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# **BUFFALO STRATEGIC PLAN**

**APRIL 2025**

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# STRATEGIC PLAN

## PROCESS

On March 27 and April 10, 2025, the Buffalo City Council and staff leadership held strategic planning sessions to develop both long-term strategies and short-term goals for the organization in 2025. The sessions focused on two key areas of strategic planning: long-term vision and short-term goal setting. The group explored the elements of the long-term vision, revisiting and updating strategy statements to define that vision. Through discussions, participants reflected on strengths, challenges, potential threats, and emerging opportunities. This process resulted in the brainstorming and development of potential short-term goals. A prioritization process followed that provides a recommended priority ranking for these action items. The City Council will now review the outcomes of these sessions as part of adopting the 2025 Strategic Plan.

## LONG TERM VISION

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

Prior to the session, participants were asked to describe their hopes for the City and organization in the year 2050. This activity produced a "dream board" outlining the characteristics and qualities the City Council aspires to embody. The participants then reviewed draft core strategy areas based on the input from this activity as provided by the facilitator. The group refined the strategy areas by constructively working to modify the strategic objectives that support each core strategy area. The strategies provide consistent and stable organizational priorities for the years to come, and serve as organizational guideposts for day-to-day action, policy formation, and program decision-making. It is anticipated that the core strategies may be modified over the long term, but generally all agreed as to the key priorities of the leadership team.

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

Following the presentation of draft core strategies and strategic objectives, the full group reviewed and discussed the body of work, and the group offered amendments to the proposed statements. Without objection and subject to further modification prior to adoption, the group agreed to the following draft core strategies and strategic objectives:

### **Core Strategies and Strategic Objectives**

The City of Buffalo is committed to leading and guiding the City towards the following long-term Core Strategies and Strategic Objectives:

#### **1. Maintain Small-Town Feel**

- a. Living spaces for all walks of life.
- b. Accessible, available, and approachable public services and City Hall.
- c. Maintain a close-knit, welcoming atmosphere through community events, neighborhood engagement, and public spaces where people can gather.
- d. Ensure access to high-quality parks, trails, and recreational amenities that serve all ages.
- e. Enhance relationships and support community partners wherever and whenever possible, including schools, churches, business organizations, non-profits, athletic associations, etc.

#### **2. Balanced Growth**

- a. Attract and retain a mix of businesses, large and small, to strengthen the tax base, utility services, provide local jobs, and opportunities for all generations.
- b. Foster commercial and industrial development through expanding municipal services while preserving the community's character.
- c. Encourage a balanced housing market with options to meet the needs of all residents.

#### **3. Safe, Welcoming, and Connected Community**

- a. Prioritize public safety initiatives to ensure residents feel secure in their homes, businesses, and public spaces.
- b. Foster a respectful atmosphere where all residents feel valued and included through community events, public engagement, and volunteer opportunities.
- c. Encourage civic participation and strong neighborhood connections to build a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for the community's success.
- d. Support community connectivity by investing and executing on a variety of communications mediums to engage with residents.

#### **4. A Destination for Living, Working, and Visiting**

- a. Develop vibrant retail, dining, entertainment and outdoor recreation options that attract and retain residents and visitors.
- b. Enhance community and lakefront areas to create a unique and inclusive atmosphere.
- c. Invest in infrastructure and technology that supports long-term sustainability and accessibility.
- d. Grow a sense of pride, excitement, and energy in all of Buffalo, including downtown.

#### **5. Innovative and Forward-Thinking Governance**

- a. Ensure transparent decision-making, clear communication, and accessibility of staff and information sources for residents.

- b. Maintain a fiscally sound government with competitive taxes and utility rates, responsible use of debt, and a budget that reflects community priorities.
- c. Embrace ingenuity and adaptability in city operations to efficiently serve the community's evolving needs.

#### **6. Community-Centered Service and Engagement**

- a. Foster a culture of responsiveness, respect, and teamwork among city staff to provide efficient, high-quality services.
- b. Provide opportunities and engagement for community, such as open houses and other involvement methods.
- c. Make residents aware City services are available through different styles of communication.
- d. Ensure all residents have access to city services, support, and resources, making interactions with the city seamless and helpful.

#### **7. Strong and Resilient Operations**

- a. Plan for long-term financial sustainability while investing in infrastructure, public safety, and essential services.
- b. Promote and lead environmentally responsible practices to maintain parks, green spaces, and a clean, livable environment by focusing on key elements, such as water quality.
- c. Maintain and empower a workplace culture that values employees, encourages professional growth, and fosters a sense of purpose in public service.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

As the session moved into the short-term actions phase, a key activity was conducting an environmental scan of the City and organization. This scan aimed to assess both the external (community) and internal (organization) environments from multiple perspectives. Throughout the work session, participants were regularly prompted with questions to guide their analysis of Buffalo's strengths, challenges, and emerging trends. These discussions were conducted in small groups and presented to the whole, where participants explored issues and opportunities facing the City in the years ahead. The insights gained from this environmental scan formed the foundation for developing the organization's goals later in the session.

