

WDM 2036

The Most Vibrant
Suburban City in North America

December 2, 2015



Next Generation Consulting

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AN OPEN LETTER TO WEST DES MOINES



Rebecca Ryan
Founder, Next Generation Consulting, Inc.

One hundred years ago in 1915 an Englishman named Jack Prince built a one-mile oval race track in Valley Junction, designed to let race cars break the city's 10 mph speed limit ten times over. The wooden track was made of 980,000 feet of 2x4's laid on edge. It was one of only 24 in the U.S. and had seating for over 10,000 people.

On August 7, the eyes of the world watched in anticipation of the fastest 300-mile auto race in history, which promised the winner a \$10,000 purse. Before it was over, the crowd of 7,000 saw one car lunge over the guardrail and another cartwheel into the infield, fatally injuring a mechanic. Ralph Mulford took home the prize, but the experience left a bad taste in the mouth of the locals, and the track was closed two years later. The wood was salvaged and used to construct buildings in Valley Junction.

I love this story about West Des Moines. It speaks to the city's openness to outsiders, its willingness to take risks, and—if things don't work out as planned—its ability to repurpose what has value. This has been West Des Moines' history for over 100 years.

Today, we start a new journey, charting a 20-year future for a city that has come so far. Just think back. Twenty years ago the Jordan Creek Town Center didn't exist. Neither did the public Library. Windows 95 had just been released, Google was only three years old, and Facebook? That wasn't even a thing yet.

What will the next 20 years bring? Change, for sure. But through the foresight process we used to develop this plan, I am confident that you have a strategy that will make West Des Moines future ready and one of North America's best cities.

These pages outline new ambitions for West Des Moines' future. Some are bold, and some may have to be repurposed. But it's in the DNA of West Des Moines to experiment and reinvent. You've been doing it for over a hundred years.

Here we go,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Ryan', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

THE VISION

**WEST DES MOINES IS THE MOST VIBRANT
SUBURBAN CITY IN NORTH AMERICA**

STRATEGY 1

WEST DES MOINES' TOP LEADERS WORK TOGETHER ON COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

In 1916, the residents of West Des Moines voted 2 to 1 in favor of building a new, \$50,000 high school (\$1.14 M in today's dollars.) As part of school board policy, only first-class, college-educated teachers were hired. By 1919, the rooms of Valley Junction high school were filled.

Throughout West Des Moines' history, the community has banded together around common values and found a way to make them come to life. The example above was accomplished during a terrible economic downturn, when 600 workers were unemployed.

As West Des Moines continues to grow, its challenges will become more complex. Without a concerted effort, silos could become rigid, and communication could breakdown. To be future ready and resilient, West Des Moines needs coordinated, cross-sectional leadership.



"I wish that West Des Moines had a formal, private-public "think tank" that is formal in nature, meets regularly, and coordinates responses to trends with our elected bodies." - Participant from strategic foresight workshop, September 2015

West Des Moines needs a government, education, and business Leadership Advisory Board that will work together on the area's most pressing challenges and most promising opportunities.

The following plan was designed by a cross section of public and private sector leaders, in part to address this strategy and ensure that West Des Moines is future ready:

Strategy 1 | West Des Moines' Top Leaders Work Together on Community Priorities

Vision: The area's top government, education and business leaders have high levels of trust in each other, and work collaboratively to address the area's most promising opportunities and most pressing challenges.

Success Metrics	5-Year Milestones (2021)	10-Year Milestones (2026)
1.1 Create a CEO-level "Leadership Advisory Board" that includes leaders of large and small businesses, government leaders, e.g. mayor and city manager, and top education leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Leaders are completely aware of each others' needs and limitations •Advisory Board has set a clearly defined common agenda/vision to achieve specific goals •Identify needs of employers and create curriculum/school tailored to employer's needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Advisory Board achieves or implements three key goals that strengthen the community and the business environment
1.2 The Leadership Advisory Board reviews <i>West Des Moines 2036</i> on an annual basis to record successes, redefine priorities, and ensure the community is vibrant and future ready.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Over half of all community priorities as outlined in <i>West Des Moines 2036</i> have active workgroups and achieved significant milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •West Des Moines 2045 is underway, to prepare the region for the next 20 years
Who's involved? West Des Moines City Council, Mayor, city manager, key city staff, chamber, business leaders from large and small companies and key WDM industries, education leaders from DMACC, WDM Schools and Waukee schools		
More information needed: Identify those who should serve		
Next action: Form these two advisory boards and get Mayor's buy-in		
Recommended Resources:		
<p>➔ Doing Well by Doing Good: A Leader's Guide by McKinsey. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/social_sector/doing_well_by_doing_good_a_leaders_guide. This is based on the successful cross-sectional leadership in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN</p>		

STRATEGY 2

WEST DES MOINES IS FINANCIALLY STRONG & SOLVENT

West Des Moines is currently the only city in Iowa with both a Moody's and a Standard & Poor AAA bond rating. S&P reports, "West Des Moines has a very strong economy, strong city management and financial policies, and strong budgetary performance and flexibility."¹

Financially, the City is doing well. Yet when a panel of West Des Moines leaders were asked, *"Thinking about West Des Moines 20 years from now, what do local governments need to be paying attention to right now, to secure their future?"*



Their unanimous response: **resource sustainability.**

They're right. Now is the time to lengthen West Des Moines' lead, and ensure adequate resources for current and future opportunities, including many outlined in this 20-year vision.

