



CITY OF HASTINGS STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

2021-2023

During the past few months, the City Council and senior staff have met in a series of facilitated work sessions to help City leadership work together on key initiatives over the next 12-18 months. This initial planning wrapped up in July 2021, but the plan will continue to evolve over the next year as initiatives are completed and others are added. The City Council has established four strategic priorities with initiatives for each. As work advances on these initiatives, the City will provide regular progress reports.

1. PEOPLE, PROCESSES, INFRASTRUCTURE & FINANCE

- Develop a multi-year financial model to improve planning and long-term stability for the City.
- Enhance diversity, equity and inclusion in City processes and operations and continue to improve Hastings as a welcoming community for all.



2. COMMUNITY IMAGE & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



- Develop a strategic communications plan that shares Hastings' story with multiple and diverse audiences.
- Find new funding streams to stimulate tourism in collaboration with Tourism Bureau/Chamber of Commerce. This initiative includes leveraging partnerships and maximizing return on investment.

3. PARKS & PUBLIC SPACES

- Improve beautification and maintenance of parks and public spaces.
- Assure enhancements to the TH 61 (Vermillion Street) are consistent with the goals and measures of the Council-adopted Vermillion Street Corridor Plan.
- Pursue projects for Lake Rebecca and Lake Isabel Parks, contingent upon pending funding proposals.



4. HOUSING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Explore the feasibility of a special taxing district as a mechanism for enhanced services in the downtown area.



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City of Hastings

*Statement of Strategic Direction
2021-2022*

Introduction

In early 2020, the Hastings City Council and Staff launched a process aimed at establishing a set of strategic priorities and initiatives for short- and medium-term implementation. That process was interrupted by the City's response to the COVID pandemic and re-launched in early 2021. For the last several months Hastings City Council and Staff have met in a series of working sessions to establish a clear set of strategic priorities and initiatives for the remainder of this year and the following year (2021-2022). This document presents the results of that process.

This is an interim strategy document. It is intended to articulate a set of initiatives that reflect the Council's defined set of strategic priorities, and then to serve as a mechanism for tracking progress toward implementation of those initiatives. As a working document, it will also serve to capture ideas presented by council members or staff for future consideration, and will provide an agreed-upon portfolio of initiatives and projects against which new ideas can be evaluated.

This condensed, facilitated process was not intended to replace a full strategic planning process. Such a process would include an in-depth analysis of the City's strategic situation and landscape, and would incorporate direct input from Hastings residents, businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders. Rather, our aim was to bring elected and appointed leaders together to reflect, discuss, and ultimately articulate a shared direction for a limited period of time, in advance of such a strategic planning process. Input was provided by council and staff through both interviews and facilitated discussions.

The document consists of the following sections:

- This **Introduction**, describing the contents and intended use of this strategy document.
- **Strategic Priorities and Initiatives**, articulating the Council's strategic priorities and the planned initiatives aimed at pursuing those priorities.
- **Topics for Future Consideration**, which captures concepts presented by council members that did not rise to the first set of initiatives, but which are captured for future consideration. This list may change or grow over time.
- **Additional City Initiatives and Efforts**, which provides a context for the planned initiatives. The City is already committed to multiple current and planned efforts of various sizes and durations. Many of these efforts are also strategic in scope, and many are consistent with the strategic priorities set forth in this document.
- **Initiative Objectives and Timelines**, which provides further description of the implementation plans for each initiative, which are of course at a preliminary stage.

This document is complete, with revisions based on input from Council in our final working session on July 21, 2021. It is ready for Council adoption to become a living record for implementation and strategic decision-making. When potentially new strategic priorities or needs arise, they are to be considered in light of the strategic priorities and initiatives captured in this document, which have been agreed upon and are underway. When new concepts are presented for consideration, they may be captured in the future version of this document, in what is sometimes called "a parking lot." As work is completed, Council may choose to draw concepts from that parking lot or propose new ideas. Ultimately, the ongoing results of this process will be replaced (or updated) by a full strategic planning process.

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Strategic Priorities and Initiatives

The centerpiece of this interim strategy development process is a set of four shared strategic priorities and eight initiatives consistent with those priorities.

Strategic Priorities

The priorities are essentially categories for focused and continuous improvement:

- People, Processes, Infrastructure and Finance
- Community Image and Public Engagement
- Parks and Public Spaces
- Housing and Economic Development

Each is described as follows.

People, Processes, Infrastructure, and Finance

Cities grow stronger through continuous improvement. This includes developing and improving management processes and leadership teams, and pursuing a shared strategic direction established through this planning process. Our staff teams can become more diverse and inclusive, reflective of Hastings. The City can develop better planning and financial management tools to guide governance and to assure fiscal sustainability. Through these means we can promote excellent public stewardship of resources along with excellent services.

Community Image and Public Engagement

Hastings is a fantastic City. We can continue to improve how we tell our story, and how we build relationships that contribute to community vitality. This includes everything from stimulating business and tourism to stimulating participation in City government, especially among members of underrepresented communities. It also includes the City being a trusted, primary source for immediate and accurate information about City events and civic issues.

