

Visioning



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.

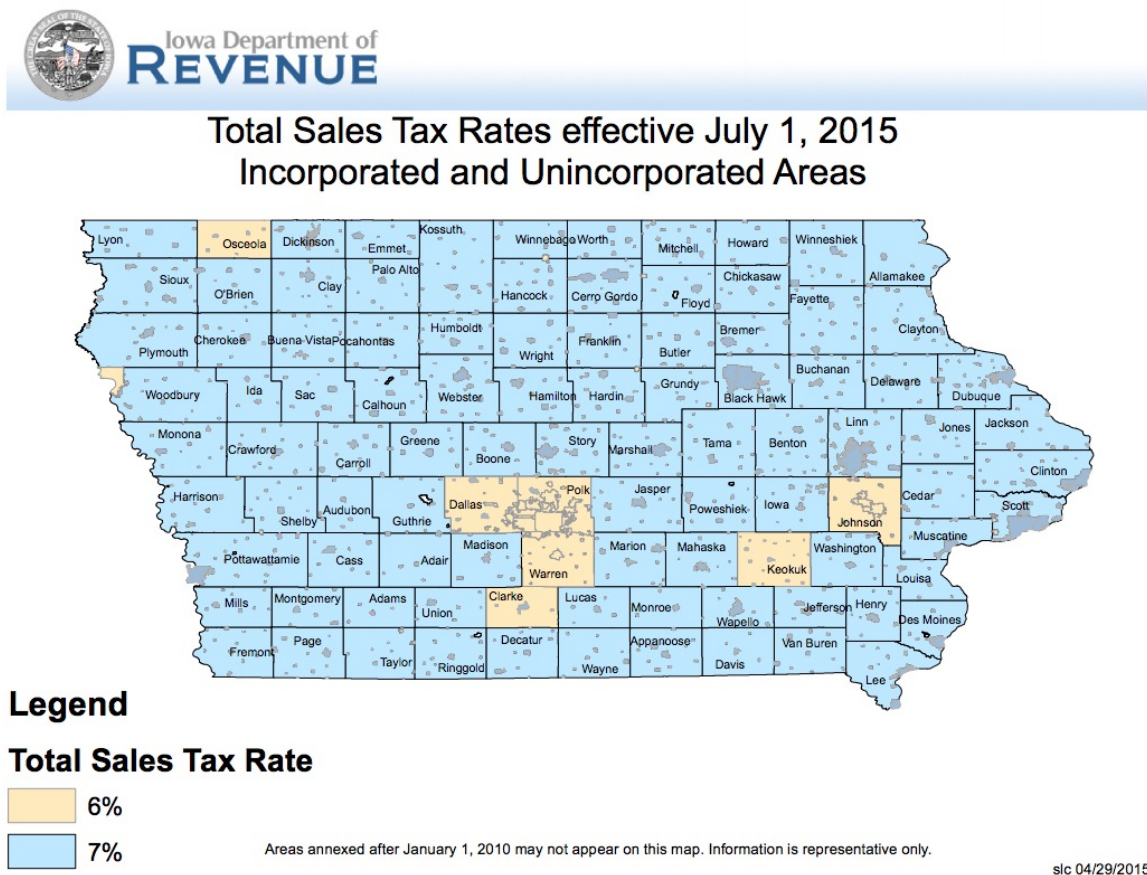
There are several resource options that West Des Moines could add, to strengthen its position:

- 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.
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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*

