

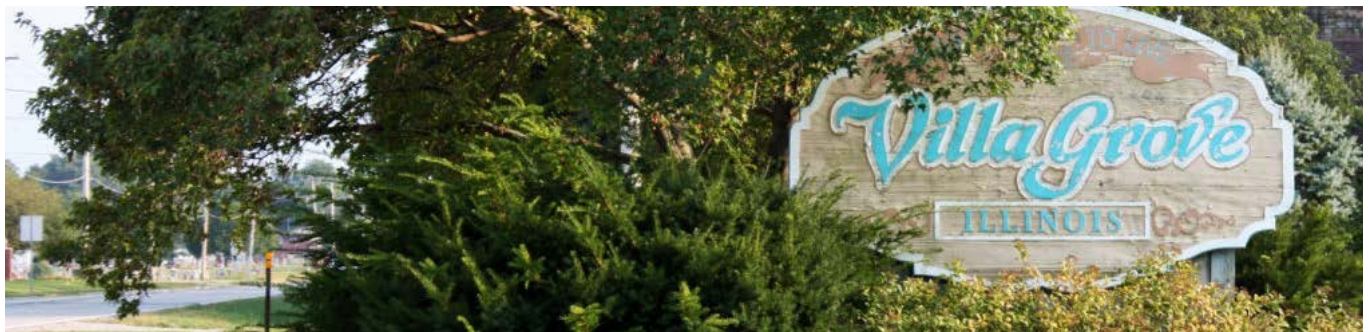
City of **Villa Grove**

Strategic Plan and Goal Development 2020

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Governmental Studies**

Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development

Villa Grove
ILLINOIS

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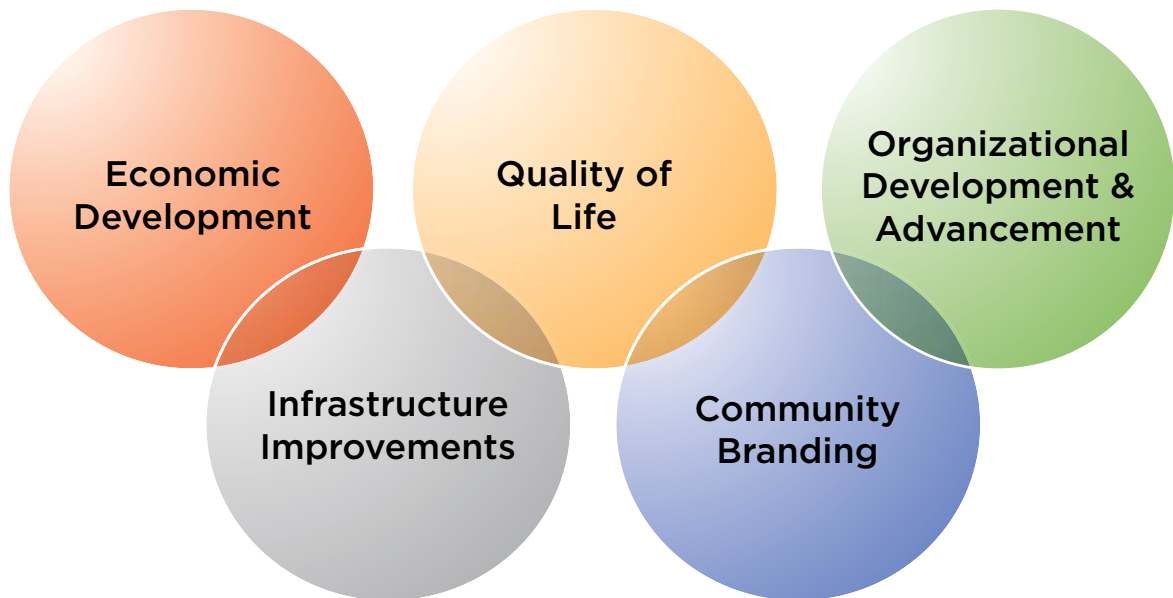


Executive Summary

Strategic planning is a preferred approach to guiding an organization’s future rather than making decisions issue by issue. The City of Villa Grove (“the City”) engaged the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to facilitate two-half day strategic planning workshops with Council and senior staff members in September of 2020. Prior to the workshops, four (4) focus groups were held with organizational stakeholders to gather input regarding the City’s future. With the focus groups as a starting point for discussions, the strategic planning workshops provided a positive atmosphere for the Council and senior staff members to collaboratively review and develop the City’s vision for the future, strategic goals, and ultimately determine where the City wants to go as an organization. As discussed and reviewed during the workshops, executive-level strategic planning sessions are a staple of good governance and leadership for progressive organizations.