Parks and Public Spaces

Public impressions of Hastings are influenced in part by people's experience of our public spaces, including the parks that are a source of community pride. This justifies continued investment in the appearance and day-to-day maintenance of parks and other public spaces, and in projects to improve selected City spaces and amenities. Pursuing this priority may include renovation, expansion, development of new parks or amenities, and/or consolidation of some facilities. It may also include broader initiatives such as the Vermillion Street Corridor project.

Housing and Economic Development

Our continued success as a City requires that the public and private sector work together to assure that those who want to live in Hastings find attractive housing options here. Long-range vitality may also hinge on maintaining and creating good jobs within the community. Listening to the needs and wishes of the community, the City of Hastings supports balanced growth and economically sustainable municipal operations.

From Priorities to Initiatives

In a sense, these strategic priorities are categories that each encompass a broad range of potential goals. Each of the strategic initiatives presented below aims to achieve goals associated with at least one of these strategic priorities:

Strategic Priority	Initiative
People, Processes, Infrastructure, and Finance	1. Multi-Year Financial Model
	2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Community Image and Public Engagement	3. Strategic Communications Plan
	4. Tourism Funding
Parks and Public Spaces	5. Parks and Public Space Beautification
	6. Vermillion Street Corridor Plan
	7. Lake Rebecca/Lake Isabel Parks Renovations
Housing and Economic Development	8. Downtown Special Service District

The benefits of most initiatives will extend beyond the above specific priorities, as well.

Initiative 1: Multi-Year Financial Model

Create a multi-year operational financial model encompassing projected expenses, investments, and revenue streams.

Strategic Priority: **People, Processes, Infrastructure, and Finance.**

A multi-year financial model provides organizations with a tool for planning beyond the next fiscal year. The biggest benefits are to help avoid investments that are not sustainable, and to spread larger expenses across multiple years where possible. An example of larger expenses would be capital equipment or capital projects.

Building this model as a management tool begins with the most recent adopted budget. We will back out any one-time items that were included in this budget. From there, we will use inflationary increases for out years to project these ongoing expenses. Salary and fringe costs, and health insurance are cost categories that will continue to increase annually. A realistic model will also reflect inflationary increases for other operating costs, such as motor fuel, electricity, etc.

Any known or planned expenses such as capital or debt issuances can be added in the year planned (or desired). For example, the model may reflect the purchase of a fire engine in year two, and an ambulance in year five. These would be one-time capital costs that we add for the appropriate year and would be removed the following year.

Revenues and expenses are to be categorized when entered into the model. We will have major categories such as salaries, fringes, services, debt, capital, etc. Within these major categories we can also include more detailed expenses, such as health insurance within the fringe costs. In future years, we may add specific items, like the aforementioned fire engine, and capture that cost in a Capital category.

An inflationary increase for revenues must also be included in this plan. Some items, such as local government aid (LGA), that are dependent on legislative approval, would not be consistent and predictable. In these cases, we will update the funding level every two years, after the state adopts the funding levels for

the coming biennium. Once all the data is entered for five years, we can develop various tables and graphs to show our projected financing and spending for the coming five years.

There will undoubtedly be a gap between expected revenues and spending. By staying current with looming operating, debt, and capital needs, the City will be better able to plan for the future, while remaining fully aware of at least most fiscal pressures.

Planning should include revenues. One possibility would be levying for large capital needs over a period of years both to save for the coming expenses and to avoid steep levy increases. Another benefit of a revenue plan would be that it allows departments to plan for available grant applications as a funding mechanism for projects such as Park renovations.

The Finance Department will have the lead role in developing this model; however, all departments will contribute to building it, and all departments will use it.

Finally, a multi-year, city-wide planning model will help elected officials avoid making decisions “in a vacuum.” For instance, public safety will always be a priority, so those needs cannot simply be set aside while considering options for programs or capital purchases in other areas of the City’s operations. Usually, decisions require not funding some items in order to fund others. These decisions typically come down to a judgement concerning priorities. This tool will provide officials with a complete picture of fiscal pressures and will allow for informed discussions during each year’s budget process, with the expectation of keeping the City’s finances on a sustainable path, while funding agreed-upon priorities for our community.

Initiative 2: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the composition and operation of City Staff, in civic life and government beyond staff and elected officials, and in the demographics and experiences of our communities.

Strategic Priority: **People, Processes, Infrastructure, and Finance.**

This strategic initiative is intended to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the composition and operation of City staff, in the population of people participating in civic life and government, and in the broader demographics and experiences of our community. It consists of a set of efforts to:

- Create a workplace culture that prioritizes equity and inclusion.
- Engage more people who are not often heard.
- Increase the experience of Hastings as welcoming for all.

Each is described below.

