrastructure across the community.
- Implement strategic housing rehabilitation initiatives by working with homeowners to enhance the housing stock and quality and to help attract a larger and more diverse population.





# Leadership Workshop – Outline of Exercises and Discussion Sessions



All discussion sessions in the planning effort employed highly participative and interactive approaches. The workshop facilitators utilized a group discussion approach called 'Nominal Group Technique' where the facilitator assures participants equal opportunities to speak and share opinions. During the workshop discussions, individuals had the opportunity to generate and share their ideas, as well as participate in small and large group activities allowing them to weigh alternatives and refine their thinking through dialogue. As ideas were shared and debated, the group worked steadily toward a consensus regarding the City's purpose, future direction, goals, and priorities.

## **INTRODUCTIONS AND ICEBREAKER EXERCISE**

Participants were asked to introduce themselves and share how long they have been involved with the City. Next, they engaged in an icebreaker exercise titled, "Garage Sale." Workshop participants collected an item from a "garage sale" table that represented to them an idea, issue, or topic that they felt was important to the City's future and should be discussed as part of the strategic plan. This was a brainstorming exercise, and no evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session. Next is a list of those answers (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Garage Sale Icebreaker: important issue, initiative, or idea that should be a part of the City's future - List**

<b>GARAGE SALE ITEM</b>	<b>IMPORTANT ISSUE, INITIATIVE, OR IDEA THAT SHOULD BE PART OF THE CITY'S FUTURE</b>
<b>Police officer</b>	City is in need of safety blue lights at Storey Park.
<b>Golf ball</b>	Value all recreational activities/assets – big draw for residents and tourists.
<b>Trash can</b>	Run down properties – enhance programs to help rehabilitate or revitalize vocational options. More pride from beautiful, clean city.
<b>Ballerina</b>	Youth are the future – Arts/Recreation – need to grow – foster youth opportunities. Build workforce – future leaders – encourage youth to stay in Galesburg.
<b>Light bulb</b>	Could Galesburg provide its own energy? Put Galesburg on the map statewide.
<b>Building plate</b>	Emphasis on bringing businesses into the community. Diverse industries – well-paying jobs – develop workforce.
<b>Building plate II</b>	Would like to see Main Street buildings full, façade nice, quality businesses but keep historic feel – “stay and play” in Galesburg.
<b>Capitol dome</b>	Need to focus on intergovernmental relations and advocacy for growth, funding increases – several projects in the community would benefit.
<b>Pepper beads</b>	Look forward to the future – make Galesburg a destination – change the perception – new story written.
<b>Socket</b>	Good jobs and infrastructure – pay attention to the power grid and power infrastructure to attract companies.
<b>Capitol dome</b>	Power grid, housing, and public safety all benefit from developing relationships with the State of Illinois.
<b>Pipe</b>	Improve the current housing stock, new homes, and rentals. Promote historic homes. Enforce codes. Expand public transportation and other transportation options.
<b>Plastic bag</b>	Transparency in planning, ideas, implementation. Easy to find information – trust, accountability.
<b>Compacts</b>	Engineering intensive projects ahead, e.g., airport expansion. Water department and aging infrastructure needs attention.
<b>Painter's tape</b>	Have been using band-aid fixes, but turning a corner – need to continue infrastructure improvements.
<b>Playing cards</b>	Have connected buildings helping with communication – need to connect with community and communicate with different avenues.
<b>Paintbrush</b>	Fix neglected properties in town, build new houses – beautification – arts, culture. Feel like home.
<b>Measuring tape</b>	Successful implementation of goals – measure success.





## VISIONING FOR THE FUTURE

The workshop participants next engaged in a visioning exercise to describe the desired future direction of the City by answering the following question: "If you left the City and the community and didn't return for 10–15 years, what do you think you will see or what do you hope you will see when you return?" Participants were asked to think about their ideas ahead of time and then be ready to share them with the group during the first session of the workshop. Responses are listed in Figure 4.

### *Figure 4. Visions of the Future—Hope or think you will see in 10–15 years*

Statements that include an asterisk (\*) indicate the idea was repeated/agreed with by other participants.

## **If you left the city and the community and didn't return for 10–15 years, what do you hope or think you will see when you return?**

- Hope to see economic vitality \* – job creation as a catalyst – commitment to excellence of all staff to all initiatives, projects, and jobs. Move the needle – measure progress.
- Hope the City is recognized as a regional leader in regional commerce and economic activity. Focus on core assets – be the best Galesburg we can be – create a community that has the resources to accomplish vision.
- Hope to see less poverty \*, growth of City, and community beautification.
- Trees and green space still exist and are improved.
- Hope to see a sports complex, which will draw tourism.
- Hope the City of Galesburg is an employer of choice with high performing staff, highly qualified team.
- Hope to see more advanced transportation system\*, better connectivity for all ages.
- City needs airport improvements and a second logistics park.
- Technology is a good communication tool but need more to build community.
- Hope the Parks and Recreation Department is fully staffed to help build infrastructure to make Galesburg a destination city.
- Hope to see vibrant and active downtown\* that is walkable, including outdoor dining and residential housing.
- Boutique hotels downtown.
- Walkable Main St. – events that still draw people to Galesburg.
- Hope to see new, additional, and affordable housing options\* (single-family, rentals, apartments, townhomes, mixed use, etc.) to help build up downtown and neighborhoods – attract youth, reinvent Galesburg's nice/identity.
- Could St. Mary's Square be mixed use – retail/housing?
- Need help with mental health and addiction crisis to build up community. Resources needed for treatment (e.g., systems and facilities).
- Hope the City is safe\*, more beautification\*, and thriving community with signage.
- More economic activity, community development.
- Progress across community – Use our past to help reinvent ourselves.
- Need to secure buy-in from community – help with solutions, understand what solutions take to get done.
- Hope the mall is gone and the City's retail/restaurants\* become a destination. Hall of Fame here.
- Hope Knox College becomes more involved with the City of Galesburg.
- Helps with talent pipeline, youth mentorship.
- Simmons St. – B&B across from train station.
- Hope that the high school is top 3 in the state, will draw more families to Galesburg.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PART I— SURRENDER OR LEAD