Strategic Priorities

Ultimately, five key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process highlighting activities and initiatives that the City should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below [in no particular order] and a brief explanation of each is also included.



Economic Development

Economic development is a great tool to help generate growth in the community. Attracting industry and businesses, both large and small, to the community can enhance the services offered to residents, increase the tax base, and promote strategic growth. It is important to focus on being business-friendly and emphasize retention as much as recruitment efforts. Growing your own and supporting local go hand in hand.

Quality of Life

The quality of life is essential to any community, regardless of size. The City of Villa Grove should continue to strive towards developing quality housing options, recreational opportunities, and a thriving business community to offer an experience that is unique to Villa Grove. Villa Grove could become known as the community that has opportunities for all.

Organizational Development and Advancement

Staying up-to-date on the latest trends and current technology is imperative to operating a well-run organization. Technology updates, succession planning, and reviewing the City's codes and ordinances are a few undertakings the City can work on to increase its effectiveness and efficiency and ultimately enhance the quality of services being delivered.

Infrastructure Improvements

An essential public service is ensuring quality physical infrastructure of the community, including roads, sidewalks, water, and sewer among others. The City should undertake adequate planning and proper funding to ensure the continued maintenance of the City's infrastructure. This will add to the quality of life for residents and aid in attracting and retaining development.

Community Branding

The City of Villa Grove is a small, quaint town with its own distinctive character. It is important that the City identifies their own brand and markets the assets that make Villa Grove unique among its neighboring communities to promote itself as the place to be for residents, businesses, and visitors alike. Initiatives like this can be costly but exploring options such as a high school marketing project, local college/university assistance, a community contest, or engaging someone in the community who may be involved in marketing can be helpful strategies.

Strategic Goals

After discussions regarding the workshop participants' visions for the future, important topics, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the City, participants were asked to identify short- and long-term goals. Participants were asked to use an agreed upon criteria to classify a goal as short- or long-term (please see full report for defined criteria).

After the workshop sessions, the Council was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The top three highest-ranking short and long-term goals are offered below as a process "snapshot" representing the most important strategic goals or priority areas for the Council and staff to address in the months and years ahead. The top three goals listed below are a result of the calculation of the goal prioritization survey, which consisted of "forced ranking" where the ranking of each identified goal is averaged by the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal were given the 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.**

In total, the group developed ten short-term goals and eleven long-term goals. For a full review and appreciation of all strategic goals and priority areas presented, discussed, and ranked, please refer to the full report.

Short-Term Goals

1. Complete construction of the community building further enhancing the quality of life in Villa Grove.
2. Explore strategies to develop diverse housing options attracting residents of all ages to the community (e.g., construct a new subdivision with single-family housing, develop senior-living housing options, clean up vacant/abandoned homes).
3. Determine and communicate final decision on the wastewater treatment plant and utilities.

Long-Term Goals

1. Identify and implement strategies to attract and retain diverse businesses (small, large, manufacturing, industrial, etc.).
2. Implement capital infrastructure plan.
3. Develop a City-wide succession plan and identify areas for improved efficiencies and training opportunities.