The questions posed throughout the session included the following:

- What do you most appreciate about the City of Buffalo?
- What is going well? What are areas of momentum within the City?
- What challenges are you facing or see coming?
- What trends/opportunities do you see coming?
- What threats could be on the horizon?

These questions and discussions helped frame the present status of the City and the organization, setting the stage for goal setting to meet the challenges and opportunities in a fashion consistent with the City's long-term vision.

## SHORT-TERM GOALS

The next portion of the Strategic Planning process was to develop a short-term goals platform and workplan to guide the organization in the coming years. Participants were offered the opportunity to present draft goals that addressed any of the following objectives - short-term actions that lead to a core strategy or strategic objective, goals to address weaknesses, opportunities, or potential impacts discussed during the assessment process, or other goals that individual members viewed to be important for the City. The process encouraged the brainstorming of SMART goals - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (2-3 years) - and objectives that would support the core strategies and vision.

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

- High Priority Goals - goals that were identified by at least three members of the Council and are the primary focus of the organization over the next two years.
- Opportunity Goals - goals that were identified as a priority that should be pursued as opportunities present themselves.
- High Priority/Committed – goals/projects that are already underway and have been committed to by the City.
- Other Brainstormed Goals – suggested areas of focused based on the strategic planning process that should serve as a resource list, but goals that did not rise to the priority of the previous three categories.

### **Proposed 2025-26 Short-Term Goals**

**High Priority** - goals that are the top priority of the organization in the coming two-year period.

1. Facilitate and prioritize business development, including growth of the industrial park, by expanding BRE programs, establishing an economic development authority, marketing business benefits, and attracting additional short-term lodging options.
2. Conduct staffing analysis, develop plan, and consider options for reducing consulting/contract related costs, such as consultant engineering, contracted building inspections, and facility/vehicle maintenance.
3. Examine utility governance structure and establish a Public Utilities Commission.
4. Develop and invest in Strategic Communications Plan.
  - a. Enhance public communication and education of city business, especially finances.
  - b. Hire communications/community engagement staff.
  - c. Utilize available communication mediums.
  - d. Develop professional branding to promote advantages and benefits of Buffalo.
5. Implement strategies and actions to enhance downtown as a destination.
  - a. Capitalize on assets and encourage improvements that draw people to downtown, such as a marina on Buffalo Lake, redevelopment of the former cinema building, and unique experiences.
  - b. Consider programs that incentivize greater private investment in business and restaurants.
6. Facilitate the successful redevelopment of the former Wright County Government Center site.

7. Support and partner with Wright Technical Center to expand job/career training opportunities and find synergies with municipal needs.
8. Pursue airport expansion to support business development.

**Opportunity** - goals that have organizational support, to be pursued when opportunity is available.

- Conduct financial and comprehensive planning for infrastructure systems, complete a utility rate study, and develop a model for long-term sustainability.
- Complete connections of trail system to serve as both community transportation and market as a regional attraction.
- Expand programs and use of Civic Center/Recreation Center that generate additional revenue to be self-sufficient, including a potential local option sales tax.
- Implement facility needs study and consider municipal campus options.

**High Priority/Committed** – goals/projects that are already underway and have been committed to by the City.

- Community Center/Splash Pad
- Veterans' Park relocation
- Electric Substation #2
- AML metering
- Buildout of municipal fiber system

**Other Brainstormed Goals** – other identified opportunities or potential future areas of focus.

- Study and consider franchise fees for street maintenance projects.
- Develop plan, implement, Highway 55 overpass – connecting the town.
- Develop a Lake Improvement Plan.
- Enhance professional development opportunities and investment in staff education.
- Prioritize and invest in green infrastructure investments – sustainable both in terms of economic and environmental.
- Develop rental inspections program.
- Develop and implement a Citizens Academy.

## NEXT STEPS

The next step in the goal-setting process is to develop action plans for each short-term goal and establish benchmarks to measure progress. A key recommendation is identifying measurable outcomes to evaluate the City's success in achieving each goal. These benchmarks will also help guide the creation of action plans to reach desired results. It's important to revisit the goals periodically to hold both the Council and staff accountable. Additionally, integrating these goals into the organization's processes will further drive success. It was a pleasure working with Buffalo again to assist your team in establishing a strategic plan for the years ahead.