Create a Workplace Culture that Prioritizes Equity and Inclusion

- Increase diversity in hiring.
 - Emphasize DEI in recruitment materials.
 - Eliminate criminal conviction question from application form. For fire and police applicants, move this to a separate supplemental question.
 - Advertise open positions through organizations and sites focused on inclusion and equity, and those targeting more diverse audiences.
 - Develop interview questions through the lens of DEI.
- Increase DEI training for City staff and officials.
 - Several years ago, all City supervisory employees attended bias awareness training. With a number of new employees in these roles, this training should be repeated.
 - GARE has said that its foundational training will be available again in September 2021. This training should be offered to elected officials.
 - Create city-wide training and development program, ensuring equity and inclusion related trainings are included. Training would focus on topics common to all employees, recognizing that some departments have existing extensive training programs.
- Increase retention of employees.
 - Create an internal staff team from all departments and employee levels to build the knowledge and skills necessary to work toward equity and inclusion throughout the organization.
 - Conduct barrier analysis and equity lens review when updating Employee Handbook and other operational policies.
 - Include DEI in employee engagement survey.
 - Ensure pay equity compliance in compensation/classification study.
 - Include DEI in employee goals and applied learning, particularly for supervisory employees.
 - Include DEI in employee exit interviews.

Engage More People Who Are Not Often Heard

- Eliminate “how long have you lived in Hastings” question from commission application form.
- Advertise commission vacancies to THRIVE and IDEA.
- In development of Strategic Communications Plan (see separate initiative), assess and build strategy for reaching under-represented populations.
- Solicit feedback (surveys, focus groups, listening sessions) from under-represented populations.
- Explore options for a citizens advisory commission to advise DEI concerns for the City both as an organization and as a community. This may be either an ad hoc task force or an ongoing commission.
- Ensure community engagement processes on City plans (recent examples include Comp Plan, People Movement, Vermillion Corridor) includes a diverse representation of the community.
- Include demographic data in future community surveys in order to gauge experiences of diverse populations.

Increase Experience of Hastings as Welcoming for All

- Continue to engage strategic partnerships through THRIVE, IDEA, and other community organizations.
- Offer income-based scholarships for residents to participate in THRIVE leadership training.
- Explore creating a marketing campaign to showcase many diverse perspectives in the community.
- Collaborate with other entities to increase public art, culture, and history projects with a focus on diverse communities. Examples include:
 - Mural.
 - Plaque to memorialize Brown’s Chapel.
 - George Daniels exhibit at LeDuc.

Initiative 3: Strategic Communications Plan

Engage Council and Staff in a strategic communication planning process.

Strategic Priority: Community Image and Public Engagement

The purpose of a Strategic Communication Plan is to address measurable objectives for Citywide strategic communication that help support and build the City's communications framework and which better share the City's story with its various stakeholders. That framework, in turn, will enable the City to achieve numerous other objectives, from providing up-to-date information about City projects and activities, to promoting economic development and community vitality, to disseminating accurate information in emergencies. The City's capacity to share its story with stakeholders likewise serves multiple purposes, from community economic development to connecting with underserved or underrepresented populations in the City.

The Strategic Communications Plan includes the following aspects:

- Defining and building the City story, beyond its visual identity system, to include defining the city's key messages for various audiences. This entails identifying important community history and assets to be highlighted, and defining strategic communications goals, target audiences, key messages, means and tactics, necessary funding, and other resources to fulfill the plan.

This story-telling effort will equip city staff, council, and community leaders with messages to develop a shared understanding of what defines Hastings, so they can better serve as ambassadors for the city.

Depending on the scope of audiences involved in brand development, a marketing consultant with experience in diversity and inclusion could be hired to facilitate focus groups and research. Whether developed internally or with an external resource, the strategic communications plan would include identifying the best methods and tactics to tell the Hastings story to diverse audiences.

- An internal communications strategy that fosters effective Staff and Council interaction and information sharing will help enable the effectiveness of the external communications strategy. To achieve this goal, the staff proposes regular council workshops to update elected officials on departmental operations. Progress updates toward strategic goals will also be reported regularly.

Communication processes will also include annual reports, quarterly updates, and other practical tools such as talking points, fact sheets or executive summaries on key plans and initiatives. Together these resources will provide the Council with up-to-date information to enable council members to inform and educate constituents on city operations. Resources will be created using plain, consistent language to equip Council ambassadors.

- Assessing and building an external communications strategy that defines appropriate tools and tactics for effectively reaching the City's many stakeholder groups, including diverse audiences. Goals for this aspect of the strategy include increasing the diversity of those engaged with the City, e.g., on commissions and committees.

- Incorporating emergency management/crisis communications in the City’s Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). This project will develop an emergency information plan that alerts, informs, and updates the maximum number of citizens when critical events occur.

The plan will include measurable objectives and timelines, as well as appendices that outline the City’s website and social media plans and policies, overall content strategies and editorial calendar, and media relations policy. The plan will also include processes and procedures that support a vital strategic communications function and clearly define roles and responsibilities, as well as levels of authority and decision-making.

Initiative 4: Tourism Funding

Find new funding streams to stimulate tourism in partnership with Tourism Bureau/Chamber of Commerce.

Strategic Priority: **Community Image and Public Engagement.**

Background – Promoting Tourism in Hastings

For over 20 years, the City and Chamber of Commerce have partnered to fund a Tourism Bureau for the purposes of marketing and promoting Hastings as a tourist destination. This partnership is permitted under State Statute 469.190 and also permits the City to impose a 3% lodging tax to fund these efforts. As required under the statute, 95% of the gross proceeds received from the lodging tax go to support the Tourism Bureau; the amount is approximately \$56,000.