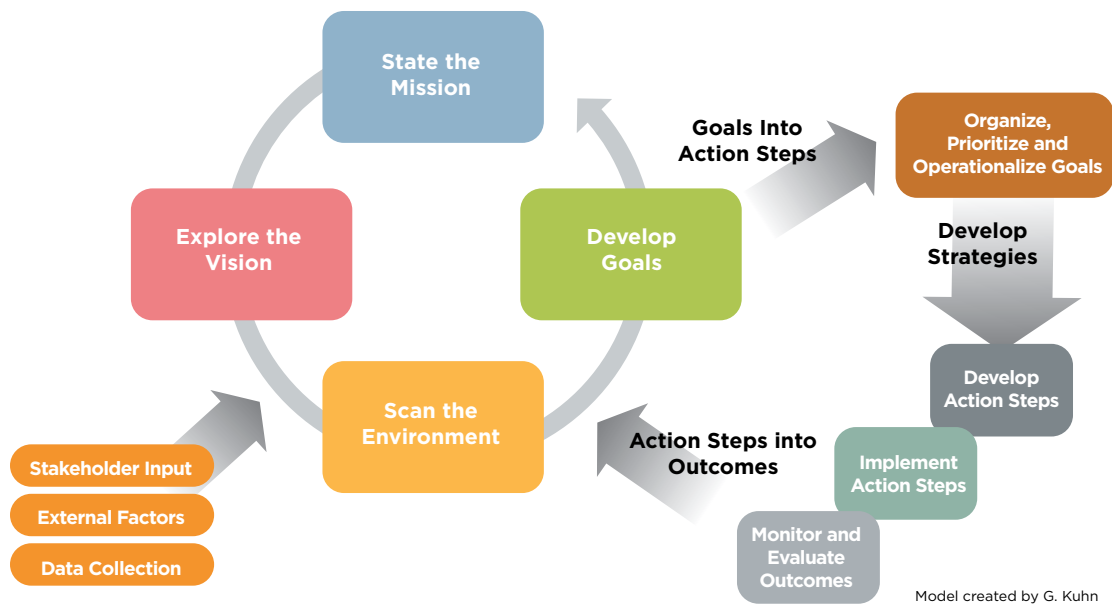
Introduction

As an organization, the City has placed itself among the special class of entities that have made a commitment to formalized strategic planning and goal setting exercises (Figure 1). As City leaders are aware, strategic planning is not a new phenomenon for progressive communities and government agencies. Policymaking boards and staff in both private and public organizations, including the City, recognize the value of such processes. This important work will serve the community well in the coming years.

The Council and senior staff members gathered in September 2020 to discuss the City’s vision, important policies, and topic areas to develop goals and ultimately establish the future direction for the City. The strategic planning workshops provided a positive atmosphere to set aside time to methodically, *strategically*, determine where it is the City wants to go as an organization. As was shared with the Council and senior staff members at the conclusion of the workshops, the City should resist the temptation to rearrange priorities as the fiscal year moves along. It is important to adhere to the results of the Council and senior staff members’ efforts throughout this process and the City’s budgeting process.

Keep in mind that the judicious use of the City’s limited resources (including financial resources and professional staff time) will be the key to good results. These high standards can place a strain on the organization, as excellence requires adequate staff time, expertise, and resources. In the end, quality policies and quality implementation equate to tough choices in setting priorities and in allocating resources. Only a limited number of goals and objectives can be effectively managed and implemented 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.

Pre-Workshop:

Taking Stock, Stakeholder Engagement Process

Stakeholder engagement is an important pre-workshop component designed to help ground the environmental scanning portion of the process. Listening is vital to planning and these steps are an important part of “taking stock” and understanding current City policies and operational perspectives, perceptions, and preferences. In total, four (4) focus groups were conducted virtually in August 2020. The focus groups generally included 10-15 participants during each session. The focus group sessions conducted included representatives from the following groups:

- Front-line City Staff
- Business and Civic Organizations
- Residents (invitational)
- Open Forum

The focus group sessions were designed to serve as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information presented next in summation was shared at the workshops and added *exploratory and thematic information* for the Council and senior staff to consider and discuss. As a result of the focus group sessions and the responses recorded, the facilitators identified six (6) overarching themes (Figure 2). The themes represent important topic areas that the Council and senior staff used as they created goals at the workshops, so alignment between the focus group themes, discussion exercise results, and goals is expected. The themes are presented below [in no particular order]. Please see [Appendix A](#) for a full summary of all focus group questions and aggregated responses for each theme.

Figure 2. Environmental Scanning, Focus Groups Overarching Themes



Outline of Workshop:

Leadership Exercises and Discussion Sessions

The format for all of the discussion sessions used in the planning effort employed approaches that were highly participative and interactive. The process was informed by the environmental scanning components and the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the City. The workshop facilitators utilized a group discussion approach called *'Nominal Group Technique'* where participants were assured equal opportunities to speak and share opinions by the facilitators. During the workshop discussion sessions, individuals had the opportunity to generate and share their ideas, as well as participate in 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 organizational values, purpose, future directions, and priorities.

Session I. Introduction Exercise –Visioning and Important Topics Discussion

Each participant engaged in a visioning and identification of an important topic to address exercise by selecting two items from the virtual “garage sale” table and using each item to answer two questions. The first item was used to answer the visioning question, *“In 10-15 years when I return to the City, I hope to see, or think I will see...,”* regarding services, programs, staffing levels, capital needs and general concepts that should or would be present in the City at these intervals?” The second item related to the second question, *“What are some important topics the City will need to address in the next 1-3 years?”* Participants were asked to think about their ideas ahead of time and be ready to share them with the group during the first discussion session of the workshop. This was a brainstorming exercise—all ideas about the City’s future were encouraged and shared. No evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session. A summary of the answers can be found on the next page.