Next, participants were introduced to a leadership exercise entitled “Surrender or Lead.” Participants were asked, in small groups, to respond to a series of structured questions to reveal hopes, perspectives, challenges, opportunities, and possible barriers based on the collective view of each group. The responses were recorded and combined themes from the four groups are reported next. For a full list of Surrender or Lead responses from each group, see [Appendix B](#).

### Themes from Surrender or Lead:



**Prioritize infrastructure** (especially related to energy, streets, housing), economic development, youth retention, and workforce development. These areas are seen as crucial for growth and community pride.



**Overcome challenges** involving financial constraints and the continued need for engaged leadership and implementable strategic planning.



**Establish effective governance and leadership** to help drive progress over the next 2–3 years.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PART II—LARGE GROUP S.W.O.C. ANALYSIS

The next step of the strategic planning workshop involved reviewing and accounting for the internal and external factors present in the environment that can potentially influence the City, both negatively and positively. Workshop participants were asked to identify the City's strengths (S) and weaknesses (W). In what areas does the City regularly excel, and in what areas are there difficulties or shortcomings in terms of expertise, resources, training, etc.? What opportunities (O) are on the horizon that can be used to the City's advantage? Conversely, what trends or challenges (C) lie ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? These elements could include both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, resources, etc. The full list of responses to the exercise are provided in Figure 5.

Figure 5. S.W.O.C. Analysis Results

## STRENGTHS

S

- Hope Cemetery is a historic asset
- Tourism
- Diversity of Galesburg
- History of Galesburg
- Railroad
- Location
- Staff
- Eric, City Manager
- Leadership throughout the community
- Residents
- Large size of Galesburg
- Water
- Safety
- Higher education
- K-12 options available
- Public transportation system
- Community leaders are proactive
  - » Communication and partnership exploration
- Cultural arts
- Parks and recreation
- Amtrak
- Volunteers and community service
- Airport and FBO ownership

## WEAKNESSES

W

- Hard for minorities fitting into the job market, community
- Not all residents have community pride, want to help bring that back
- Staff need to help cultivate better culture and continue with a "customer-first" mentality
- Safety – challenging policies for policing, funding, and staff resources are challenging
- K-12 could have more diversity in staff, classes offered
- Public transportation stretched thin, new equipment needed
- Improve relationship and communication with County
- Housing stock availability
- Property tax rate for State
- Power grid and power availability are challenging – need to explore options
- Outside perception – opportunity to tell a positive story
- May not have skilled workforce – lacking knowledge of available resources

## OPPORTUNITIES

O

- City Manager, fresh ideas, and leadership
- Staff and opportunity to hire and fully staff departments
- Engaging residents
- Large size of Galesburg – opportunities to expand and grow
- Central location
- Community education
- Education choices available
- College campuses
- Transportation system
- Transportation network (highways, public transportation)
- Government, education, and civic partners
- Leaders throughout community
- County government partnerships and communication
- Cultural arts, etc.
- Downtown revitalization
- Housing stock – creating options for all ages and income levels
- Amtrak service
- Perceptions of and in the community
- Workforce readiness – building a skilled workforce
- Airport expansion and utilization
  - » FBO operator at airport
  - » Expanded hangars and jet maintenance and repairs
- BNSF Railway as the City's largest employer
- Diversity of population and workforce factors
- Building on the City's history
- Tourism
  - » Ferris wheel inventor
  - » Hope Cemetery
  - » Birthplace of Carl Sandburg





- Staffing levels need to be addressed
- Residents
- Customer service consistency
- Water Department
- Community safety
- Community education on what is happening in the City, civic engagement, keeping community up to date
- Colleges and community colleges
- IDOT
- Downtown – not all buildings are locally-owned
- Low housing stock, not diverse enough
- Homeownership vs. rental rates in Galesburg
- Property tax and tax rates
- Power grid
- Perceptions of the City
- Workforce readiness
  - » Building a skilled workforce
- BNSF Railway and improving relationship and engagement with the community
- Diversity of population and workforce factors