There are three categories of action items for this initiative: Alternative Revenue Sources, Leverage Partnerships, and Maximize Return on Investment. In general, progress should be able to proceed in each of these areas within 3 to 6 months; beyond this time frame should be for ongoing efforts.

Alternate Revenue Sources

The number one action item is to research how other municipalities support tourism and the revenues they use. This research may be through Explore Minnesota, University of Minnesota Extension, League of Minnesota Cities, or other organizations. This research would likely build on the prior U of M Tourism Study. Whatever revenue options might be considered, fundraising should not take staff time away from tourism promotion.

Leverage Partnerships

Aside from direct money, there may be existing marketing or communications resources operated by outside entities that could be used to promote Hastings tourism.

Maximize Return on Investment

Finally, this initiative should seek to create the greatest value from the dollars spent on tourism. The City will work with the Tourism Bureau to explore ideas, partnerships, and other potential means of marketing with the goal of using our mutual resources and skills to showcase Hastings as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Initiative 5: Parks and Public Space Beautification

Improved beautification and maintenance of parks and public spaces.

Strategic Priority: **Parks and Public Spaces.**

This initiative is proposed in response to Council concerns about the aesthetic quality of some parks and public spaces, and a shared desire among elected and appointed leaders that residents and visitors take pleasure and pride in Hastings' many public spaces.

The Parks Department will lead this initiative with support from Public Works, Community Development, contractors, and other partners such as local athletic associations and larger, organized user groups and civic organizations.

The initiative's objectives focus on a sustained and timely attention to parks & public spaces maintaining a high level of aesthetic quality in those areas with priority given to high-profile and high-use locations. A continued, consistent investment in facilities, buildings, park equipment, and the trail system will also be necessary to achieve these goals.

In 2021, we implemented a new team approach to park maintenance. To maintain high aesthetic standards overall, we intend to pursue the following additional tactics:

- We will need to add staff, both seasonal and full-time, to deliver a higher standard of service.
- We intend to continue utilizing the existing adopt-a-park and volunteers to build a spirit of community pride and reduce costs.
- We will transform some underutilized spaces over time to lower-maintenance areas, which will reduce demand on staff time and other resources. This change will also have a beneficial environmental impact.
- We are prepared to help community leaders understand the elements of the parks & trail system, and the work of the park maintenance division. This can build alliances for support of our effort and help community members to better appreciate their natural spaces.

To sustain this initiative, we will need ongoing funding for maintenance, seasonal & full-time staff, equipment, and vehicles. We will also seek continued funding for ongoing and future restoration projects in natural and open spaces.

The obstacles we face include the large acreage of parks & public spaces, the geographic spread of these spaces, and the obvious seasonal challenges. We have recently experienced some difficulty filling seasonal positions and lack city staff to manage a greater number of volunteers. There is competition and differing priorities from different user groups and rental customers for high profile/high use parks.

Initiative 6: Vermillion Street Corridor Plan.

Assure that the Enhancements to TH 61 (Vermillion Street) are consistent with the goals and measures of the Council-adopted Vermillion Street Corridor Plan.

Strategic Priority: **Parks and Public Spaces.**

The Vermillion Street Corridor Plan was adopted by the City Council in April 2018 to create a roadmap for the economic redevelopment and revitalization of Vermillion Street. The Plan subdivides the corridor into five specific geographic areas and provides recommendations to improve each of areas by identifying improvement recommendations and development opportunities and characteristics. The Plan is used as the foundation for decision-making matters pertaining to the Vermillion Street Corridor, as it includes a working plan to guide the City in implementation and potential partnerships, as well as the appropriate role of the City in development of the Corridor.

Since adoption of the Vermillion Street Plan, MN DOT has begun preliminary planning for improvements to the TH 61 (Vermillion Street) corridor. MN DOT will hire a consultant for its corridor study in summer 2021, with completion of its study in 2022. The extent of the improvements has yet to be developed but may likely include roadway, intersection, and streetscaping enhancements to improve the visual quality and safety of the corridor. The project is expected to include preliminary design work with the City and stakeholders (similar to the Mississippi Bridge project). Construction of improvements may take place within the next five-plus years.

Because Vermillion Street serves as a major transportation and commercial corridor for the City while containing existing properties that are ripe for redevelopment, the City's objective is to ensure economic vitality of the corridor and present a more pleasing visual image.

The Vermillion Street Corridor Plan includes detailed action steps to foster economic development (see separate document attached). Specific quarterly milestones would be established to track progress on remaining items.

Full realization of a vision for the Vermillion Street Corridor involves some challenges:

- Being strategic in our pursuit of redevelopment. Specific sites and roles need to be established in order to be effective.
- The role of the City in pursuing streetscaping and visual enhancements to the corridor will require clarification. We will need to determine whether the City will work in conjunction with MN DOT's planned improvements, or on a separate timeframe.
- Staff turnover and vacancies in the Economic Development Coordinator position have slowed the progress in implementing the plan to date. We look forward to a renewed effort in implementing this important priority.

Initiative 7: Lake Rebecca / Lake Isabel Parks Renovations

Pursue two separate projects, restoring parks at Lake Rebecca and/or at Lake Isabel, contingent upon pending funding proposals.