Exploration of Villa Grove’s Desired Future Condition: Visions of the Future

Garage Sale Item	Visions of the Future
Bed	New senior living facilities, new housing developments (first-time buyers)
Stroller	Attract younger families to the community
Stroller	Attract younger families and retain current youth
Crib	More young families, without growing youth, the community can’t survive; community beautification and more amenities
Chair	Facilities for seniors and recreation; more housing options
Car	Transportation network – connect surrounding communities; meet demographic housing needs (e.g., all phases and stages of life), support school system, comprehensive services offered at the community center
Door	Open the door to make Villa Grove more attractive to others
Toy box	Improvement in parks – form a Park District
Umbrella	Better use of reservoir
Shoe	New/big businesses in town (e.g., tire store)
Shoe	Attract younger families – community growth and improvements (e.g., facilities, fields, etc.)
Picture frame	More attractive/positive outlook of the community – improve image and reputation
Microwave	Quick progress – see things get done

Exploration of the City of Villa Grove’s Important Topics to Address

Garage Sale Item	Important Topic(s)
Broom	Infrastructure – sewer is in immediate need of attention
Toilet	Clean up, spruce up the community; improve the downtown and infrastructure
Shoe	Infrastructure improvements – water/sewer; community center, support school system, be an attractive community for young families and seniors
Shoe	Better community engagement/relationship between Villa Grove government and the community
Gym toilet	Downtown streetscape improvements; attract businesses, tourists, residents
Fish tank	Community center finished, wastewater, pump stations, and infrastructure addressed
Bread	Reservoir could be a big draw for town if updated and taken care of
Flower pot	Low income residents need assistance with issues (e.g., tenant union, food insecurity, etc.)
Clock	Plant seed for growth, branch out
Computer	Community center finished

Session II. Environmental Scanning Part I

Surrender or Lead

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 designed to initiate discussion and reveal hopes, perspectives, challenges, opportunities, and possible barriers based on the collective view of each participant’s group. The group’s responses were recorded and are reported below. The **bolded** and underlined sections are key phrases that the group provided in response to the exercise’s open-ended questions and prompts.

Group #1

1. We want to **excel**, but **need to overcome negative image/connotations**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **infrastructure** and **increased tax base** because **we need to grow**.
3. If it weren’t for **location**, we would **attract industry/business**.
4. We need to finally **focus on economic development**.
5. **Community building and assisted living facility** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #2

1. We want to **grow**, but **not go broke**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **growth** and **retention** because **revenue is needed to maintain core service delivery**.
3. If it weren’t for **limited financial resources**, we would **prosper**.
4. We need to finally **work together to achieve goals**.
5. **What the Council can accomplish** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #3

1. We want to **rebrand community**, but **maintain core values**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **utilities** and **community recreation** because **of their urgency**.
3. If it weren’t for **our commitment and willingness to improve**, we would **not be going through this process**.
4. We need to finally **address housing needs**.
5. **New community building** will have the biggest impact on the City in the coming 2-3 years.

Session III. Environmental Scanning Part II

Large Group S.W.O.T. 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 success of the City, both negatively and positively. Given the exploratory statements and challenges raised in the Surrender or Lead exercise, participants were then asked to identify what constraints and practical difficulties are likely to be encountered that will make it challenging to achieve the desired future state. These elements included both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, resources, etc. Furthermore, participants were asked to identify the organization'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 **threats (T)** lie ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? Those answers are captured next.

S.W.O.T. EXERCISE (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Internal

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School District • The people/community • Local businesses — stable (e.g., dentist, grocery store) • Good park and recreation program • Current leadership — open to progress • Emergency services (e.g., full-time police department, fire department) • Financially sound • Safe/low crime rate • Infrastructure — new water plant, sewer system improved water quality, alleyways • City staff and council • Oakland golf course — draws people in from surrounding communities, great demographic to capture • Streetscape plan • Secular community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trains — traffic delays • Community apathy • Previous leadership was reluctant to change • Waterway/flooding • Lack of diversity — might not feel as welcomed • Lack of social services • Housing stock, low housing value/appraisal • Maintenance of homes • Perception of the community (e.g., flood town) • Low property income • The County • Rental market (run-down) • Property maintenance and landlord issues — not enforceable by law/ordinance/issues • Lack of tenant association/union • Utilities — EPA mandates and standards • Stability of local businesses — especially the family owned • Lack of industry and manufacturing • Lack of a niche — something to draw people in