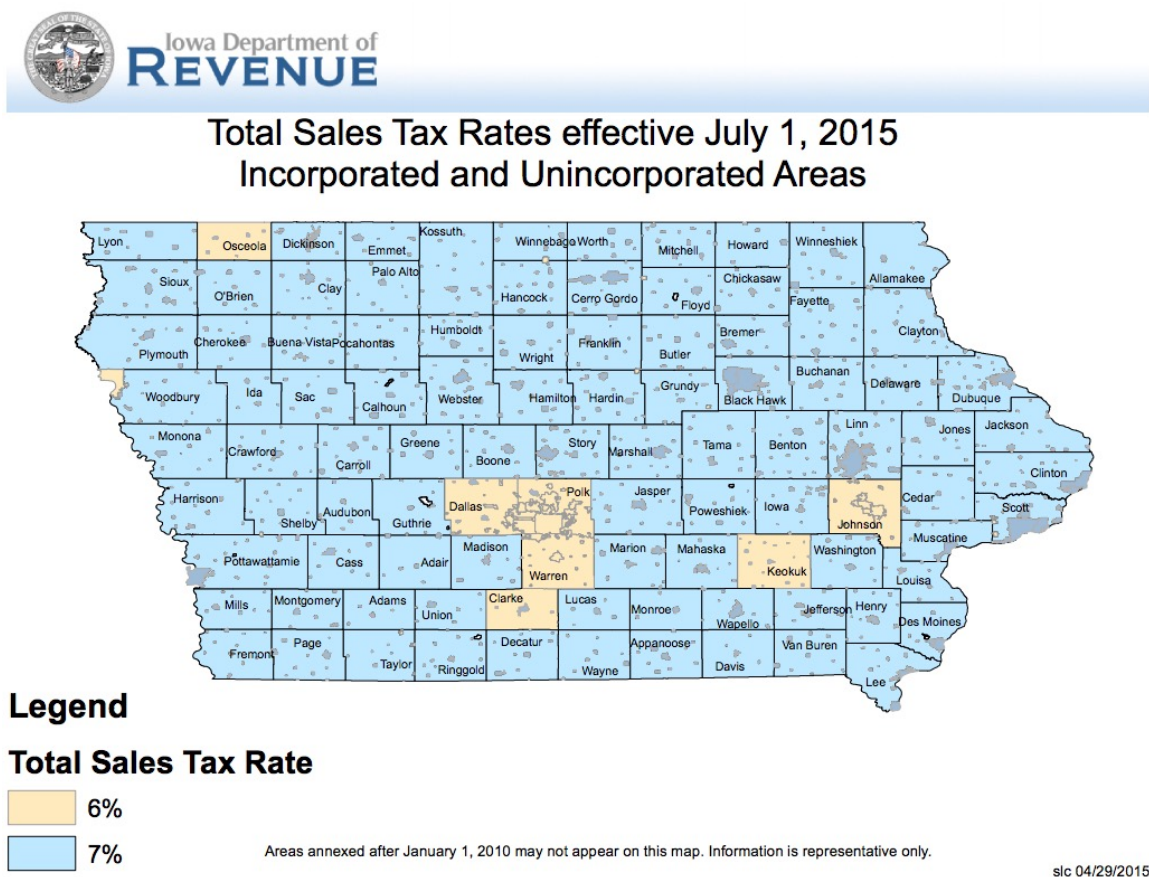
There are several resource options that West Des Moines could add, to strengthen its position:

- Continue to develop internal efficiencies, fostered by an innovative culture.
- Develop public/private partnerships and regional partnerships, modeled after WRA, MPO, MWA, West Com, West Pet and others
- A \$1-\$2.00 per night hotel tax. This tax is paid by guests (not local residents) who stay at hotels and motels in the city. These taxes could help cover costs of funding maintenance and infrastructure required to host 20 million visitors per year to the Jordan Creek Town Center.
- Work with local, regional, and state partners to find ways to work together in economic, environmental, public safety, transportation and other efforts.
- Many communities are experimenting with behavioral economics, a means of encouraging "good behavior" like paying one's taxes on time.

¹ Des Moines Business record, accessed on Nov. 15, 2015: <http://businessrecord.com/Content/Default/-All-Latest-News/Article/West-Des-Moines-credit-rating-is-tops-in-two-books/-3/248/67888#ixzz3sWFY8y>

→ The Local Option Sales Tax (LOST). Currently, 92% of Iowa jurisdictions have the option to ask voters to pay an extra penny on every dollar spent. Only West Des Moines and a handful of other Iowa jurisdictions don't have this option², as Figure 1 shows. The penny tax would add up to \$7 million a year in new revenue for the City of West Des Moines.

Figure 1: Iowa Counties and Jurisdictions that have the Local Option sales Tax (blue) versus those that don't (yellow)



Using any of these resource options could increase resources available for public safety, public works, property tax relief, and the kind of investments that will attract and keep great employers and a world class workforce.

² Emily Schettler, "Bill would help cities pass local option sales tax," *The Des Moines Register*, March 16, 2014.