Strategic Priority: **Parks and Public Spaces.**

This initiative combines two separate projects, each of which is the subject of a pending grant request. Beyond that, the projects are distinct – and quite different – from one another.

The Lake Rebecca Park Restoration project is the subject of a \$2M grant request pending with the State of Minnesota LCCMR. Current circumstances may make approval of that grant more likely this year than in future years; if approved, it would fund an extensive renovation of Lake Rebecca Park. If that grant is not approved, the City does not have immediate plans for that project.

The Lake Isabel Park project is the subject of a grant request with the Minnesota DNR, which is a match of funds currently committed by the City and by the Neighborhood Homeowners Association for improvements to that park. In July 2021, the application for a DNR Outdoor Recreation Grant was awarded \$240,000. DNR staff has advised the formalities of the grant and final authorization would be made by late summer 2021.

Initiative 8: Downtown Special Service District

Establish a special taxing district in downtown area.

Strategic Priority: **Housing and Economic Development.**

Special service districts (SSDs) are established at the request of the persons who will pay for the increased level of service. The SSD collects additional tax revenue from commercial and industrial properties within a defined area (residential properties excluded) to provide for identified service and maintenance within the area. The support of at least 25% of impacted properties is necessary for establishment. The operations of SSDs are regulated under Minnesota State Statutes 428A and have been established in a number of Minnesota cities including Stillwater, White Bear Lake, and St. Louis Park.

Downtown's mix of historic architecture, outdoor spaces, riverfront views, and unique shopping and dining establishes Hastings as a special place. The objective of ensuring a high-level experience is important to maintaining downtown's position as magnet for citizens and visitors. Establishment of an SSD would provide revenue for enhanced maintenance and services for Downtown Hastings.

An outline of proposed steps is below. Specific quarterly milestones would be established to track progress. Completion of all the steps may take one year.

- **Research** - Learn further about the mechanics of establishing an SSD and the experiences of others in establishing and operating an SSD.
- **Outreach - General Idea** - Discuss the concept of establishing an SSD with downtown property and business owners to determine support, obstacles, and areas for potential funding of a future SSD. Establishment of an SSD requires the support of 25% of impacted property owners. Establishing an SSD must have strong buy-in from the business community and not be viewed as imposed by the City.
- **Draft Plan** - Prepare a draft list and budget for potential service and activities that may be provided as part of an SSD.
- **Outreach - Draft Plan** - Discuss the draft plan of potential items with downtown property and business owners. This may include multiple meetings to incorporate changes and concerns.
- **Ordinance and Plan Adoption** - Develop the ordinance amendment and SSD Plan for official public hearing and consideration by the City Council.

There would be some challenges. The establishment of an SSD requires the support of at least 25% effected property owners. Expectations for the level of service and specific items to be funded would need to be agreed upon between the City and property owners.

Future Topics for Consideration

As noted above, some of the ideas put forward by council members have not been developed into strategic initiative concepts. These ideas are not lost; rather, they remain as viable options for strategic initiatives that could be developed into concepts upon direction of Council.

One intended outcome of this condensed strategy development process is the creation of a set of ideas that can be developed in the future. As individual Council members (or staff members) propose ideas, these could be advanced by approval of the full Council or be held for future consideration in this list of ideas.

The first set of ideas are listed below by Strategic Priority.

Ideas Related to People, Processes, Infrastructure, and Finance

1. **Continue to Improve environmental sustainability of City operations.**

While not developed into an initiative concept at this time, Hastings is making steady progress in the Green Step Cities Program. In addition to this initiative, staff can still present current environmental sustainability efforts and articulate how this value factors into operational decisions. Examples presented in the Council discussion included electric vehicles, building enhancements, and process improvements.

Ideas Related to Community Image and Public Engagement

1. **Develop an internal communication strategy focused on council-staff communication.**

Aspects of this idea are being addressed by Concept 2: Strategic Communications Plan. In particular, staff supports conducting regular Council work sessions focused on City operations and updates on the progress of strategic initiatives.

2. **Develop policy for public recognition.**

In recent years, the City has received increasing number and types of requests for public recognition and awareness campaigns such as proclamations, colored lights, and social media. A policy would ensure consistent responses.

3. **Incorporate elements of the HPAAC Arts & Culture Plan into City goals and initiatives.**

HPAAC's Arts & Culture Plan contains a number of recommendations to foster the creative economy and demonstrating Hastings as a destination for arts and culture. Much of the plan's recommendations should be led by other community partners. The City could reinstate its Arts Task Force to advise a unified policy and coordination for art displayed in Hastings.

Ideas Related to Parks and Public Spaces**1. Expand Hastings’s status as a trail hub to drive tourism and awareness of Hastings.**

The City can continue to work with Dakota County, Goodhue County, and Red Wing in the normal course of regional trail development. Further investment in trails and in marketing Hastings as a trail hub could be pursued in the future as a strategic initiative.

2. Develop a plan for a new multipurpose indoor sports field.

Council discussion of this idea ultimately centered on preparing preliminary plans for opportunities such as this, so that if a specific opportunity arises, the City is in a position to capitalize on it. This approach to planning would be an excellent topic for a future Council work session.