## NOMINAL GROUP GOAL IDENTIFICATION

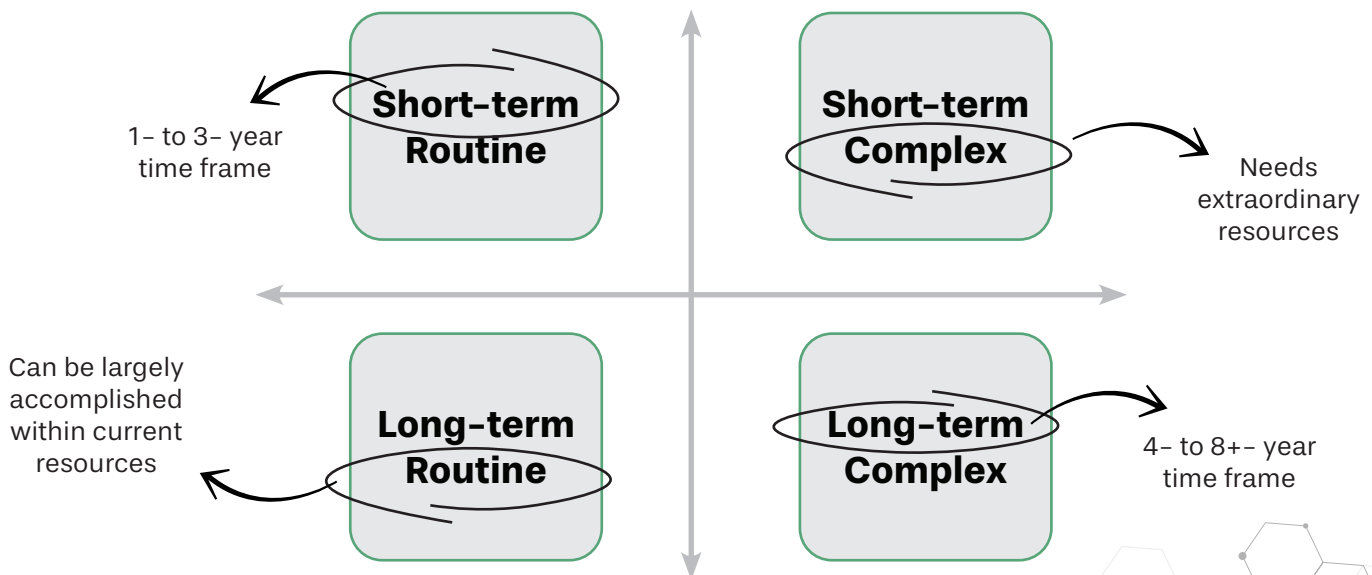
With the preceding discussion sessions and exercises acting as a sound foundation for goal setting, the next exercise provided time for a healthy group discussion and development of goals and/or objectives needed to achieve the future visions as expressed by workshop participants.

Participants worked in the same small groups for goal development. Each group was allotted time to develop, and then report out, three or four important policy and program goals they thought the City should accomplish. Groups were asked to create goals using two timeframes; **short-term goals** (which could be started or accomplished in the next one to three years), as well as those that would be considered **long-term goals** (which could be accomplished in the next four- to eight-year time frame). Each workgroup then shared their short- and long-term goals with the larger group for feedback and discussion. Goals could be highly specific or general.

### Open Group Discussion and Consolidation of Goals and Objectives

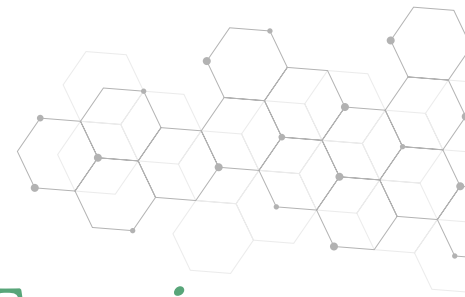
This final phase of the discussion served as the forum for workshop participants to discuss, refine, and compare the ideas and goals offered by each participant. Participants gave their opinions and further explained the fit, ideas, and policy outcomes expressed in the goals and discussed if additional goals were needed. Lastly, the group categorized each goal as complex or routine (see Figure 6). Complex goals are complicated, multi-layered goals that require extraordinary resources, such as technical specialists, funding, or the collaboration or agreement of another unit of government or an outside organization, business, or agency. Routine goals are not simple or easy but could largely be accomplished by the organization with required budget and staffing allocations or with minor external assistance.

Figure 6. Strategic Goal Matrix





# Post-Workshop – Goal Prioritization and Ranking Exercise



The City Council members were asked to delineate, via a post-workshop online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The workshop participants were provided an online ranking tool where point values were assigned to each goal in both the short- and long-term categories. The calculation of goal prioritization consisted of "forced ranking" where the ranking of each identified goal is calculated as the average of the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal was given scores of 2, 5, 6, 6, 1, 2, and 3, the average total would be 3.57. **The lower the score, the higher the priority.** Again, the average totals were based on the rankings provided by the Council members.

The outcomes of the City's goal ranking exercise, along with the assigned priority levels for each goal, are presented in Figure 7. The dashboard demonstrates the strategic goals, tasks, and objectives for the City leadership to address in the months and years ahead. Following the ranked goals, the City's broader priority areas are shared and defined.

**Figure 7. 2024 Ranked Strategic Goals Dashboard**

<b>SHORT-TERM ROUTINE STRATEGIC GOALS</b> <i>Short-term goals have a time frame of 1–3 years. Routine goals are not simple or easy but can be accomplished with current City resources.</i>	<b>PRIORITY LEVEL</b>
<b>Develop a multi-year plan to invest in infrastructure improvements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a City-wide facility maintenance and replacement program for sidewalks, bike paths, roads, parks, drainage, water, and wastewater.</li> </ul>	<b>High</b>
<b>Improve the City's marketing and external communication strategies to ensure cohesive and accurate messaging to the variety of stakeholders, residents, and businesses across the community.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate communication avenues and establish a one-stop-shop for information, possibly a City newsletter</li> <li>• Ensure communication is accessible by all age groups</li> <li>• Create opportunities for engagement with community</li> </ul>	<b>High</b>
<b>Develop and implement an approach for beautification of the City's facilities, gateways, and public properties across the community.</b>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Evaluate staffing needs throughout the organization to ensure that City departments are fully staffed to deliver the level of services desired/required.</b>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Investigate ways to improve the recruitment and retention of city staff.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider additional benefits, sign-on bonuses, and other incentives</li> </ul>	<b>Lower</b>
<b>Enhance, improve, and build upon the City's long relationship with the BNSF Railway.</b>	<b>Lower</b>