The following plan was designed by a cross section of public and private sector leaders, in part to address this strategy and ensure that West Des Moines is future ready:

Strategy 2 | West Des Moines is Financially Strong & Solvent

Vision: The City is able to leverage its strengths during difficult financial times

Success Metrics	5-Year Milestones (2021)	10-Year Milestones (2026)
2.1 Continue to strive for internal efficiencies, fostered by an innovative culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The City has a continual improvement process in place that measures efficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The City has a public and private partners who help the city achieve efficiencies
2.2 Stable balance sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maintain *high bond rating •Pass local option sales tax •Explore and implement best practices in behavioral economics, to nudge citizens, businesses and others to behave in a financially responsible way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reduce the property tax burden by increasing other forms of revenues, including those outlined on the previous page
2.3 Maintain property development *balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Single family v. multifamily •Commercial v. residential •Explore options to adjust the 1975 tax levy limits to more current levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increase sustainable development while maintaining a balance of services •Offer public programs for local small businesses, to retain them and help them grow
2.4 Explore public-private partnerships for major investments, e.g. infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Continue and/or strengthen public/private and regional partnerships including WRA, MPO, MWA, West Com, West Pet and others 	
Who's involved? Local, state and federal elected officials; community leaders; and school officials		
More information needed: Define specific ranges for milestones, where *noted		
Next action: Assign this strategy to the appropriate group, which may be a cross section of municipal employees, electeds, and local business owners.		

Recommended Resources:

- Cities at Work, a guide to progressive policies to raise municipal revenues efficiently and fairly, https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/COW_05RaiseNeededRevenue.pdf
- What Works Cities, an initiative by Bloomberg Philanthropies to help cities use big data to drive high quality/high result decision, including the use of behavioral economics: <http://www.bloomberg.org/program/government-innovation/what-works-cities/>
- The Next Big Things: The Next 20 Years in Local Government by the Alliance for Innovation includes best practices and case studies in public-private partnerships: http://transformgov.org/en/research/the_next_big_things

STRATEGY 3

“QUALITY OF LIFE” IS THE NORTH STAR FOR WEST DES MOINES

The North Star is famous for holding nearly still in the sky while the entire northern sky moves around it. This makes it popular as a guiding light for travelers.

“Quality of Life” is a North Star for smart communities that want to attract and retain great companies, talent, and families. Quality of Life is valued by citizens regardless of the state of the economy, the diversity of citizens, or the invasiveness of technology. “Quality of Life” has made West Des Moines popular for families and businesses and will continue to matter for the next generation. Yet, there are concerns:



I am concerned that West Des Moines doesn't have a real sense of community due to the perception of suburbs. Is there some way to develop a 'cool' downtown/metro feel in West Des Moines, a place where young people can lift in lofts, apartments, etc. [and is also] affordable as they start their careers out of college? - West Des Moines resident and parent

Quality of life can be measured. Research among America's best places to live show the following seven factors make up “quality of life.”

Vitality How healthy is West Des Moines? This index accounts for air and water quality, parks, trails and recreation areas, and the overall wellbeing of the community.

Earning Talented workers expect to have multiple jobs in their lifetimes and value a community with a breadth and depth of occupational options, plus support for entrepreneurial ventures.



Learning How smart is West Des Moines? Young knowledge workers want to live in communities where education is valued and accessible – for themselves and their children.

Social Capital Young professionals value living in diverse communities. This index evaluates West Des Moines' diversity, its racial profile, inclusion and care of minorities, and its commitment to broad-based young professionals organizations.

Cost of Lifestyle Can I afford to live in West Des Moines? Young talent are normally in the early years of their earning potential and are carrying enormous college debt loads. Affordability is key. This index includes all the variables in the national cost of living index, which includes a roof over the head, food on the table, and a ride to work, plus a few others.

After Hours There's more to life than work. This is the index that tallies all the things to do and places to go after five.

Around Town How easy is it to get around West Des Moines? Out of West Des Moines? Here we look at how much time workers spend in traffic, and how connected West Des Moines is via mass transit and air travel.

How might West Des Moines' quality of life compare to its rivals, or its peers? And what can the community focus on, to lengthen West Des Moines' lead in this area, and ensure that the next generation enjoys the same high quality of life?

Strategy 3 | Quality of Life is the North Star in West Des Moines

Vision: West Des Moines has and maintains high standards for “Quality of Life”

