


CITY OF FERGUS FALLS

Strategic Framework

2023-2027

PREPARED BY:  wsb

Process Overview



The City of Fergus Falls undertook a strategic framework planning process in 2022. The city began by identifying four areas of focus: economic development, community and social development, infrastructure, and land use. With the assistance of WSB, Inc. and Moore Engineering as consultants, the city engaged the City Council, city staff, and the community in discussions about priorities and strategies in each of these four areas.

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK ENGAGEMENT PROCESS INCLUDED:

- A kickoff meeting with the City Council and staff in May to introduce the process and four focus areas as well as begin discussions around their goals and strategies within these areas.
- Committees were established that included key community members and stakeholders for each of the four focus areas. These committees met in June, October, and November to brainstorm, dream, vet and guide ideas, priorities, and strategies related to the four focus areas.
- Community-wide engagement and feedback were solicited via two in-person events in August and October.
- Additional community feedback was sought via virtual tools which included: an online map, module, and survey.
- A check-in meeting with City Council and staff in November provided an update and sought feedback regarding community input.



This plan summarizes the discussions, priorities, and strategies from the Fergus Falls Strategic Framework Process. It is intended to be a working document that is fluid, eliciting ongoing discussion on priorities, strategies, and projects.

Community-Wide Engagement Process

Public input was gathered through in-person events as well as virtual tools. These included an in-person open house where attendees responded to “prompts” on giant Post-It Notes, a 20-question web-based survey, taken by 89 individuals, and an online, interactive “Social Pinpoint” map that allowed users to “pin” comments. Fifteen individuals pinned 25 comments on the map, and 190 users visited the online map.

Through this process, themes emerged, revealing popular ideas and priorities in the community. Each opinion and comment is valuable. However, the overarching takeaways gathered through public input allow decisionmakers to understand and focus on themes of consensus.

The takeaways below are grouped within the focus areas employed in the Strategic Framework Process. For each question, the one-sentence “response” in italics captures the popular opinion on that topic, summarizing the response(s) voiced most frequently. The questions below are pulled directly from the web-based survey and the in-person open house prompts. Following the questions, please find a note about the Social Pinpoint interactive map.



Economic Development

QUESTION	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name one thing that would add to the vitality of Downtown. 	<p><i>More retail, restaurants, bars, and parking - with the river as the focal point</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of business would you go to for goods or services on a regular basis if it was available in Fergus Falls? 	<p><i>Target, a grocery store, clothing options for the family such as Kohls, and a craft/hobby store</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of housing is needed in the community? 	<p><i>Affordability for all housing within the community, increase opportunities for different types of housing, including single family, multi-family, and senior living</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there enough jobs in town for those who want them? Do you think the available jobs fit the community in pay and skills? 	<p><i>There are plenty of jobs but higher-paying jobs with benefits are needed</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What should be done with the RTC/Kirkbride? 	<p><i>Opinion is split between tearing it down versus keeping the tower and repurposing the site as an event venue or community center</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What childcare needs do you see in the community? 	<p><i>More daycare facilities and providers are severely needed, particularly for infant care and for drop-in and extended hours options</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The city supports economic development in a variety of ways, including through business subsidies or incentives like Tax Increment Financing and tax abatement. Do you support this? 	<p><i>Most respondents support this type of economic development</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you support business subsidies or incentives, for which type of business would you favor using them? 	<p><i>Most support subsidies for businesses creating good-paying jobs</i></p>

Community & Social Development

QUESTIONS	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What makes you proud to live in Fergus Falls? 	<p><i>Beauty, safety, the art scene, and nice people</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the city's best features or amenities? 	<p><i>River, lakes, outdoor scene, downtown</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What would make you feel more connected with your city? 	<p><i>More communication from city officials, as well as more gathering places and events</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you think of our local values, what comes to mind? 	<p><i>Safety, family-focused, kindness, supportive of the arts</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you learn what's going on in the City of Fergus Falls? 	<p><i>Facebook and word-of-mouth</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What community asset would you be willing to financially support through taxes? 	<p><i>Streets/infrastructure as well as the aquatic center</i></p>