## SHORT-TERM COMPLEX STRATEGIC GOALS

*Short-term goals have a time frame of 1-3 years. Complex goals require extraordinary resources, experts, or funding to accomplish.*

### PRIORITY LEVEL

Use the 2024 Galesburg housing study to develop policies, programs, and approaches for short- and long-term housing needs while working to improve the mix of housing and housing stock.	High
Explore funding source options for long-term road and infrastructure maintenance needs across the community.	High
Analyze and resolve the City's water sourcing options and solutions for the next 60-100 years.	High
Evaluate equipment and techniques to comply with Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) water treatment requirements.	Medium
Work with other civic organizations and agencies in the City and region to improve the delivery of mental health resources and services.	Medium
Utilize partnership and relationships with Knox College and Carl Sandburg College to improve talent pipeline, youth mentorship, job creation and training.	Medium
Partner to support the creation of a Community Center to provide more recreational opportunities and community events.	Medium
Determine the feasibility of a new or expanded sports facilities complex.	Medium
Integrate and improve public safety communication by sharing more information about activities, incidents, awareness, and response about safety-related happenings in the community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop awareness on approaches and resources available to residents and businesses</li> <li>• Share success stories</li> </ul>	Lower
Establish a culture of long-term thinking/planning within the City Council to enhance Council teamwork, relationships, unity, and process.	Lower
Work to revisit and complete the National Railroad Hall of Fame to help City capitalize on the tourism industry.	Lower

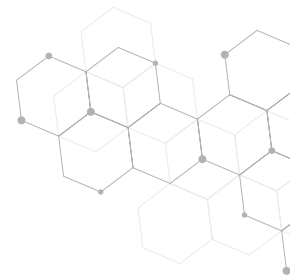
## LONG-TERM ROUTINE GOALS

*Long-term goals have a time frame of 4-8 years. Routine goals are not simple or easy but can be accomplished with current City resources.*

### PRIORITY LEVEL

Continue to increase the City's investments and activities to foster and support broad economic development opportunities and actions in the community.	High
Capitalize on the City's airport as an asset with regular maintenance, improvements, and enhanced marketing for tourism.	High
Review and update the City's development ordinances.	Medium
Improve and expand the City's garage/maintenance equipment facility.	Lower





## LONG-TERM COMPLEX GOALS

*Long-term goals have a time frame of 4–8 years. Complex goals require extraordinary resources, experts, or funding to accomplish.*

### PRIORITY LEVEL

<p><b>Work with downtown businesses to make downtown a vibrant and active hub, including attracting outdoor dining and residential housing developers for mixed-use development.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g., boutique hotels downtown, events that draw crowds from all over the region</li> </ul>	<p><b>High</b></p>
<p><b>Work to address power infrastructure needs and deficits and improve the power grid in and around the City with electric utilities/providers.</b></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>
<p><b>Partner to help reduce and/or alleviate elements of poverty in the City by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating current resources and exploring additional resources that might be available</li> <li>• Investing in actions, programs and approaches that can create/build more affordable housing and expand housing types/options</li> <li>• Develop a directory of resources, host roundtables with partner organizations, help to broaden the conversation</li> </ul>	<p><b>High</b></p>
<p><b>Foster and facilitate a redevelopment plan for the Sandburg mall and the area surrounding the mall.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider complete redevelopment and removal of obsolete or neglected structures and facilities at the mall</li> </ul>	<p><b>High</b></p>
<p><b>Continue to advance programs and activities aimed at filling the City's industrial park while also investing in infrastructure to improve its usefulness and appeal.</b></p>	<p><b>Medium</b></p>
<p><b>Use regional partnerships to create a plan for expanded multi-modal transportation throughout the City.</b></p>	<p><b>Medium</b></p>
<p><b>Continue to focus on strengthening the City's intergovernmental partnerships.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g., Knox County, school districts, higher education, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medium</b></p>
<p><b>Strengthen the City's wireless network to provide accessible and reliable high-speed internet throughout the community.</b></p>	<p><b>Medium</b></p>
<p><b>Work to make Galesburg a producer/exporter of renewable energy.</b></p>	<p><b>Lower</b></p>
<p><b>Consider assembling a temporary/part-time/consultant construction crew to address City facilities rehabilitation and maintenance needs.</b></p>	<p><b>Lower</b></p>
<p><b>Completion of the Railroad Hall of Fame mentioned in strategic goals.</b></p>	<p><b>Lower</b></p>



# Strategic Priority Areas

Based on an evaluation of the entirety of the process, including stakeholder feedback, discussions at the workshop, and the goals developed, several high-level strategic priority areas were identified. These priority areas highlight the activities and initiatives that the City will focus on in both the short and long term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated in Figure 8 and fully defined next. For strategic goal and focus group data alignment related to each area, see [Appendix C](#).