Success Metrics	5-Year Milestones (2021)	10-Year Milestones (2026)
3.1 Appoint a Quality of Life “kitchen cabinet” (a cross section of generations, ethnicities, occupations - including entrepreneurs- and new- and long-time residents.) The kitchen cabinet will informally advise the Mayor and the Leadership Advisory Board on Quality of Life improvements that will have a measurable effect on the city’s reputation as the most vibrant city in N. America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •West Des Moines has calculated its “Quality of Life” scores compared to five or more “Best places to live”, and has a plan to increase its scores in its highest-scoring indexes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The community has made measurable, visible progress on achieving its QOL goals. These may include: community facilities that add to the area’s quality of life, a professional sports team; increased cultural amenities; increase in youth sports programs; investments in public art, or other priorities determined by citizens. •West Des Moines improves its scores in two of the seven indexes outlined on the previous page
3.2 West Des Moines wins national awards for its commitment to quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Quality of Life “kitchen cabinet” is recognized for its innovative approach by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the Alliance for Innovation or a similar national organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •West Des Moines has completed one capital project, e.g. complete streets, that have a measurable impact on citizens’ reported quality of life •West Des Moines is an innovator in the implementation of “urban villages,” a means to retrofit suburban communities and make them feel more walkable and connected.
3.3 “Quality of life” is the number one reason citizens report staying in West Des Moines, as measured by the citizen survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The City has codified “quality of life” standards into its development and comprehensive plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •West Des Moines is listed as the #1 city in America by Money magazine, jumping 93 places from its 2008 place. The city’s commitment to “quality of life” is listed in the article, as the reason it’s on the list
Who’s involved? Mayor, residents who volunteer to serve on the QOL kitchen cabinet, key City staff (i.e. parks and rec, planning, economic development)		
More information needed: Baseline metrics of West Des Moines’ current Quality of Life scores		
Next action: Design an application for citizens to apply for the Mayor’s Quality of Life Advisory Board		

Recommended Resources:

- How to Measure Quality of Life, free tools offered by NEXT Generation Consulting: <http://www.nextgenerationconsulting.com/how-to-measure-quality-of-life/>
- Two successive Cincinnati mayors have successfully used their “Young Professionals Kitchen Cabinet” to promote the city as vibrant and thriving. Learn more: <http://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/mayor-john-cranley-cooks-up-young-professionals-kitchen-cabinet-to-promote-vibrant-thriving-city-fo>
- Sustainable Seattle’s Urban Villages, which seeks to build “urban villages” around hubs of activity including in suburban areas. A primer is here: <http://www.theurbanist.org/2015/02/04/measuring-success-on-the-urban-villages-strategy-part-1-what-its-all-about/>. Read more about Sustainable Seattle’s Neighborhood Assessment Project here: http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cs/groups/pan/@pan/documents/web_informational/p2233677.pdf

STRATEGY 4 | WEST DES MOINES IS A LEADER IN SUSTAINABILITY

In October, 2015 the City of West Des Moines adopted a Strategic Framework to guide the staff's work and the upcoming comprehensive planning process. The first guiding principle is:

Establish a Legacy Community: If we are to serve as one of the nation's most valued communities in which to live, work, learn and play, we must stand the test of time—meaning our work must always value healthy social, economic, and natural resources.

This last part, *valuing our natural resources in order to stand the test of time* is the rationale for why West Des Moines must become a leader in sustainability.

What is sustainability? The original definition of sustainable development comes from the 1987 Brundtland Report, developed by the World Commission on Environment and Development:



Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

With this in mind, and knowing that the predictions for the Midwest include more severe storms, which will require greater community resilience, the plan on the following page combines the ideas from a cross section of public and private sector leaders with those put forth by the West Des Moines City Staff 2026 Strategic Framework.

Strategy 4 | West Des Moines is a Leader in Sustainability

Vision: West Des Moines is a climate-resilient and sustainable community

Success Metrics	5-Year Milestones (2021)	10-Year Milestones (2026)
4.1 Environmentally sensitive areas are protected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All areas have been mapped, and appropriate policy and/or infrastructure improvements have been completed or planned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over half of all environmentally sensitive areas are protected, and the remainder will be protected within 5 years
4.2 Infrastructure withstands severe climate events, i.e. severe storms, floods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies for new development are in place Plans to retrofit existing infrastructure are in place Partnerships to meet climate needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25% of current infrastructure meets new standards West Des Moines has twice as many LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified buildings in 2026 as 2016
4.3 West Des Moines is recognized as the region's most resilient community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MidAmericanCity Hall implements a site improvement that serves as a demonstration project, e.g. a rain garden, native plantings, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property owners, e.g. residential and commercial, are encouraged or incentivized to increase property resilience, i.e. rain gardens, native, drought-resistant plantings, etc. City Hall and its partners use over 30% of local foods at all public meetings and events, to promote food security and resilience
4.4 Public and private partners work together on greenway development/connections and watershed and water quality planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10% increase in greenway connections/development Watershed convenes a stakeholder group to identify goals for water quality and planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Des Moines receives peer or national recognition for innovations in greenway and watershed partnerships and projects
4.5 West Des Moines has a Climate Action Plan, supported by key stakeholders in business, education, and the public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City Hall has made progress on over half of the goals included in its Climate Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City Hall has accomplished "80X80", 80% completion in 80% of the Climate Action Plan's goals.
Who's involved? City, Major Employers, policy makers, schools, Midamerican Energy, Citizens, Developers, Tech Companies, MWA, waste haulers, manufacturers, retailers		
More information needed: Baseline emissions data, options for counterbalance, incentives, current policies, ability of institutes to drive change, identify current standards, forecasts for more extreme climate events, I.D. critical infrastructures for public health and safety, risk assessment for community, current waste stream data, available funding options, best practices, needs assessment		
Next action: Hire a consultant to determine baseline measures and I.D. communities already enacting climate change plans or doing best practices		

Recommended Resources:

- Portland's Climate Action Plan, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/531994>
- Stakeholder Involvement in Sustainable Watershed Management includes best practices from the World Bank and other leaders: <http://www.intechopen.com/books/advances-in-landscape-architecture/stakeholder-involvement-in-sustainable-watershed-management>
- The STAR communities initiative outlines tools to measure sustainability in a community: <http://www.starcommunities.org/>

STRATEGY 5 | DOUBLE DOWN ON TECHNOLOGY

Microsoft is now a member of the West Des Moines business community. Facebook is in Altoona. Google is in Council Bluffs.