External

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown/local development (implement plan) • Proactive local government • Community center • Marketing • Community engagement • Be welcoming — offer more cultural diverse opportunities • Tenants union or similar — could reduce police calls for code violations/issues • Create/continue with CIP — stay on top of needs • Adding industry to the tax base (e.g., manufacturing, etc.) • Utilize the railroad in a positive way — market? businesses? activities? • Find the niche — who is Villa Grove? • Build on success of schools • Use golf course customers — market community, housing, schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 — impacts and response • Succession planning for businesses/farming • Family farms being bought up • Democratic Governor • Residents can be a challenge to progress — need to educate them on ideas/projects/changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vocal minority • Waterway — flooding • “Flood town” reputation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EAV issues • Wind farm — stopping growth east • State of Illinois budget crisis • Poorly maintained rental properties • County level collaboration/interaction can be difficult • Mayor not running again • Cost of needed infrastructure improvements coupled with emergency fixes needed • Economies of scale difficult with minimal growth

Session IV. Nominal Group Goal Identification

With the preceding workshop sessions as a sound foundation for goal-setting, the final workshop session was a healthy group discussion of goals and/or action items needed to achieve the future visions as expressed by the group. Agreed upon criteria were used to classify a goal as short- or long-term. The purpose of the exercise is to group goals of roughly the same type together so when prioritization occurs, the participants can avoid the problem of comparing “apples to oranges.”

The agreed upon criteria used for classifying goals as either short- or long-term involved the following: **Short-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway in the next one to three years. **Long-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway within a three to eight year timeframe.

To begin the process, participants returned to the groups they had worked with during the previous Surrender or Lead exercise. Each member was allotted time to highlight the three or four most important policy and program goals they thought the City should accomplish in the next one to three years. The groups then shared their short-term goals with the larger group. After some discussion, the small groups met again to establish long-term goals focused on a three to eight year timeframe. Again, those were then shared with the larger group for feedback. Goals that participants developed could be highly specific or general.

Open Group Discussion and Consolidation of Goals

This final phase of the discussion served as the forum for Council and staff members to discuss, evaluate, and debate the ideas and goals offered by each participant in the previous sessions. Participants were asked to give their opinions, evaluations, and judgments of the worthiness and value of different policy objectives. Participants were also asked to confirm each goal as short- or long-term, especially where similar goals were developed. In total, the group developed ten short-term goals and eleven long-term goals.

Post-Workshop:

Goal Prioritization and Council Ranking Exercise

After the workshop, each Council member was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The Council was provided with an online ranking tool where point values were assigned to each short- and long-term goal by individuals. The calculation of goal prioritization consisted of “forced ranking” where the ranking of each identified goal is averaged by the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal were given the 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 collective Council ratings provided.

The following illustration presents the dashboard of high, medium, and low priority levels for the short- and long-term strategic goals based on the consensus ranking exercise conducted by the Council (Figure 3). The goal priority dashboard demonstrates the most important strategic goals, tasks, and objectives for the Council and staff to address in the months and years ahead. For a review of the full list of the short- and long-term strategic goals combined and presented by priority level categories (high, medium, and low) please see [Appendix B](#).

The following color-coded dashboard graphic was created by using the average score provided by Council members’ individual rankings to determine each goal’s priority level.

Figure 3. Strategic Goals — Priority Dashboard

Short-term Prioritized Strategic Goals	Priority Level
Complete construction of the community building further enhancing the quality of life in Villa Grove	high
Explore strategies to develop diverse housing options attracting residents of all ages to the community (e.g., construct a new subdivision with single-family housing, develop senior-living housing options, clean up vacant/abandoned homes)	high
Determine and communicate final decision on the wastewater treatment plant and utilities	high
Implement short-term components of the streetscape plan to enhance beautification of Main Street	high
Develop a City-wide park improvement plan (including cleaning up the reservoir at John Leon park, Richmond Park, and improving the soccer fields) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore hosting travel tournaments at City parks to attract visitors and enhance revenue streams 	medium
Develop City-wide facility improvement plan (e.g., EMS building, digital signage, update water meter system, police station upgrades)	medium
Explore strategies for incorporating land and amenities into City limits for desirable, compatible, and acceptable uses	medium
Create a City-wide Information Technology plan to enhance technology systems and encourage usage (e.g., police technology and equipment upgrades, update the website, convert paper archives to digital records management system, offer more online forms for residents/businesses)	low
Undertake an organizational study analysis (e.g., review and update City ordinances, review staffing levels and compensation levels in all departments)	low
Develop a community marketing strategy to promote the City to potential residents of all ages, visitors, and current and future businesses	low