**Figure 8. Strategic Priority Areas**



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND BEAUTIFICATION

The City of Galesburg has a rich history worth celebrating. The City's proactive and passionate leadership, commitment to high quality of life, and strong support for the arts and culture are just a few of its strengths. Prioritizing beautification efforts and dedicating funds to accomplish beautification goals will not only help to enhance the City's aesthetic appeal, but also build a sense of community pride. By improving the gateways, streets, and sidewalks through public/private partnerships, residents and businesses can be inspired to invest more deeply in their community, fostering a stronger, more trusting relationship between the City government and its citizens.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Community engagement and effective governance is vitally important for communities of all sizes. Whether it is listening to the needs of residents and businesses, delivering a cohesive message, or promoting the City's events and activities, clear communication and active engagement are high priorities for City staff and elected officials. Highlighting what makes Galesburg unique to current and potential residents, businesses, and tourists is essential for successful marketing and branding of the community. Moreover, community engagement enhances transparency, which is fundamental to effective governance.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

The City of Galesburg's central location and large size lend themselves to a bustling business district. Continued focus on revitalization and rehabilitation of downtown historic buildings will be important to achieving Galesburg's economic and community development goals, including creating jobs, increasing tourism dollars, and recruiting new businesses that will complement and diversify the City's business mix. The City can focus on areas of growth and expansion by employing tools such as façade grant programs, rehabilitation assistance, talent pipeline partnerships and other incentives to recruit and retain businesses.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS

Proactively planning and rehabilitating the City's existing facilities along with strategic investments in the City's water and power infrastructure are essential to ensuring City facilities are sustainable and can accommodate potential growth. Additionally, diversifying the housing stock is crucial to meeting the needs of both current and potential residents across various life stages. Exploring housing need, availability, and future developments will enable the City to adapt to, and plan for, changes in population, demographics, and tourism, positioning the community for long-term success.





## Conclusion

The value of the strategic planning process will only be realized if this report is used as an active working guide for the leaders of the City of Galesburg. This document captures the content of the discussions and assists the City's leaders in developing implementation plans for their high-priority goals.

In the City's ever evolving operating environment, adapting to changes in demographics, community trends, technology advancements, and best practices, among others, will be key. The strategic plan is meant to be a roadmap for the City with the flexibility to adapt to those changes. Therefore, it is recommended that the City undertake a regular review (monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually) of the strategic plan, its goals, and implementation schedule to identify the need for updates or modifications so the entire City consistently recognizes and meets changes in community needs and expectations. In addition, the City is encouraged to continue to engage in regular strategic planning process updates and renewals every three years.

What is apparent from the exchange of ideas and dialogue during the environmental scanning and strategic planning workshop is that the City is fortunate to have progressive leadership that is looking ahead and committed to strategic thinking and planning.

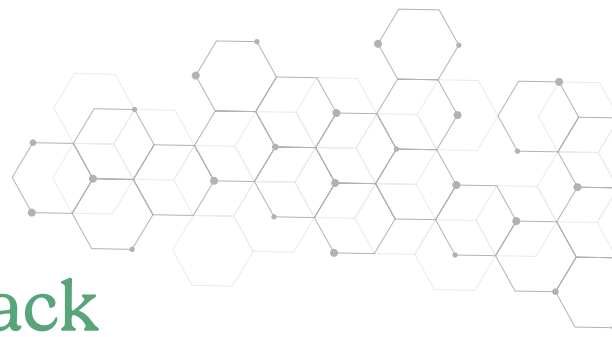
We wish you well with the ambitious years that lie ahead.



**Greg Kuhn and Mel Henriksen, NIU-CGS Project Coordinators and Session Facilitators.**



# Appendix A: Focus Group and Leadership Interview Feedback



## SUMMARY

One of the key analytical techniques used for focus group and interview notes is an analyst's search for key phrases, words, or terms that emerged during the focus group and interview sessions, a process known as coding. Coding is done by analysts' individual readings of the data, followed by key term searches. The words and phrases listed below are the results of the study team's analysis of the collected focus group and interview notes. At a glance, the reader can discover what terms were used or referred to most frequently in the feedback notes. Using individual analysts' coding, the researcher identifies terms that recur across groups and across questions. The results reveal key topics or issues that should be weighed and considered when proceeding with strategic planning discussions.

The information that follows is a summary of key themes and topics that emerged during the exploratory focus group sessions and leadership interviews. The stakeholder feedback collection served as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information that is presented in this summation was designed to add exploratory and thematic information for the City leadership team to consider during the strategic planning workshop.

The same exploratory discussion questions were asked to each focus group and interviewee and are listed below:

1

**How would you describe the City to a stranger or someone who doesn't live or work in the area?**

2

**If you left and didn't return for 10-15 years, what services/programs do you think you would see the City offering or what do you hope you would see when you return?**

3

**What do you like best about the City? Related to that, what are the strengths or greatest assets of Galesburg?**

4

**Can you identify areas or topics in need of attention or improvement? Related to that, what are the weaknesses or greatest needs for the City?**

5

**What are or should be the top priorities for the City over the next three to five years?**

6

**If you could change or initiate one key item or one goal for the City, what would it be?**

## OVERALL THEMES BASED ON THE EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND BEAUTIFICATION

- **Preserve the City's rich history and use it to market the community**
- **Market Galesburg as a vibrant arts and culture community – become a destination, attract potential residents and visitors**
- **Restoration of downtown**
  - » Include mixed-use residencies downtown
  - » Provide incentives for downtown businesses for façade or other improvements
- **Attract development on the south side of town**
  - » Reduce north/south divide
- **Beautify the gateways and main corridors**
- **Redevelop the mall area**
- **Address underemployment with job/life skills training**