These companies are in Iowa in part because of the state's inexpensive energy costs and proximity to high speed broadband. These assets can be leveraged for even more economic development, and can also improve the quality of life for residents in West Des Moines.

One of the participants in West Des Moines 2036 asked,



What if West Des Moines provided high speed internet like a public utility, through a public-private partnership?

How could a robust public-private partnership in West Des Moines leverage a commitment to the internet to improve services and quality of life for all residents, businesses, students, and families?

Many cities are already embarking on plans to bring high speed internet to all citizens. High speed internet is being seen as an essential public utility, like water and electricity.

Eastern Tennessee is approaching high speed internet like a public utility, seeing it as an accelerator for economic development:



You had railroads, you had interstates, and this is the new infrastructure cities need to have," said Jody Wigington, CEO of Morristown Utility Systems (MUS), which is providing the internet service. "To us, this really is as essential to economic development as having electricity or water."³

Doubling down on technology will help West Des Moines lengthen its lead as a robust economic and education engine.

³ Jim Metheny, "Need for Speed: City Utilities Fight to Offer Internet", WBIR, May 6, 2015.

The following plan was designed by a cross section of public and private sector leaders, in part to address this strategy and ensure that West Des Moines is future ready:

Strategy 5 | Double Down on Technology

Vision: West Des Moines will be the city that continues to embrace secure technology to empower and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

Success Metrics	5-Year Milestones (2021)	10-Year Milestones (2026)
5.1 Everyone in the City has fast, affordable internet service in their homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A public-domain, all-city fiber network is in development with 20% of the population having access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •80% of WDM has access to 1000 mobs download speeds
5.2 Increase in the number of online businesses in the 50265/66 zip codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Small business usage of the City's public network generates \$250K in revenue, in excess of the costs of maintenance •This surplus is reinvested for expanded services and better quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Revenue from small business usage increases to \$2.5M •Target market is tech businesses and entrepreneurs
5.3 Every West Des Moines resident has the "WIN" (West Des Moines Integrated Network) app, which feeds a constant stream of local information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •All existing city and government apps are integrated into a single, user friendly app •A roster of private sector partners are identified and working in collaboration with the City 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Local government, businesses and citizens are interacting use the WIN app. •The app expands to include charity information, care fair updates, polls, notifications, etc.
Who's involved? Lawyers - is competition with the private sector a legal issue for a municipality? Network architects, political/public opinion pollsters, contractors to lay fiber, and app developers for the WIN app.		
More information needed: Feasibility studies, cost/benefit studies		
Recommended Resources:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Institute for Local Self-Reliance, which advocates for community broadband initiatives, tracks more than 60 municipal governments that have built or are building successful fiber networks: http://muninetworks.org/ 		

STRATEGY 6 | DEVELOP, RETAIN, AND ATTRACT THE WORLD'S BEST WORKFORCE

West Des Moines has always had a reputation for high quality schools. But many of our students leave to attend college — or just to get away — and don't come back.

Participants in the foresight lab admitted that West Des Moines needs to diversify its economy. As one participant noted:



In twenty years, we'll say we prospered because we diversified our workforce and had strategic thought leaders who stayed ahead of the job transformation curve.

The future is coming. And we know some of the trends.

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- We know that future jobs will require more STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, art, and math).
 - We know that many workers can live anywhere in the world, and work remotely.
 - We know that many cities around the world are trying to attract the brightest and best as part of their economic development strategy.
-

To compete in a world where work is what you do, not a place you go, West Des Moines has the potential to lead with its quality of life and award winning schools, and be home to the most talented workforce on the planet.

This strategy builds on one of West Des Moines’ strengths, our education system, and sets ambitious targets for achievements in innovation and economic diversity.

Strategy 6 | Develop, Retain, and Attract the World’s Best Workforce

Vision: West Des Moines is buzzing with global talent, innovation, and really ambitious kids.

Success Metrics	5-Year Milestones (2021)	10-Year Milestones (2026)
6.1 High schools have more National Merit Scholars than Palo Alto, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Public-private partnership to leverage best practices in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •65% of all STEAM teachers have been trained through Project Lead The Way
6.2 West Des Moines has more patents per capita than Boston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A STEAM incubator is launched in West Des Moines, attracting national attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •High schoolers begin applying for patents as part of upper level coursework in engineering and science
6.3 West Des Moines’s economy is virtually recession proof because of its diversity and the large percentage of workers in high growth industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •West Des Moines has a targeted economic development plan that focuses on the retention and attraction of high growth businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •West Des Moines 5-year unemployment average is lower than the national average •West Des Moines’ employment base grows by 15%
Who’s involved? Master teachers serving West Des Moines schools, business leaders who employ STEAM workers, high tech community, Chamber of Commerce, parents of high performing children		
More information needed: Project Lead the Way status in Iowa, identify master teachers serving in West Des Moines STEAM curriculum		

CONCLUSION

These six strategies form a base for prosperity for the next generation. They come from analyzing hundreds of trends, designing six possible scenarios (see the next section), and identifying the issues that West Des Moines must address, whatever the future brings.