Ideas Related to Housing and Economic Development**1. Stimulate job creation in Hastings.**

Council discussion focused on the creation of career-oriented positions. If advanced as a strategic initiative, one first step may be a study of job creation, current and potential, in Hastings. The Chamber of Commerce would be a potential partner in such an initiative.

2. Complete a full housing inventory analysis to guide development strategy.

The intent of this idea is to look at the overall inventory of housing units, available and occupied, considering demographic trends such as older residents moving into long-term care settings. City staff has already done related research under the auspices of HEDRA and has shared these findings with Council.

Additional City Initiatives and Efforts

The initiatives presented above should not be read in a vacuum. In many areas, the City is already undertaking aspects of the initiatives. For example, last year HEDRA completed a housing study, this spring the City funded extra seasonal staff to assist with a new “dedicated team” approach to park maintenance, the CIP/CEP have been updated which is an essential step toward the multi-year financial model, the City has conducted utility rate studies which will inform the multi-year financial model, for several years City officials and staff have been active with the DEI efforts of THRIVE, this winter the City joined GARE which will serve as an additional DEI training resource, the City has partnered with Dakota County to augment the Mississippi River Trail, City staff have met with MN DOT and prospective consultants to ensure awareness of our Vermillion Corridor Plan is reflected in MN DOT’s upcoming corridor study, and HEDRA is updating its goals and planning for economic development.

Looking forward 6 to 18 months, the City already has many initiatives that support each of the four Strategic Priorities of this report. And these need to be balanced in terms of time and budget with decisions about new initiatives.

PEOPLE, PROCESSES, INFRASTRUCTURE, and FINANCE

- **Accounting Software** – Current software is outdated, not user friendly, and has limited functionality in remote-work environment. 2021 Budget includes funds to hire consultant to assist with vetting needs and options. With budget amendment for new system, this could be implemented in Oct 2022.
- **Multi-Family Utility Billing** – In summer/fall 2021, Finance Department will be updating process for calculating utility bills on multi-family accounts.
- **2021 Audit** – Annual independent financial audit monopolizes Finance Department time for several weeks in February, April, and June 2022.
- **Update Personnel Policy** – The last significant amendment to the City’s Employee Handbook was in 2012. It needs to be updated to reflect policy and law changes since then as well as ensuring it meets operations needs now and going forward.
- **Employee Engagement Survey** – The City will be conducting a survey to gauge employee satisfaction, performance, and perspective about the City as an organization. Information will provide insights into areas for organization improvement and baseline data for future comparison.
- **Compensation & Classification Study** – The City last conducted a comprehensive compensation and classification study of all positions in 1999-2000. There have been periodic updates since then with the last significant review in 2006-2007. Updating the study now would help with recruiting and retaining employees as well as maintaining internal consistency. Hiring a consultant is estimated at \$15-20K; implementation may be phased in over a couple years.
- **Union Contracts** – 5 collective bargaining agreements expire at the end of the year. Negotiation for renewal contracts begins in late summer.
- **Photocopier/Printer Lease** – Current lease expires at the end of the year and replacements need to be decided by end of September. IT staff has asked for input from all departments before soliciting quotes.

- **City Hall Boilers** – At 30+ years, the boilers have exceeded their lifespan and are requiring more frequent repair. Replacing them with high-efficiency model is anticipated in 2022. This will be part of the City Hall Dome Project (see Parks and Public Spaces priority).
- **LeDuc Security Cameras** – DCHS has requested security cameras. MNHS requires a study prior to approving camera installation. Staff has solicited quotes for study anticipating cost will be covered by a grant.
- **Fire Department Study** – The City has issued an RFP for a consultant to review staffing model, workload, service calls and their impact on Department performance.
- **Ice Arena Refrigeration System** – The CIP anticipates a \$1.8M project in the next couple years to upgrade the refrigeration system from R-22 to an ammonia-based system. We have requested state bonding support for this project.
- **Police Hiring** – Two long-tenured officers are retiring in Oct/Nov 2021. The hiring process for these positions can easily take three months.
- **Plan for 2022 Neighborhood Project** – Design and engineering work for the 2022 Neighborhood Project actually begins in the summer of 2021, so it is ready to bid early in 2022.

COMMUNITY IMAGE and PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- **Administrative Citations** – City Council has approved the concept of administrative citations as a streamlined mechanism for responding to property maintenance and similar code violations. This would require changes to the City Charter and City Code. We are presently seeking individuals to serve on the Charter Commission to start the process.
- **State of the City** – All City departments, particularly Communications, have considerable time in preparing this annual presentation in February.
- **National Night Out** – During National Night Out in August.
- **Fire Department Open House** – During National Fire Prevention Week in October.
- **Machinery Hill** – During Rivertown Days in July.
- **Police Week** – During National Police Week in May.
- **Party in the Park** – During National Parks & Recreation Month in July.