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICES

- **Improve the community's perception/attitude (e.g., "comeback kid" success story)**
- **Unified vision and strategic direction**
  - » Council, staff, residents, businesses
- **Civic engagement – enhance community's knowledge of elections and candidates**
- **Enhance communication with the community**
  - » Use varied approaches
  - » Share more with the community to help provide information on what is going on, available resources for residents and businesses, success stories (e.g., Regional Alternative Education Services)
  - » Lack of local media (e.g., newspaper) – makes it harder to share what is going on in the community
- **Consider a community center – a gathering place for all residents from the youth to the elderly**
- **Provide, or work with other agencies to deliver, mental health resources**
- **Licensed childcare options/availability needed**
- **More recreational opportunities for the youth (bowling, programming, gathering spaces, etc.)**

### INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS

- **Improve roads and sidewalks**
  - » Enhance connectivity and walkability
  - » East Main Corridor improvements
- **Improved housing – programs/incentives to rehab homes**
  - » Pursue new investment and incentive tools to stimulate new housing development
- **Housing stock variations and mix – a wide gap between the quality of housing can be seen throughout the community**
  - » More options/mix of options, type and quality could help attract/retain a younger demographic
- **Expanded public transportation network and services**
  - » Regional collaboration
- **Accessible and reliable high-speed internet throughout the community**
  - » Attract remote workers
- **Upkeep and better marketing of the airport as an asset**

## EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION

- **Regional collaboration and approach**
  - » Work with other institutions such as the educational and civic organizations to create a workforce pipeline
- **Diversity in leadership positions**
  - » Opportunities for youth to get involved so they can become the next generation of leaders
- **Proactive vs reactive leadership**
  - » Build a culture of long-term thinking
- **Establish a community identity**
- **Utilize and communicate existing community assets**
- **Host more community events and market and advertise**
- **Cohesive messaging and communication**
- **Unified direction**
  - » Continue to enhance council teamwork, relationships, and process

## OVERALL THEMES BASED ON THE STAFF FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK:



### COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

- A historic hub city with small town values, close to big town amenities
- Need to create a community brand – who are we?
- Strong community pride – need to tell positive story
- Striding in the right direction – improving atmosphere, need to keep momentum



### INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

- Revitalize/replace housing stock – single family, townhomes, modern apartment complexes
- Help property owners clean up their properties
- Update/upgrade potable water system to meet EPA standards



### QUALITY OF LIFE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Strengthen public safety – fear of crime/perception
- City needs a “draw” – a destination to attract people
- Sportsplex centrally located – more tournament-oriented, modernized with AstroTurf so more weather resistant
- Need better access to emergency physical/mental health treatment and facilities (e.g., life flight)



### EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Increase safety surveillance camera use and number
- Enhance staffing levels across the organization to meet the community's needs and desires
- Promote a positive work culture/support organization dedication



## OVERALL THEMES BASED ON THE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS:



### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

The interviews highlighted a consensus on leveraging the City's arts, culture, history, and other local assets to attract tourism and industry, fostering economic growth and stability. Key priorities included attracting and retaining well-paying industries to enhance residents' quality of life, adopting a growth mindset, collaborating with the local education system to develop a workforce pipeline, addressing daycare needs to support population growth and employment opportunities, and revitalizing downtown through building rehabilitation to make it more vibrant and appealing. Economic development and job creation were identified as essential strategies to help Galesburg reach its full potential.



### INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Several critical infrastructure and property maintenance needs were highlighted throughout the interviews. Key priorities included securing funding for repairing essential infrastructure such as streets, sidewalks, curbs, and water systems. Participants highlighted the importance of advocating for state-level funding and grants to enhance areas like Main Street and Grand Avenue. Another focus was improving the housing stock and quality, including affordable housing options such as rentals, starter homes, and new builds across various income levels. Rehabilitation programs for homes in disrepair were identified as important. Additionally, discussions centered on making the community more attractive to residents and investors. This involves prioritizing property maintenance and enhancing gateways to foster a welcoming environment.



### COMMUNITY SERVICES AND UNITY

Discussions from interviews highlighted several key community service and unity initiatives. A primary focus was establishing a consensus on a community center, emphasizing defining its purpose and ensuring sustainable operational costs. Collaboration with civic groups was identified as an avenue to address residents' basic needs, including mental health challenges, enhancing civic participation, and tackling rising crime rates. Participants emphasized the need to enhance leadership diversity to better represent the makeup of the community. Lastly, fostering unity through collaboration across diverse backgrounds and cultures was highlighted as vital for collective progress and community cohesion.



### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Interviews revealed agreement on the importance of engaging and supporting youth within the community. A primary objective was to provide motivation and opportunities that encourage young residents to stay in, or return to, Galesburg. This includes involving them in community activities to strengthen their sense of connection and belonging. There was an emphasis on improving efforts to equip students with local certifications and job placements, aiming to establish a sustainable workforce pipeline within the community. Collaborative initiatives with schools and libraries were identified as critical for creating an environment where young people can thrive and contribute to the community's overall wellbeing.

# Appendix B:

## Surrender or Lead Exercise

The **bolded and underlined** sections are key phrases that each group provided in response to the Surrender or Lead exercise's open-ended questions and prompts during the leadership workshop.