The first two strategies—**adding a source of revenue to the city’s tax base and coordinating our region’s leaders**—are table stakes, a minimum level of investment we have to make, simply to stay in the game and maintain our current advantages.



The next two strategies, **focusing on quality of life and taking sustainability seriously**, will lengthen your lead. They’re areas that most suburban cities aren’t addressing. But if West Des Moines intends to be a great city, it will.



The final two strategies which **drastically increase what I call West Des Moines hardware (internet connectivity) and software (people power)** are where it starts to get interesting. This is where the “leapfrog” moments will happen. This is where West Des Moines makes the jump from being a good Midwestern city to being a great North American city.

The choice is now largely up to us.

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and our grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

- *Daniel Burnham, American Architect and Urban Planner*

METHODOLOGIES

West Des Moines 2036 was launched in March 2015 and presented in December 2015. It used a professional futuring process called “Strategic Foresight” and was facilitated by Rebecca Ryan of NEXT Generation Consulting, Inc.

The following methodologies and outcomes informed this plan:

1. A Delphi Panel of regional stakeholders identified West Des Moines’ 6 key opportunities and constraints.
2. A trend analysis was conducted by a team of emerging corporate leaders and City of West Des Moines department leaders.
3. Six future scenarios for West Des Moines 2036 were developed by a team of emerging corporate leaders and City of West Des Moines department leaders.
4. Key crossover issues were identified in the scenarios.
5. Visioning and strategic planning was completed by a team of emerging corporate leaders and City of West Des Moines department leaders.
6. Rebecca Ryan refined the final West Des Moines 2036 plan and it was reviewed by stakeholders.

DELPHI PANEL RESULTS

In April and May, 2015, a targeted group of West Des Moines business and local government leaders responded anonymously to two rounds of questions about the future of their community.

Overall, the panel is in close agreement about what policies can have the most impact on the future of West Des Moines. Such a tight grouping shows a consistency of thinking and also points towards the need for a highly integrated strategic development plan. Ranked high to low they are:

1. Having a safe and attractive place
2. Clear vision (Tied for second place)
3. Leadership commitment (Tied for second place)
4. Being a catalyst for regional policy development
5. Sustainability as a goal
6. Lack of resources as a restraint

The consultants concluded in the Delphi Panel report ([view the PDF via Dropbox](#)):

The clear potential for West Des Moines is to become a regional (Midwest) leader for employment and workforce development. Also a model of best practices for other cities to emulate, with an emphasis on health and wellness. West Des Moines leaders realize that in order to attract and retain new talent they must be branded as an “attractive and safe place” to live and work.

The major roadblock to development is the need to reach a regional consensus (of governments AND citizens) about what government should provide, to what degree and what quality. There is a high level of resistance to change among both policy-setters (elected officials) and public administrators. Also opposing forward development is a lack of infrastructure, because investments in improvements and extensions are not being made.

The motivation for forward movement is a lack of clear vision of 20 years from now and a plan to get there. Further, commitment among leaders is needed but is lacking at the moment. Interestingly, a number of respondents stated the need for expanded technology capabilities as a core requirement.

TREND ANALYSIS RESULTS

In June 2015 a group of public and private sector leaders met to learn the Strategic Foresight methodology, and began to apply it to *West Des Moines 2036*.

Participants brainstormed the STEEP (Social, Technology, Economic, Environmental, and Political) trends impacting West Des Moines in the next twenty years, and then sorted them based on impact and uncertainty as the following photo demonstrates.

Figure 1. The Big Sort, West Des Moines 2036



Based on the group's input, West Des Moines will face the following trends in the next 20 years:

High Impact/High Uncertainty Trends (upper right hand)

These trends have the potential to be game changers for West Des Moines.

- Increasing acceptance of gender/sexual difference and relations
- Change in political environment and will to invest in green space, infrastructure, etc.
- Increasing debate of the "Proper" role of government
- Higher density of housing w/local parks
- Increased voter/citizen apathy
- Increasing (or decreasing?) gaps between those who can afford technology and those who can't
- Increasing fluidity of the workforce, e.g. going from employer to employer

- Decrease in human (face-to-face) interaction
- Increase in drone use for public works & public services
- Increasing strengths of the “Low property tax movement.” This will make it harder to balance budgets
- Increasing integration of affordable housing -> communal living
- More informed constituents
- Increased strength in radical majority power base
- Increased likelihood of city bankruptcy
- Federal cessation / increased political split/division among states and Federal government
- Increasing cost of providing education requires relocation to alternate venues
- Increase in remote, distributed work, e.g. in business, all levels of employees’ work can be done world-wide vs locally
- Increased use of technology for Public Safety, e.g. security cameras do your policing
- Education goes online, elementary through adult, and will reduce need for campuses
- New threats to security & national peace
- New ways to fight wars
- Decreasing financial health of many members of society
- Increasing infrastructure costs, especially operating & maintenance costs
- City Capital investments
- Increase in driverless cars, e.g. do we drive cars or do they drive us?
- Increasing interest in public transportation & how we will get around, e.g. moving sidewalks
- Increased traffic challenges/technology
- Federal funding - will it raise, remain low, or decrease further?
- Balancing “the police state”
- Increase in nontraditional public revenue streams, e.g. more taxable items, more tax incremental financing (TIF), and/or revenue from currently non-taxable items
- Increasing familiarity with terrorism, e.g. a generation that has grown up with terrorism
- Increasing threats of terrorism in the heartland
- More people choose to rent vs. own, Buy early vs. late
- Increased (or decreased) # of children per household