Long-term Prioritized Strategic Goals	Priority Level
Identify and implement strategies to attract and retain diverse businesses (small, large, manufacturing, industrial, etc.)	high
Implement capital infrastructure plans including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring a railroad overpass connecting to the Regional Aquatic Center • Improving bike path connectivity • Replacing sewer lines • Phasing out concrete • Improving the drainage system • Establishing thru streets at Pheasant Point 	high
Develop a City-wide succession plan and identify areas for improved efficiencies and training opportunities	high
Further develop and implement phase 2 of the community center including wide-ranging programs for the community building (reinvigorated and expanded adult recreation programs, youth programs, more active senior programs)	high
Implement long-term components of the streetscape plan to enhance beautification of Main Street	medium
Explore strategies to operate a municipal court where ticketing and fining authority would be a City undertaking	medium
Implement the City-wide park improvement plan	medium
Implement the community marketing strategy created and identify ways to improve community engagement	medium
Implement City-wide Information Technology plan (including county-wide law enforcement records management system)	low
Revisit strategic plan to identify progress and need for updating on a regular basis	low
Explore strategies to attract a lodging facility (motel, hotel, bed and breakfast)	low

Strategic Priority Areas

Ultimately, five key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process highlighting activities and initiatives that the City should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below [in no particular order] and a brief explanation of each is also included.



Economic Development

Economic development is a great tool to help generate growth in the community. Attracting industry and businesses, both large and small, to the community can enhance the services offered to residents, increase the tax base, and promote strategic growth. It is important to focus on being business-friendly and emphasize retention as much as recruitment efforts. Growing your own and supporting local go hand in hand.

Quality of Life

The quality of life is essential to any community, regardless of size. The City of Villa Grove should continue to strive towards developing quality housing options, recreational opportunities, and a thriving business community to offer an experience that is unique to Villa Grove. Villa Grove could become known as the community that has opportunities for all.

Organizational Development and Advancement

Staying up-to-date on the latest trends and current technology is imperative to operating a well-run organization. Technology updates, succession planning, and reviewing the City's codes and ordinances are a few undertakings the City can work on to increase its effectiveness and efficiency and ultimately enhance the quality of services being delivered.

Infrastructure Improvements

An essential public service is ensuring quality physical infrastructure of the community, including roads, sidewalks, water, and sewer among others. The City should undertake adequate planning and proper funding to ensure the continued maintenance of the City's infrastructure. This will add to the quality of life for residents and aid in attracting and retaining development.

Community Branding

The City of Villa Grove is a small, quaint town with its own distinctive character. It is important that the City identifies their own brand and markets the assets that make Villa Grove unique among its neighboring communities to promote itself as the place to be for residents, businesses and visitors alike. Initiatives like this can be costly but exploring options such as a high school marketing project, local college/university assistance, a community contest, or engaging someone in the community who may be involved in marketing can be helpful strategies.

Conclusion

The value of the strategic planning process will only be realized if it is used as an active working guide to both the City's leadership team and staff as the issues explored during the strategic planning process are pursued. It is designed to capture the content of the discussions and assist the City in further developing implementation plans for their high priority goals. In the City's ever evolving operating environment, adapting to the changes in demographics, community trends, technology advancements, best practices, and development opportunities among others will be paramount. The strategic plan is meant to be a road map 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, modifications or a renewal of the process to ensure the City consistently recognizes and meets the changes in community needs and expectations.