### Group 1

1. We want to **improve infrastructure**, but **we need to prioritize and allocate resources**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **youth** and **the economy** because **we need to take pride in our community**.
3. If it weren't for a **perception of division**, we would **have public support to move forward**.
4. We need to finally **complete the Railroad Hall of Fame**.
5. **The vision of the City Manager and his staff** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

### Group 2

1. We want to **grow** but **we are in Illinois**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **infrastructure (energy, streets, housing)** and **workforce development, education** because **companies will only come if we have these things**.
3. If it weren't for **lack of funds**, we would **invest in infrastructure improvements**.
4. We need to finally **aggressively address the appearance of our City**.
5. **Job creation and economy** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

### Group 3

1. We want to **connect Knox College through Standish Park**, but **also protect and maintain the park at the same time**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **housing** and **beautification of gateways** because **we want to attract and retain residents and visitors**.
3. If it weren't for **Eric**, we would **not be here**.
4. We need to finally **use our strategic plan to follow through on planning our 3-5 year goals**.
5. **Leadership in all areas of our community** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

### Group 4

1. We want to **advance our city**, but **where do we begin?**
2. The two most important things to focus on are **economic development** and **youth retention** because **it will allow us to advance, grow and move forward**.
3. If it weren't for **financial challenges**, we would **have the ability to do lots of positive things**.
4. We need to finally **prioritize and focus on what we can accomplish that is of the highest priority**.
5. **Economic development** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

# Appendix C: Strategic Priority Area Goal and Stakeholder Feedback Alignment



## **Priority Area: Community Development and Beautification**

The City of Galesburg has a rich history worth celebrating. The City's proactive and passionate leadership, commitment to high quality of life, and strong support for the arts and culture are just a few of its strengths. Prioritizing beautification efforts and dedicating funds to accomplish beautification goals will not only help to enhance the City's aesthetic appeal, but also build a sense of community pride. By improving the gateways, streets, and sidewalks through public/private partnerships, residents and businesses can be inspired to invest more deeply in their community, fostering a stronger, more trusting relationship between the City government and its citizens.

### **Community Development and Beautification-Related Goals from the Workshop:**

- **Develop and implement an approach for beautification of the City's facilities, gateways, and public properties across the community.**
- **Continue to advance programs and activities aimed at filling the City's industrial park while also investing in infrastructure to improve its usefulness and appeal.**

### **Community Development and Beautification-Aligning Stakeholder Comments from the Pre-workshop Stakeholder Sessions:**

- **Preserve the City's rich history and use it to market the community**
- **Market Galesburg as a vibrant arts and culture community – become a destination, attract potential residents and visitors**
- **Beautify the gateways and main corridors**
- **City needs a "draw" – a destination to attract people**



## **Priority Area: Economic Development and Job Creation**

The City of Galesburg's central location and large size lend themselves to a bustling business district. Continued focus on revitalization and rehabilitation of downtown historic buildings will be important to achieving Galesburg's economic and community development goals, including creating jobs, increasing tourism dollars, and recruiting new businesses that will complement and diversify the City's business mix. The City can focus on areas of growth and expansion by employing tools such as façade grant programs, rehabilitation assistance, talent pipeline partnerships and other incentives to recruit and retain businesses.

### **Economic Development and Job Creation–Related Goals from the Workshop:**

- **Utilize partnership and relationships with Knox College and Carl Sandburg College to improve talent pipeline, youth mentorship, job creation and training.**
- **Work to revisit and complete the National Railroad Hall of Fame to help City capitalize on the tourism industry.**
- **Continue to increase the City's investments and activities to foster and support broad economic development opportunities and actions in the community.**
- **Capitalize on the City's airport as an asset with regular maintenance, improvements, and enhanced marketing for tourism.**
- **Review and update the City's development ordinances.**
- **Work with downtown businesses to make downtown a vibrant and active hub, including attracting outdoor dining and residential housing developers for mixed-use development.**
  - » E.g., boutique hotels downtown, events that draw crowds from all over the region
- **Foster and facilitate a redevelopment plan for the Sandburg mall and the area surrounding the mall.**
  - » Consider complete redevelopment and removal of obsolete or neglected structures and facilities at the mall
- **Work to make Galesburg a producer/exporter of renewable energy.**

### **Economic Development and Job Creation–Aligning Stakeholder Comments from the Pre-workshop Stakeholder Sessions:**

- **Restoration of downtown**
  - » Include mixed-use residencies downtown
  - » Provide incentives for downtown businesses for façade or other improvements
- **Attract development on the south side of town**
  - » o Reduce north/south divide
- **Redevelop the mall area**
- **Address underemployment with job/life skills training**





## **Priority Area: Community Engagement and Governance**

Community engagement and effective governance is vitally important for communities of all sizes. Whether it is listening to the needs of residents and businesses, delivering a cohesive message, or promoting the City's events and activities, clear communication and active engagement are high priorities for City staff and elected officials. Highlighting what makes Galesburg unique to current and potential residents, businesses, and tourists is essential for successful marketing and branding of the community. Moreover, community engagement enhances transparency, which is fundamental to effective governance.