- Dilution of traditional political power, and increase in other kinds of power positions
- Conventional, e.g. Caucasian, voters being replaced by next generation and “New America”
- Vocal minority gains power
- Increase or decrease in willingness of individuals to take responsibility, e.g. owner responsibility
- Importance of great, visionary leadership
- Increase or decrease in ability to recognize trends
- Increase in intuitiveness of technology, e.g. smart sensors on roads that predict and prevent “black ice”
- Increased public pension costs & their impact on local and state government sustainability
- Increasing threat of nuclear attack (or zombies?)
- Increase in trend towards online shopping (and away from traditional in-store retail shopping)
- Increase or decrease in City investments in capital and social amenities, e.g. be more competitive in quality of life investing and explain “Where does the \$ go?”
- Continued migration of rural to urban
- Increase of powerful corporate partners with conflicting demands on city
- Threat of leadership void at the city level
- People becoming less materialistic, downsizing, etc.
- Increasing likelihood of cyberterrorism and technology crashing
- Increasing climate change impact on weather patterns, e.g. three 100-year floods in Central Iowa, and more weather extremes

High Impact/Low Uncertainty (lower right)

These trends should be incorporated in City and other stakeholder plans, because they are likely to happen and will have a large impact on the City:

- Cities will charge more fees and increase fees for services
- [Note: this list is under development due to a technical difficulty in transferring the digital file...]

Low Impact/High Uncertainty (upper left)

West Des Moines should already be addressing these trends, because they are likely to happen. But their impact will be low:

- Increasing employer support/tuition for training & college
- Increase in private sector taking over city services
- Increase in public safety disaster & crime alerts to all parties

SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

After the sorting exercise, participants broke into six teams and developed the following scenarios :

Scenario 1: Tale of One (Juan) Perfectly Positioned City



This scenario tells the story of the decline of West Des Moines' traditional retailers, and how one resident, Juan, leads the effort to reinvent retail and retail infrastructure, using nontraditional media, after the Des Moines Register is shuttered.

Scenario 2: Keep Calm and Drone On

In 2016, a Millennial entrepreneur named Paul partners with HyVee to test drones for grocery delivery. After some success, he creates an entire drone network and achieves financial success. In 2021, Paul runs for Mayor of the City of West Des Moines. After

election, he begins experimenting with drones in public sector jobs, like lifeguarding public pools. Buoyed by savings to the budget (drones are cheaper than employees!), by 2026, drones are delegated to other jobs including public safety, e.g. being first responders into fires. However, after a 2031 stock market collapse, Paul realizes that by using drones, he has inadvertently made the recession worse for West Des Moines. Drones don't receive paychecks and don't contribute to the local economy. West Des Moines' economy is so badly bruised by the high unemployment from drone displacement, coupled by the recession, that the public schools go into steep decline. Paul is left in 2036 weighing the impacts of robotics to replace workers. See the video [here](#).

Scenario 3: American Dream

This scenario included two interwoven stories, which are arguably about the “Two Americas” emerging in the next twenty years:

- In 2015, a 21 year old ISU grad gets his first job at Wells Fargo, a 12-month rotation as a Finance Associate. He has high student debt, but was told by his parents that education and home ownership are the key to the American Dream. He buys his first home in West Des Moines a few years later. In 2035, the stock market takes a tumble and a visionary, young high tech leader out of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, strongly appeals to a new generation of voters—most of whom feel squashed by the current system. The market goes through a drastic correction and his house loses value, leaving him with a large student debt and an uncertain future. He wonders if his parents and grandparents were right about “The American Dream”?
- In 2015, a 21 year old child of Central American immigrant parents moves to Iowa from California. His parents moved the family because they were sure that California's drought in California would impact agricultural jobs. Soon, he got caught up with the Immigrant Rights movement, which was based on fair wages, solidarity among workers, and giving back to their native communities. In 2035, the stock market takes a tumble and a visionary, young high tech leader out of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, strongly appeals to a new generation of voters—most of whom feel squashed by the current system. A new generation of elected officials—many of them second generation immigrants or other “minorities” take power. They are strongly networked, and use many of the tools of the sharing economy to redistribute resources and create jobs. This is what his parents meant when they talked about the “American Dream.” See video [here](#).

Scenario 4: I.T. Could Happen to You

In 2016, ten-year old Karitha, “Kat”, moves to West Des Moines with her parents, immigrants from India. Kat grows into a shy teenager with a penchant for technology: she shops online, participates in online study groups, and gets all of her entertainment online.

At this point, the City of West Des Moines is thriving. High incomes and standard of living are the norm, the City is still growing and enjoys mostly modern infrastructure. It’s not until several years later that West Des Moines’ retail starts struggling as more people do what Kat does: shop online. The City’s debt grows, and West Des Moines struggles to repurpose large retail shopping malls.