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 and a management team that is looking ahead and committed to strategic thinking and planning. One noted observer summarized the challenges of organizational progress this way:

*“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change,
and change amid order...”*

— A.N. Whitehead

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



Melissa Henriksen and Jeanna Ballard, Project Coordinators and Session Facilitators

Appendix A:

Focus Group Sessions — Summary Themes & Responses

Appendix A: Focus Groups — Feedback Summary

One of the key analytical techniques used for focus group notes is an analyst's search for key phrases, words, or terms that emerged during the focus group sessions. Coding is done by analysts' individual readings of the data, followed by key term searches with the aid of document software. The words and phrases listed below are the results of the study team's analysis of the collected focus group notes. At a glance, the reader can discover what terms were used or referred to most frequently in the feedback notes. Using individual analyst's coding, the researcher identifies terms that recur across groups and across questions. The results are revealing in that, they highlight 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/outreach sessions. The focus groups 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 Council and Senior Leadership Team to consider during the strategic planning workshop sessions.

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

1. How would you describe the City of Villa Grove to a stranger or someone who doesn't live or work here?
2. If you left Villa Grove tomorrow, and didn't return for 10-15 years, what do you think you'll see, or what do you hope you'll see, when you return?
3. What do you like best about Villa Grove? Related to that, what are the strengths/greatest assets?
4. Can you identify areas or topics in need of attention or improvement? Related to that, what are the weaknesses/greatest needs in Villa Grove? Challenges?
5. What are/should be the top priorities for the City over the next 3-5 years?
6. If you could change or initiate one key item or thing about the City, what would it be?

Overall Themes

The data below were derived from the analysis of the bundled focus group data. Using qualitative analysis techniques such as reviews of phrases, developing sorting categories, and conducting word counts, the following comment themes, topics, and phrases surfaced.

Environmental Scanning – Overarching Themes



Community Growth and Development

- Work to enhance community growth — attract new residents, more housing developments, local businesses to help bring in other sources of revenue and make the community thrive
- Proactive planning — manageable and strategic growth, make sure the community has the capacity to meet the new growth (e.g., emergency services, city services, etc.)
- Ensure that the community stays true to maintaining financial sustainability while working towards growth and development
- Work to attract more diversity, open to different cultures
- Community growth to help turn some current liabilities into assets (e.g., railroad)
- Create a space that is comfortable to both live and work (have the technology and connectivity available)
- Continue to develop south end of town — make it comfortable and an inviting place to be

Business Attraction and Retention

- Continue on the right track with the downtown development
- Revitalize Main St. — have music playing, booming businesses, diverse dining options, theater showing movies, etc.
- Dedicate a person to attract businesses, think bigger/outside the box
- Attract businesses that are also sustainable (encourage shop local)
- Having a downtown destination, draw people in, provide a stronger community feel
- Attract more manufacturing places to the area and industrial park development
- Have a place for visitors to stay overnight (e.g., Motel or Bed and Breakfast)
- Use the city's communication platforms (e.g., social media, website) to promote businesses and the overall community

Community Appearance and Beautification

- Property maintenance/up-keep across the whole community, a lot of abandoned homes, absentee landlords, etc.
- More efforts directed at cleaning up the community and enforcing codes and ordinances
- Keeping the City desirable, following through with projects, beautifying the community
- Improve vacant lots — turn into green space (e.g., mini parks, community gardens, etc.) — help with community appeal and beautification
- Look into working with a property manager to help clean up some housing properties — refurbish older homes, enhance overall community appeal/appearance

Communication and Community Engagement

- More positive interaction, transparency and communication between the City and the community
- Work to improve community involvement and attract more volunteers
- More involvement, support, and communication between the City's leadership and the local businesses (fair and consistent treatment across the different businesses)
- Improve responsiveness to the community, respect different viewpoints, seek out different opinions and perspectives
- Allow for more initiatives to be community-driven
- Enhance community awareness and information sharing on important City projects and initiatives (lack of centralized communication platform/network)

Recreation Opportunities

- Need to have more opportunities/activities for kids to do (pre-teen and teen), will help attract more young families
- Enhance connectivity throughout the community (walking, biking paths)
- Community center development completed and in use
- Host sporting and community events, will help generate revenue
- Have more summer recreation teams and programs
- Enhance recreation/sport services and amenities (e.g., track, upgrade fields, swimming pool, etc.)
- Look into having a public golf course
- Maintain the great park system, and look to grow and utilize the current facilities

Infrastructure Improvements

- Improve City-wide roads and street repairs (e.g., new subdivision Pheasant Point)
- Upgrade school facilities and potentially expand to meet anticipated community growth
- Resolve the issues with the wastewater treatment plant – get a plan in place and communicate/share that plan and options
- Repave the old railroad tracks into biking and walking trails
- Update recreation facilities (near grocery store)
- Explore how to resolve the traffic issue stemming from the railroad (help support local businesses, explore alternative routes, over/underpass, etc.)