### **Community Engagement and Governance–Related Goals from the Workshop:**

- **Improve the City's marketing and external communication strategies to ensure cohesive and accurate messaging to the variety of stakeholders, residents, and businesses across the community.**
  - » Consolidate communication avenues and establish a one-stop-shop for information, possibly a City newsletter
  - » Ensure communication is accessible by all age groups
  - » Create opportunities for engagement with community
- **Evaluate staffing needs throughout the organization to ensure that City departments are fully staffed to deliver the level of services desired/required.**
- **Investigate ways to improve the recruitment and retention of city staff.**
  - » Consider additional benefits, sign-on bonuses, and other incentives
- **Work with other civic organizations and agencies in the City and region to improve the delivery of mental health resources and services.**
- **Partner to support the creation of a Community Center to provide more recreational opportunities and community events.**
- **Determine the feasibility of a new or expanded sports facilities complex.**
- **Integrate and improve public safety communication by sharing more information about activities, incidents, awareness, and response about safety-related happenings in the community:**
  - » Develop awareness on approaches and resources available to residents and businesses
  - » Share success stories
- **Establish a culture of long-term thinking/planning within the City Council to enhance Council teamwork, relationships, unity, and process.**
- **Partner to help reduce and/or alleviate elements of poverty in the City by:**
  - » Evaluating current resources and exploring additional resources that might be available
  - » Investing in actions, programs and approaches that can create/build more affordable housing and expand housing types/options
  - » Develop a directory of resources, host roundtables with partner organizations, help to broaden the conversation
- **Continue to focus on strengthening the City's intergovernmental partnerships.**
  - » E.g., Knox County, school districts, higher education, etc.



## Community Engagement and Governance—Aligning Stakeholder Comments from the Pre-workshop Stakeholder Sessions:

- **Improve the community's perception/attitude (e.g., "comeback kid" success story)**
- **Unified vision and strategic direction**
  - » Council, staff, residents, businesses
- **Civic engagement – enhance community's knowledge of elections and candidates**
- **Enhance communication with the community**
  - » Use varied approaches
  - » Share more with the community to help provide information on what is going on, available resources for residents and businesses, success stories (e.g., Regional Alternative Education Services)
  - » Lack of local media (e.g., newspaper) – makes it harder to share what is going on in the community
- **Consider a community center – a gathering place for all residents from the youth to the elderly**
- **Provide, or work with other agencies to deliver, mental health resources**
- **Licensed childcare options/availability needed**
- **More recreational opportunities for the youth (bowling, programming, gathering spaces, etc.)**
- **Regional collaboration and approach**
  - » Work with other institutions such as the educational and civic organizations to create a workforce pipeline
- **Diversity in leadership positions**
  - » Opportunities for youth to get involved so they can become the next generation of leaders
- **Proactive vs reactive leadership**
  - » Build a culture of long-term thinking
- **Establish a community identity**
- **Utilize and communicate existing community assets**
- **Host more community events and market and advertise**
- **Cohesive messaging and communication**
- **Unified direction**
  - » Continue to enhance council teamwork, relationships, and process
- **Strengthen public safety – fear of crime/perception**
- **Need to create a community brand – who are we?**
- **Strong community pride – need to tell positive story**
- **Striding in the right direction – improving atmosphere, need to keep momentum**



## Priority Area: Infrastructure and Housing Improvements

Proactively planning and rehabilitating the City's existing facilities along with strategic investments in the City's water and power infrastructure are essential to ensuring City facilities are sustainable and can accommodate potential growth. Additionally, diversifying the housing stock is crucial to meeting the needs of both current and potential residents across various life stages. Exploring housing need, availability, and future developments will enable the City to adapt to, and plan for, changes in population, demographics, and tourism, positioning the community for long-term success.

### Infrastructure and Housing Improvements-Related Goals from the Workshop:

- **Develop a multi-year plan to invest in infrastructure improvements**
  - » Create a City-wide facility maintenance and replacement program for sidewalks, bike paths, roads, parks, drainage, water, and wastewater.
- **Enhance, improve, and build upon the City's long relationship with the BNSF Railway.**
- **Use the 2024 Galesburg housing study to develop policies, programs, and approaches for short- and long-term housing needs while working to improve the mix of housing and housing stock.**
- **Explore funding source options for long-term road and infrastructure maintenance needs across the community.**
- **Analyze and resolve the City's water sourcing options and solutions for the next 60-100 years.**
- **Evaluate equipment and techniques to comply with Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) water treatment requirements.**
- **Improve and expand the City's garage/maintenance equipment facility.**
- **Work to address power infrastructure needs and deficits and improve the power grid in and around the City with electric utilities/providers.**
- **Use regional partnerships to create a plan for expanded multi-modal transportation throughout the City.**
- **Strengthen the City's wireless network to provide accessible and reliable high-speed internet throughout the community.**
- **Consider assembling a temporary/part-time/consultant construction crew to address City facilities rehabilitation and maintenance needs.**
- **Completion of the Railroad Hall of Fame mentioned in strategic goals.**





## Infrastructure and Housing Improvements-Aligning Stakeholder Comments from the Pre-workshop Stakeholder Sessions:

- **Improve roads and sidewalks**
  - » Enhance connectivity and walkability
  - » East Main Corridor improvements
- **Improved housing – programs/incentives to rehab homes**
  - » Pursue new investment and incentive tools to stimulate new housing development
- **Housing stock variations and mix – a wide gap between the quality of housing can be seen throughout the community**
  - » More options/mix of options, type and quality could help attract/retain a younger demographic
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  - » Attract remote workers
- **Upkeep and better marketing of the airport as an asset**
- **Revitalize/replace housing stock – single family, townhomes, modern apartment complexes**
- **Help property owners clean up their properties**
- **Update/upgrade potable water system to meet EPA standards**