In 2026, Kat graduates from MIT with honors at the age of 20, a child prodigy. She did most of her coursework online. She feels lucky to join the workforce during a time when technology is racing forward: more virtual businesses, medicine, services, and entertainment.

A few years later, Kat returns to West Des Moines and starts her own IT consulting firm specializing in IT security, training, and system interfaces. Her firm becomes successful.

In 2031, cloud-based IT systems are attacked in a sophisticated cyberterrorism plot, and crash. The impacts are profound: banking, medicine, and retail can’t function. The public order is threatened and the economy falters. Cities’ public safety services are stretched beyond their capacity as security cameras and automated systems can’t function.

The City Manager calls Kat and asks if she’ll lead a team of local IT firms and locally-based server farms to create a local solution and get essential services restarted. Kat accepts the challenge and local services are restored. Large worldwide services recover a month later.

By 2033, the IT issues are solved, but longer-term societal issues linger: consumers have lost faith in IT; citizens have lost trust in local government, and people are financially challenged. At this point, the City faces three choices:

- Embrace the challenge, take advantage of its IT leadership, and become an international leader in IT and cyber security
- Be satisfied with the status quo and hope for the best
- Suffer from the lack of public trust and allow citizen angst and distrust to grow, leading to a negative culture and continued decline

View the scenario [here](#).

Scenario 5. World Class

What happens when West Des Moines chooses to deliver world class education? This scenario was one of the more optimistic scenarios for the future of West Des Moines:

- Employed a robust public-private partnership between local businesses and the education community
- Delivered best-in-class education
- Was successful despite disruptions including cuts in state and federal investment/funding
- Was highly efficient in delivering education and matching trainees with job opportunities
- Was tied directly to jobs and the future of West Des Moines economy

Scenario 6. Shift

In 2016, things in West Des Moines are pretty rosy. About this time, the City decides to really tune in and ask, “What do residents want from their community?” The result is that the city stops trying to lure only big businesses, and starts a strategy to attract individuals.

The strategy includes investments in large, high speed internet bandwidth and quality of life amenities (parks, etc.). Their strategy realizes that in the 21st century people can live in a high quality community like West Des Moines and work remotely.

In 2024, the strategy is tested when the stock market declines. West Des Moines faces a choice: do we stop our quality of life investments, or do we “double down” and refocus on the next generation, investing more to develop our best and brightest?

The community chooses to double down. and in 2036 is named a “Destination Community,” noted for its investments in technology, education, and health care. See the scenario [here](#).

KEY ISSUES

Although the teams developed six plausible scenarios, none of them is likely to be 100% true. The value of completing these scenarios was to discover issues common to any of West Des Moines' possible futures.

The following "High Impact and High Vulnerability" issues were coming among at least two scenarios, and are arranged by their origination:

→ **Outside-in issues**, e.g. stock market crash, originate *outside* of our control, but impact us internally. *We can't prevent these issues, but we can be prepared for them.*

→ **Inside-out issues** are issues we can control and which directly affect us. *To be future ready, we must address these issues responsibly.*

→ **Hybrid issues** share origination: we control them somewhat and external forces also control them. *We must have a handle on the portions we control and be prepared for those portions beyond our control.*

Outside-in Issues:

- Stock market crash
- Climate issues

Inside-out Issues

- Private and public sectors working together
- (Over-) Reliance on technology sector
- Need to find efficiencies in how we deliver services including education and other "public" services
- Reliance on retail sector including managing its physical footprint

Hybrid Issues

- Future job availability
- Embrace of Innovation/Technology; are we nimble and innovative enough to adapt to sudden or transformative technology change?

The next step in the process was to turn these issues into plans. The group completed this on September 30, 2015 and many of those plans are included in this document.

ABOUT NEXT GENERATION CONSULTING

This project was led by Rebecca Ryan, founder and CEO of NEXT Generation Consulting.



Rebecca Ryan is the founder and owner of NEXT Generation Consulting, Inc., the Resident Futurist at the Alliance for Innovation, and a Senior Advisor at the Governing Institute.

Rebecca is the author of *The Next Big Things: The Future of Local Government* (2015), *ReGENERATION: A Manifesto for America's Future Leaders* (2013), and *Live First, Work Second: Getting Inside the Head of the Next Generation* (2007). Since 1998, she has spoken to thousands of audiences about who and what is coming next.

Trained as an Economist (Drake University) and a Futurist (University of Houston), Rebecca is described by clients as a "human spark plug". Other accolades include:

- *Communicator of the Year*, Women in Communication
- *Woman of Influence*, Business Journal of Greater Milwaukee
- *Entrepreneur of the Year*, U.S. Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship
- *Most Powerful Women in Public Accounting*, CPA Practice Advisor
- *Thought Leader*, CPA Practice Advisor
- *Top 100 Most Influential People*, Accounting Today

Rebecca was delighted to work on *West Des Moines 2036*, because she lived in the area for ten years, first as a student at Drake University and then as a young professional working for the Iowa Department of Economic Development, the Iowa Association of Business and Industry, and Keep Iowa Beautiful.

Rebecca currently lives in Madison, Wisconsin, but you can reach her here:

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