Overall Strengths/Assets

- Great school system (offer things surrounding schools don't — forensics class)
- Good amenities (e.g., local grocery store, hardware store, etc.) — can find everything you need despite its size
- Friendly, open, welcoming, tight-knit community
- Safe — feel comfortable letting kids walk around town, great place to raise a family
- Great parks and recreation
- Sense of community/pride — people pour their heart and soul into the community and are dedicated to improving the town
- Community values — hard work, teamwork (integral piece of the community)
- Community moving in a positive direction
- Unique local businesses (e.g., winery)
- Community events and festivals (e.g., plaza downtown to host events, draw people in)
- Strategic location — near bigger town amenities and employment options
- Taking steps to grow and attract new residents/families
- Low taxes, affordable housing, TIF districts
- Has land and old buildings that can be utilized for potential future use
- Have all the emergency services
- Community values its history, the youth and the elderly

Overall Opportunities for Improvement

- Enhance housing options (for all phases and stages of life, assisted living facility, low-income)
- The smell of the community (well-water sourced from limestone)
- Improve the reputation — known for the railroad and flooding
- Re-establish the building and trade program at the school — could help with property improvements
- Expand open/outside of the box thinking
- More intergovernmental collaboration with surrounding rural communities — leverage resources
- Better communication between the City and the community
- Property maintenance/code enforcement – improve overall community appearance
- Lack of opportunity, not a lot of employment options within the community, not much for the kids to do (e.g., no community building, indoor gym, etc.)
- Great economical divide – need to look for more services for that demographic
- More social services (mental health, physical therapy)
- Capitalize on opportunities/current assets to reinvent the City
- Enhance budget transparency and accountability

Appendix B:

Combined Short- and Long-Term Strategic Goals Prioritized

Combined Short- and Long-Term Prioritized Strategic Goals

The following color-coded dashboard graphic was created by using the average score provided by Council members' individual rankings to determine each goal's priority level.

Prioritized Short- and Long-term Strategic Goals	Priority Level
Complete construction of the community building further enhancing the quality of life in Villa Grove	high
Explore strategies to develop diverse housing options attracting residents of all ages to the community (e.g., construct a new subdivision with single-family housing, develop senior-living housing options, clean up vacant/abandoned homes)	high
Determine and communicate final decision on the wastewater treatment plant and utilities	high
Implement short-term components of the streetscape plan to enhance beautification of Main Street	high
Identify and implement strategies to attract and retain diverse businesses (small, large, manufacturing, industrial, etc.)	high
Implement capital infrastructure plans including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring a railroad overpass connecting to the Regional Aquatic Center • Improving bike path connectivity • Replacing sewer lines • Phasing out concrete • Improving the drainage system • Establishing thru streets at Pheasant Point 	high
Develop a City-wide succession plan and identify areas for improved efficiencies and training opportunities	high
Further develop and implement phase 2 of the community center including wide-ranging programs for the community building (reinvigorated and expanded adult recreation programs, youth programs, more active senior programs)	high
Develop a City-wide park improvement plan (including cleaning up the reservoir at John Leon park, Richmond Park, and improving the soccer fields) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore hosting travel tournaments at City parks to attract visitors and enhance revenue streams 	medium
Develop City-wide facility improvement plan (e.g., EMS building, digital signage, update water meter system, police station upgrades)	medium
Explore strategies for incorporating land and amenities into City limits for desirable, compatible, and acceptable uses	medium
Implement long-term components of the streetscape plan to enhance beautification of Main Street	medium
Explore strategies to operate a municipal court where ticketing and fining authority would be a City undertaking	medium
Implement the City-wide park improvement plan	medium
Implement the community marketing strategy created and identify ways to improve community engagement	medium

Create a City-wide Information Technology plan to enhance technology systems and encourage usage (e.g., police technology and equipment upgrades, update the website, convert paper archives to digital records management system, offer more online forms for residents/businesses)	low
Undertake an organizational study analysis (e.g., review and update City ordinances, review staffing levels and compensation levels in all departments)	low
Develop a community marketing strategy to promote the City to potential residents of all ages, visitors, and current and future businesses	low
Implement City-wide Information Technology plan (including county-wide law enforcement records management system)	low
Revisit strategic plan to identify progress and need for updating on a regular basis	low
Explore strategies to attract a lodging facility (motel, hotel, bed and breakfast)	low