Land Use

QUESTIONS	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would you like your community to continue growing at about the same rate, grow less, or grow more? 	<p><i>Most respondents support more growth</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where are our best spots for outdoor recreation? 	<p><i>Delagoon, Pebble Lake, parks</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where is development (retail, housing, etc.) needed? What type? 	<p><i>Strong support for more retail in all areas of town</i></p>



Infrastructure

QUESTIONS	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are the city's roads, sewer, and water services working for you? 	<p><i>Roads are in need of repair, and some experience issues with taste of water</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How should the city fund road repair and construction? 	<p><i>Through state and local taxes, special assessments, and/or grants</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where can roads or other infrastructure be improved? 	<p><i>Street repair is needed everywhere but especially Union and Lincoln</i></p>

Social Pinpoint

The online, interactive Social Pinpoint map allowed users to “pin” comments on a map of Fergus Falls. Users selected, an icon representing one of the four Strategic Framework Process focus areas. Other users of the map could upvote or downvote each comment. Social Pinpoint is best understood as a means for community members to share their individual ideas. This tends to result in unique feedback that may not be representative of the general consensus on any given topic, but is nonetheless valuable. Below is the most upvoted comment shared in each of the four categories.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Employment continues to be a challenge for the city. What are some ways that Fergus Falls can attract diverse and economically sustainable industries to help bolster employment opportunities, which bring in more revenue and provide citizens with long-term employment options?

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

I really enjoy that the city has invested in the downtown infrastructure more. I would love to see some more diversity/incentives for retail and hospitality businesses downtown so that we can attract more foot traffic during the year to help encourage more tourism.

LAND USE

Fergus Falls lacks public art in the downtown area. The type of public art that locals and visitors both like to look at and are willing to share with their “followers” on social media platforms. Simple things like murals, sculptures, and fountains are a few things that could be added to help with that. Just a few small things that might make Fergus Falls more enjoyable.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Consider an alternative design to the current intersection at Fir and Union - something such as a roundabout that would allow traffic to flow more freely without having to crossover or strain your neck to navigate safely.

Priorities/Strategies



The following represents the priorities, strategies, and projects gleaned from the strategic framework planning process. This list is in no particular order of importance and is meant to be fluid and adaptable. It is also categorized by each focus area. It is recommended that the Fergus Falls Team continually discuss long, mid-, and short-term time frames and designate persons to be the champion for each priority. As such, it is recommended that the City Administrator and Community Development Manager bring the City Council and Staff Team together at least once per year to provide an update on and discuss any changes to the strategic plan.

Community & Social Development

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>COMMUNICATIONS</p> <p>There was significant discussion and feedback throughout the process surrounding the need for enhanced city communication efforts. This led the City to create and hire a communications manager even before the process was complete.</p>	<p>Create a strategic communications plan, which defines a community brand that is used in all messaging.</p>	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>Communications Manager</p>
	<p>Create a bi-weekly city update, after the Committee of the Whole meetings, to proactively provide accurate information to residents across the most effective, efficient, and diverse communication platforms.</p>	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>Communications Manager</p>
	<p>Find ways to improve the communication between and from residents to increase citizen engagement.</p>	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>Communications Manager</p>
	<p>Find ways to enhance the links and landing pages on all city and community partner websites.</p>	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>Communications Manager</p>
	<p>Remain actively engaged with the PEG access committee on both technology and programming.</p>	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>City Administrator, Communications Manager</p>

Community & Social Development (Cont'd)

