

West Des Moines Action Plan Supporting *WDM 2036*

September 2016

Preamble

In December of 2015, in partnership with Next Consulting, the West Des Moines City Council published its 20-year future course for the city: **WDM 2036**.

Consisting of a visionary direction coupled with six key strategies, success measures and milestones, this document should prove a powerful tool for guiding city staff, residents and policy-makers. But as with any thoughtful plan, action steps must be taken to support the strategy.

This document briefly reinforces the strategic framework of WDM 2036. It then proceeds to capture short-term goals and/or action steps for city staff and leaders to pursue over the next 1–3 years with the intent of supporting the 20-year vision.

Vision: *A Community Coveted for Its Business Climate, Natural Resources and Overall Community Sense of Well-Being*

- West Des Moines connects natural, social and economic resources for the city's ongoing vitality and the public's health and well-being
- Future growth will embrace redevelopment, infill and Greenfield opportunities, capitalizing on existing infrastructure
- Overall quality of life/livability features (e.g., stormwater management and natural systems, technology, connectivity, walkability, entrepreneurial nodes, neighborhood revitalization) will play a priority role in growth and development
- All populations will be embraced and encouraged to provide input
 - Upcoming Opportunity: Developing a specific approach for public engagement through the update of the city's comprehensive plan
- Communications with the public and partners will be ongoing, transparent and meaningful and employ all means possible to make connections
- The overall health and well-being of West Des Moines' economy, natural resources and people will be balanced in recommendations and decision-making in support of the 2036 Vision

Mission: *To deliver healthy social, economic and natural resources through effective partnerships and efficient systems*

- The public and partners will find city services easy to access
- We will maximize effectiveness through flexibility and efficiency
- All communications will be ongoing and productive in improving quality service delivery to our many residents and other stakeholders

Action Plan

The actions highlighted below lead directly to the 2036 vision by improving the balance of social, economic and environmental resources in West Des Moines—both physically and philosophically—while enhancing the city’s capacity to deliver exceptional service in a growth environment.

PART A. Promote livability with West Des Moines’ top leaders working together on community priorities (2036 Strategy #1)

Measures: Launch of Leadership Advisory Board; substantial progress in updating West Des Moines’ comprehensive plan for protection; and enhancement of unique natural features and the environment, balanced land uses and fiscal sustainability

1. Launch a Leadership Advisory Board (LAB)
2. Update West Des Moines’ Comprehensive Plan to reflect fiscal sustainability (i.e., analyze infrastructure and support costs vs. tax income for given land uses) and balance of land uses to achieve walkability, cultural vitality and overall healthy community goals
 - a. Determine the meaning of “quality of life” from the perspective of current and future West Des Moines residents and other stakeholders
 - i. Launch focus groups, on-line mechanisms, survey, outreach methods to a rich mix of audiences for input; include demographic mix
 - b. Prepare to codify standards to achieve that “quality of life.” For potential elements to include, see the rest of this section, particularly no. 3
3. Enhance walkability, cycling options, public transit, mixed-use developments
 - a. Gain developer input on implementing developments, particularly mixed-use (i.e., developments that incorporate commercial, residential, multi-modal, etc.); gain input from developers who work in single family, multi-family, commercial/office, etc.
 - b. Identify connectivity gaps in all modes of transportation; prioritize connections for inclusion in Capital Improvements Program (CIP)
 - c. Review current zoning/ordinances/policies/guidelines and identify options for encouraging walkable, mixed-use developments (Complete Streets) appropriate to suburban-style community
 - d. Identify areas with greatest potential to develop mixed-uses and associated walkability and housing options; share with developers (See Part B)
 - e. Expand redevelopment options (including police/fire in creating guidelines/standards)
4. Provide for a mix of housing options to serve a broad range of household incomes
5. Enhance recreation and education options to meet identified needs of all residents and stakeholders
 - a. Expand community recreation options (e.g., all areas within a five-minute walk of trail, trail loops, water trails, greenbelt/riverfront enhancements)
 - i. Launch a Western Reaches Raccoon River Greenbelt Plan
6. Apply public health data to planning, development and design
 - a. Partner with Polk County Public Health, Healthiest State Initiative, Blue Zones and others (see LAB reference above, and sidebar)

About a Leadership Advisory Board (LAB)

Launch a LAB to provide an opportunity for a group of leaders who represent many different points of view to get together and give city leadership their thoughts on challenges and opportunities that come to the city. This group could meet routinely or function more as a task force on a particular issue. At a minimum, the LAB should include leaders/representatives from government, social services, education, business, development, conservation, public safety and public health. The goal here is to provide background and perspectives of value to the staff, public and council. Potential topics for LAB consideration include:

- Updated Comprehensive Plan
- Updated Economic Development Strategic Plan
- Local Business Growth
- Regional Water Utility Options
- Infill and Redevelopment Approaches

PROMOTE LIVABILITY

Priority Steps 2016/17

1. *Recruit/convene/launch and sustain the Leadership Advisory Board (CMO)*
2. *Launch update of the city’s comprehensive plan employing balanced land uses, fiscal sustainability and intensity of uses; also see Part D (DS)*
 - i. *Evaluate Complete Streets Policy for use in meeting development and walkability goals*
 - ii. *Implement community/stakeholder engagement to define “quality of life” for West Des Moines*
3. *Convene developer meetings for early input on implementing development and obstacles to mixed-use approaches (DS/CED)*
4. *Execute inclusion of civic/entertainment venue at City Hall complex site plan (Parks/CMO)*
5. *Launch a Western Reaches Raccoon River Greenbelt Plan (Parks)*