PARKS and PUBLIC SPACES

- **Mural** – Contract with the artists and HFS has been extended for the mural to be painted in mid-August to early September. Communications is planning a press release and other publicity.
- **City Hall Dome Project** – The City has hired architects from Miller Dunwiddie for repair/renovation of the City Hall dome, as well as HVAC and climate control systems. Updated cost estimates and construction documents are anticipated in fall 2021, with construction planned for 2022. This project has \$2M in state bonding support.
- **No Wake Ordinance** – Washington and Dakota County Sheriff Departments are studying appropriate river speeds over the summer and expect to make recommendations to their respective boards in fall 2021.

- **Flint Hills Land Donation** – The Parks Department is working with Flint Hills Pine Bend on a land donation and conservation easement to add to open space of the Lake Rebecca and River Flats Parks area.
- **EAB 2021 Implementation** – Approximately 49 boulevard trees have been identified for removal and an additional 90+ for mandatory treatment. The City adopted a hardship relief program to offset removal costs for eligible residents.
- **EAB 2022 Survey** – During winter 2021-2022, Forestry staff will continue inventory of boulevard trees and identify additional ash trees for removal or treatment. This will be the second of a four-year survey.

HOUSING and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Review Zoning and Development Code**- Review changes to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and development standards of the market. To be completed by summer 2022.
- **Shoreland and Critical Areas Ordinance** - Adopt changes to the Shoreland and Critical Areas Ordinance consistent with MN DNR regulations. To be completed by summer of 2022.
- **Architectural Assessment of Downtown Buildings** - Hire a consultant to complete an inventory of the architectural and structural conditions of historic downtown buildings. Develop a grant program for assistance. Study to be completed by end of 2021 with grant program developed in 2022.
- **Review Existing Incentive Programs** - Review HEDRA loan, and land incentive programs to ensure they meet current needs. To be completed by the end of 2022.
- **Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Visits** - Conduct at least 12 visits annually and provide survey report to HEDRA. Ongoing.
- **Business Drop-in Visits** - Complete at least 100 unique business cop ins per year and provide semi-annual updates to HEDRA. Ongoing.
- **Blight Identification** - Proactively identify and pursue code enforcement violations. Review Revolving Loan Fund to better target towards properties.
- **Improvements to Development Process** - Meet with at least six commercial residential developers that have completed projects in the las three years to determine any necessary improvements.

Initiatives Timelines and Objectives

To track and report progress toward achieving the strategic priorities identified in 2021, the council and staff agreed on the following milestones, responsible leaders, and completion dates as the most objective way to measure progress. The combined council and staff will review progress quarterly. The city administrator will note when the milestone is complete. If the milestone is to be continued, then staff will report quarterly on its continued status.

Multi-Year Financial Model

End state: A functioning multi-year operational financial model that consistently captures and communicates projected expenses, investments, and revenue streams to city leaders, staff, and citizens.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Analyze preliminary budget	Finance Manager	Sept 2021
Identify inflationary increases	Finance Manager	4Q21
Identify one-time capital expenditures	Finance Manager	4Q21
Identify projected revenue	Finance Manager	4Q21
Update model with final budget	Finance Manager	Dec 2021
Identify looming operating, debt, and capital needs.	Management Team	1Q22
Report model to Finance Committee	Finance Manager	1Q22
Update projections prior to annual budget cycle	Finance Manager	May 2022

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

End state: A Hastings city government and community that honor, respect, and practice diversity, equity, and inclusion as lived values.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Create a Workplace Culture that Prioritizes Equity and Inclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase diversity in hiring • Increase retention of employees • Increase DEI training for staff and officials 	Human Resources Department Heads	ongoing
Engage More People Who Are Not Often Heard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit feedback and input from diverse audience • Create opportunities for advisory and commission engagement by diverse residents of the City 	Department Heads	ongoing
Increase Experience of Hastings as Welcoming for All <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue strategic partnerships with community organizations • Create marketing campaign to promote diverse perspectives • Increase public art, culture and history projects focusing on diverse communities 	Department Heads	ongoing

Strategic Communications Plan

End state: A communications infrastructure that shares the City’s story with its various stakeholders, enables the City to disseminate accurate information in emergencies, promotes economic development and reaches underserved or underrepresented populations in the City.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Define the story, key audiences and messaging for each	Management Team and Communications Coordinator	2Q22
Review metrics and analytics to evaluate content and channels	Communications Coordinator	2Q22 and ongoing
Assess and build internal communications processes and procedures	City Council, Management Team, and Communications Coordinator	3-4Q21
Assess and build an external communications strategy (possible different strategies for different target audiences)	Communications Coordinator	3Q22
Assess and build an emergency management/crisis communications plan	Public Safety and Communications Coordinator	TBD
Assess and build strategy for under-represented populations	Communications Coordinator with partners	3Q22
Assess and improve the user experience with the City’s website	Communications Coordinator	ongoing
Review and amend communications-related policies and procedures (web, social media, media relations, event policies, and processes)	Communications Coordinator	4Q22

Tourism Funding

End state: New funding sources for promoting tourism leads to a measurable increase in tourism over pre-COVID levels.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Review existing marketing and communications	City and Chamber/Tourism	4Q21
Review U of M tourism study	City and Chamber/Tourism	4Q21
Identify alternate revenue sources	City and Chamber/Tourism	1Q22 and ongoing
Continue using free resources such as press releases, online event calendars, or online rating	Chamber/Tourism staff	ongoing
Continue lead generation to build email database for future marketing.	Chamber/Tourism staff	ongoing
Send Chamber/Tourism staff to Explore Minnesota annual conference	Chamber/Tourism staff	Feb 2022
Annual report (including occupancy rate at local hotels) to City Council.	City and Chamber/Tourism staff	Sept 2022