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>OVERALL COMMUNITY HEALTH & PUBLIC SAFETY</p> <p>The stakeholders had concerns and discussion about the need to recognize and make efforts toward the mental and physical health, as well as safety, of the community.</p>	Support and enhance the Fire and Police Departments' efforts regarding mental health awareness and communicate those strategies to the public.	Short Term	Police Chief, Fire Chief, Communications Manager
	Communicate and educate the public on the mental health resources in the community including promoting amenities within Fergus Falls from the lens of overall health such as parks, trails, and the river.	Mid-Term	Communications Manager
	Investigate additional opportunities for provision of housing and services to increase overall well-being of existing residents.	Long Term	Community Development Manager, Housing and Redevelopment Authority
<p>SCHOOLS</p> <p>The importance of a good educational system within the community was discussed as well as creating and maintaining relationships and partnerships between the schools and city.</p>	Continue support of the high school internship for business and project-based learning program.	Short Term	Community Development Manager
	<p>Engage M-State Fergus Falls in the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage Community organizations and local businesses to take part in the M-State Fergus Falls "Welcome". Have M-State Fergus Falls student - specific events at Spies Riverfront Park. Engage and connect the Downtown Riverfront Council with M-State Fergus Falls students. Bring the business community to the M-State Fergus Falls students/campus. 	Short Term	Community as a Whole Leads: City, Chamber/Business Community, M-State Fergus Falls Administration.
	Find ways to engage the Hillcrest Lutheran Academy students to become more aware of the community offerings and engage in the community similar to the above for M-State Fergus Falls.		

Community & Social Development (Cont'd)

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>CHILDCARE CHALLENGES</p> <p>Childcare challenges are a significant issue in the City that in turn affect local employment challenges. Supporting efforts to address childcare issues was a focused conversation of the committees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the existing Rural Child Care Initiative Program (RCCIP) Childcare Taskforce's efforts. Conduct a town hall event for the community and to educate providers and interested providers about available resources and support. 	Short Term	Community Development Manager
	Explore incentives and supportive programs for providers and interested providers.	Mid-Term	Community Development Manager
	Work with employers to provide childcare services.	Long Term	Community Development Manager
	Explore ways to partner with the local school district on childcare facilities and options.	Long Term	Community Development Manager



Infrastructure

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <p>There was significant discussion regarding the need to better inform the community about local infrastructure, including the need, funding mechanisms and decision-making process.</p>	Continue to maintain the accurate, consistent, and funded 5-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for strategic prioritization of projects.	Short Term	City Engineer, Finance Director
	Use the CIP to create an outward facing, interactive, public, GIS page on the website to educate the public and provide them with a point and click option to gather information regarding targeted infrastructure projects and plans.	Mid-Term	City Engineer, Planning Specialist/ GIS Coordinator
	Explore and potentially adopt franchise fees as a stable, dedicated funding source for roads.	Short Term	City Administrator, Finance Director
	Communicate to the public the cost of infrastructure projects, how they are paid for, the decision-making process behind them, and the legal restrictions of funding them such as special assessments and state aid funding.	Mid-Term	Finance Director, Communications Manager
	Continue to maintain and communicate an accurate asset management program and develop agreed upon metrics for maintenance and replacement of internal infrastructure and capital equipment.	Short Term	Public Works Director, City Engineer, Finance Director, Communications Manager
<p>CREATION OF DESTINATION PLACES</p> <p>There was discussion reinforcing the need to continue creation of destination places within the community so that Fergus Falls is looked at as the place to go locally and in the region for recreation. This would also benefit demand for commercial uses and services.</p>	Continue the focus on downtown riverfront improvements and connections that encourage the recreational aspects of the river.	Mid-Term	City Staff, City Council
	Update the Park & Recreation plan to include funding sources, and a strategy for engaging all community members around park amenities.	Mid-Term	Communications Manager
	Continue exploration of partnerships with the State and County for joint enhancements and funding sources.	Mid-Term	Public Works Director, MnDNR

Economic Development

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS</p> <p>The city sought a conversation about economic development tools in order to coalesce around priorities and the use of limited financial resources.</p>	<p>The city will work with strategic stakeholders on an update to the business subsidy plan to include the below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and define the who, what, where, and when regarding business subsidies the city will consider; review annually. Create a matrix to assist in decision-making subsidy decisions. Create a childcare subsidy. 	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>City Administrator, Community Development Manager</p>



Economic Development (Cont'd)

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>DOWNTOWN</p> <p>Downtown Fergus Falls is considered a vital piece of Fergus Falls' future. The stakeholders had robust discussion about strategies to energize and vitalize downtown.</p>	<p>Create a Downtown Historic District to include design standards, public/private partnerships, façade programs, and access to incentives and funding sources. Educate business and property owners regarding the benefits of the designation and explain any potential drawbacks.</p>	<p>Long Term</p>	<p>Community Development Manager, Communications Manager, Otter Tail County Historical Society</p>
	<p>Create wayfinding in downtown ensuring information about parking locations and businesses located on adjoining side streets.</p>	<p>Long Term</p>	<p>Public Works Director, Communications Manager</p>
	<p>Incorporate pedestrian safety into all future projects in downtown through the CIP.</p>	<p>Short Term</p>	<p>City Engineer</p>
	<p>In conjunction with Greater Fergus Falls, conduct a commercial leakage study and use existing study metrics.</p>	<p>Mid-Term</p>	<p>Community Development Manager, Greater Fergus Falls</p>
	<p>Leverage the Otter Tail River as an amenity to bring people downtown. In conjunction with the strategy to continue focus on Riverfront improvements. Specifically, make river modifications to provide better access to the riverfront and explore activities such as paddling and tubing on the river.</p>	<p>Long Term</p>	<p>Public Works Director, MnDNR, Otter Tail Power Company, Private Sector Partners</p>
	<p>Partner with the business community on a business highlight campaign to focus on individual downtown businesses.</p>	<p>Mid-Term</p>	<p>Communications Manager, Downtown Riverfront Council, Chamber of Commerce</p>
	<p>Look for residential use opportunities in downtown.</p>	<p>Mid-Term</p>	<p>Community Development Manager, Planning Specialist/GIS Coordinator</p>

Land Use

PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES	TIME FRAMES	DESIGNATED PERSONS
<p>DEVELOPMENT FOCUS</p> <p>The groups discussed which future land uses would benefit the community and should be prioritized given the city’s limited resources. Housing/residential development was the use that rose to the top in the discussions because it would aid in economic development and create a more sustainable local economy</p>	<p>Focus short and mid-term efforts on residential development and conduct a housing study that can be used as a marketing tool to attract developers in all land use categories – residential, commercial, retail.</p> <hr/> <p>Pursue the following specific opportunities:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norgren Property <hr/> • Dairy Property <hr/> • Redevelopment of Under-Utilized School Sites <hr/> • Former Wastewater Treatment Plant <hr/> • Former Kmart Site <hr/> • RTC/Kirkbride <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the existing Master Plan. • Partner with a developer who can assist in implementing the vision for the site based off the Master Plan and position it for phased re-use. • Continue to explore financing options that may assist in Plan implementation. • Advocate at the state level for access to historic tax credits. 	<p>Mid-Term</p> <hr/> <p>Short Term</p> <hr/> <p>Short Term</p> <hr/> <p>Mid- and Long Term</p> <hr/> <p>Long Term</p> <hr/> <p>Long Term</p> <hr/> <p>Mid- and Long Term</p>	<p>City Administrator, Community Development Manager</p> <hr/> <p>City Staff Team</p> <hr/> <p>Leads: City Administrator, Community Development Manager, Planning Specialist/GIS Coordinator</p>

Summary/Conclusion



The 2022 Fergus Falls Strategic Framework process allowed the City Council, City Staff, stakeholders, and the community to brainstorm and discuss priorities and strategies in the areas of economic development, community and social development, infrastructure, and land use for Fergus Falls. The process allowed for listening and better understanding of individual goals. This shared understanding should lead to greater focus and collaboration, maximizing progress.

It is recommended that opportunities are created annually for updates and continued discussion by the Fergus Falls Team on the priorities, strategies, and projects as laid out in this document. This will be vital in keeping the lines of communication open for collaboration, understanding, the building of trusting relationships, and the continued momentum in creating a successful Fergus Falls.