Parks and Public Space Beautification

End state: All Hastings parks are maintained to documented standards; non-park public spaces defined in the initiative are likewise clean with landscaping well maintained and snow managed.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Identify priority list of high-profile and high-use locations	Parks Dept and Parks Committee	1Q22
Maintain high-profile and high-use locations using team structure	Parks Dept	ongoing
Identify underutilized spaces to convert to lower-maintenance areas	Parks Dept and Parks Committee	1Q22
Approve additional staff, both seasonal and full-time (may be phased in over several years)	City Council	budget
Sustain existing adopt-a-park and volunteers	Parks Dept	2022
Educate the community on the elements of the parks & trail system and the work of the park maintenance division	Parks Dept and Communications Coordinator	2022

Vermillion Street Corridor Plan

End state: Implement the Vermillion Corridor Plan for economic revitalization of the TH 61 corridor. Ensure MN DOT enhancements are consistent with the plan.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Continue participation in joint planning with MN DOT	Public Works Director	ongoing
Consultant begins corridor study	Consultant	4Q21
Completion of corridor study	Consultant	1Q23
Final design and cost estimates	MNDOT	2023-2025
Hwy 61 construction begins	MNDOT	2026
Communicate to council any updates to MN DOT planning	Public Works Director	ongoing
Identify priority areas for redevelopment	Community Development Director	completed
Meet with property owners to determine likelihood for redevelopment and the extent to which HEDRA would play a role	Community Development Director	ongoing
Meet with interested redevelopment partners to determine interest and identify obstacles	Community Development Director	ongoing
Determine any HEDRA resources to spur development	Community Development Director	ongoing

Lake Rebecca / Lake Isabel Parks Renovations

End states: If funding is received, the Lake Rebecca Revitalization Project results in a unique amenity and asset to the community. Lake Isabel park restoration is completed consistent with available funding to restore that beloved public space to its full beauty and usefulness.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
LAKE REBECCA PARK:		
Monitor progress of grant for Lake Rebecca	Parks Dept	3Q21
If funded, RFP and complete plan for Rebecca restoration	Parks Dept and consultant	3Q22 – 2Q23
If funded, approve plan for Rebecca restoration	Parks Committee and City Council	3Q23
If funded, begin construction at Lake Rebecca		3Q23 – 2Q24
If funded, complete work at Lake Rebecca		
If not funded, consider plan for future restoration	Parks Dept and consultant	2022
If not funded, appearance/security improvements (e.g.: remove back parking lot)	Parks Dept	2022
LAKE ISABEL PARK:		
Grant approved for Lake Isabel Park	DNR	July 2021
Complete D&E plan for Isabel restoration	ISG, Parks Dept	4Q21
Approve plan for Isabel restoration	Parks Committee and City Council	4Q21
Final grant authorization	NPS	Sept 2021
Bid construction project		March 2022
Begin construction at Lake Isabel		May 2022
Complete work at Lake Isabel		Summer 2022

Downtown Special Service District

End state: A special taxing district is established in the downtown area providing enhanced maintenance and services for Downtown Hastings leading to a 10% increase in visitors to the businesses in the district.

Milestone	Responsible Leader(s)	Date
Research the mechanics of establishing an SSD	Community Development Dept.	done
Research experiences of others in establishing and operating an SSD	Community Development Dept.	4Q21
Discuss initiative with downtown property and business owners to determine support, obstacles, and areas for potential funding of a future SSD	Community Development Dept.	1Q22
Prepare a draft list and budget for potential service and activities that may be provided as part of an SSD	Business Community	1Q22
Hold meetings to discuss the draft plan with downtown property and business owners	Business Community	2Q22
Incorporate changes and concerns adjusting plan as necessary	Business Community	3Q22
Develop the ordinance amendment and SSD Plan for official public hearing	City Attorney	3Q22
Public hearing and approve ordinance	City Council	3Q22

Conclusion

This document arose from a condensed planning process conducted primarily over ZOOM. It will have its greatest impact not as a static document, but as an aid to:

- Articulation and preservation of new strategic concepts and potential projects.
- Evaluation and prioritization of any new efforts in terms of agreed-upon priorities and in light of efforts both underway and planned.
- Ongoing progress reporting on implementation from staff to Council.
- Informing constituents of the City's achievements.

It will serve those purposes by becoming an active repository for project status reports, future initiatives and projects, and learning from existing efforts. That process will begin with quarterly updates to council on the status of implementation. As the strategic initiatives process, the strategic thinking of Council and staff will be aided by the information gathered through this reporting process.

This document and process reflects the best thinking and concerted efforts of Hastings City Council and Staff. The team from Ethical Leaders in Action, as the facilitators of this project, wish to thank the City and its leaders for the opportunity to do this work with them. We admire the dedication and professionalism of the leaders with whom we worked and are grateful for the supporting role we were able to play in this process.