PART B. West Des Moines is financially strong and solvent (2036 Strategy #2) Develop, retain and attract the world's best workforce (2036 Strategy #6)

Measure: An increase in taxable valuation within a pre-determined area; stable balance sheet

1. Complete update of the 2009 West Des Moines Economic Development Strategic Plan
Note: the balance of actions listed in this section reflect items for consideration in that update
 - a. Ensure the economic development plan targets job retention and attraction of high growth businesses
2. Explore public-private partnerships for major investments, e.g., infrastructure
 - a. Continue/strengthen effective regional and public-private partnerships including WRA, MPO, WMA, West Com, West Pet and others
3. Identify policies, processes and partners to encourage entrepreneurship and local business growth
 - a. Remove obstacles to entrepreneurship and locally grown businesses
 - i. Review regulations (e.g., stormwater, sprinkler, zoning) in partnership with business and public safety
4. Promote infill/redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization
 - a. Begin with Historic West Des Moines; implement an "early win" project emerging from the current master planning effort
 - i. Identify additional opportunities throughout West Des Moines business corridors and neighborhoods; share with developers
5. Focus on market trends for a future affordable housing strategy (see Part A/Update Comprehensive Plan)
6. Develop, retain and attract the world's best work force (WDM 2036, Strategy 6)
 - a. Partner with West Des Moines Community School District, Heartland AEA, Greater Des Moines Partnership/WDM Chamber and others to increase development of local work force
 - b. Study feasibility of launching a STEAM incubator in West Des Moines, attracting national attention
 - i. Include research on potential for public-private partnership to leverage best practices in STEAM
 - ii. Connect STEAM educators to Project Lead the Way training
7. Attract Millennials
 - a. See Update Comprehensive Plan and address first impressions/architectural standards, housing availability/affordability, technology access, walkability
 - b. Address job availability in Economic Development Update (see no. 1 and 6 above)
 - c. Identify strategies that establish West Des Moines as "unique"

FINANCIAL STRENGTH Priority Steps

1. Update Economic Development Strategic Plan (CED/Chamber/CMO/Finance/Legal)
2. Adopt redevelopment guidelines and implementation strategies (DS/ENG/PW/CMO)
 - i. Identify funding stream for redevelopment guidelines
3. Host developer meetings through collaboration of economic development and development services (Clyde/Lynne/Duane/CMO)



Action Plan

PART C. A sense of community drives quality of life in West Des Moines (2036 Strategy #3)

Measures: Implementation of the community outreach plan's top priorities; public involvement in upcoming initiative(s), e.g., comprehensive plan update; use of new technologies in citizen outreach; technology access improvements; set benchmarks for measurement through citizen survey

1. Enhance community outreach to all audiences, with emphasis on historically under-represented populations
 - a. Develop a comprehensive community outreach plan
 - b. Establish ongoing, two-way communication
 - c. Incorporate new technologies in the plan
 - d. Dedicate/budget staff time within each department to ensure plan implementation; convene dedicated staff as ongoing working group in support of communication specialist
2. Locate social nodes/gathering spaces and associated connections throughout the city
 - a. Incorporate outreach efforts of public safety and public works, library and human services programs, and all current/incoming recreation/trails/development/project plans and programs
 - b. Identify social gathering nodes as part of City Hall Complex Site Plan
3. Engage residents of West Des Moines in updating the comprehensive plan incorporating support and direct involvement of City Council and other community leadership
Note: the purpose here is to aid in launching an overall community outreach plan while also achieving valued engagement for the comprehensive plan update
4. Develop a plan to provide wi-fi access/high-speed broadband across the community
5. Maintain the city's commitment to resident safety



QUALITY OF LIFE

Priority Steps

1. Write the community outreach plan; gain staff, council and LAB feedback (CMO Comm)
2. Convene the public (through focus groups, technology, public gatherings or other means) to gain input for comprehensive plan update, particularly addressing "quality of life" definition(s) (CMO Comm/DS)
 - i. See Part A #1
3. As quality of life is better understood, identify citizen survey questions to use as a benchmark for measuring progress in Sense of Community/ Quality of Life over time (CMO Comm/DS)

PART D. West Des Moines is a Leader in Sustainability (2036 Strategy #4)

Measure(s): Environmentally sensitive areas mapped; policies of area watershed management plan recommendations are considered for adoption (flood plain protection); City Hall Complex implements a demonstration site improvement; Climate Action Plan underway

1. Partner for greenway development/connections, watershed and water quality planning (See Part A-#5)
 - a. Continue participation/partnership in area Watershed Management Authorities and similar collaborations
2. Outline a goal of becoming the region's most resilient community and promote rain gardens and native plantings; identify hubs for demonstration plantings and projects
 - a. Begin with City Hall Complex Site Plan Improvement to implement an "early win" project that demonstrates an aesthetically appealing, nature-based stormwater management project
3. Continue to implement and expand sustainable design
 - a. Create and fill a stormwater management position
 - b. Use conservation measures/best-management practices to maintain our quality of water, air and environment, incorporating energy-efficiency measures and other resiliency initiatives
 - c. Launch a Conservation Natural Resource Enhancement Plan, including water quality, diversity of plants and vegetation
 - d. Ensure ongoing education, currency and the capacity for innovation of technical professionals in all aspects of using natural systems to maximize stormwater management
 - e. Emphasize this topic in continuing education plans of applicable internal personnel
4. Offer public education mechanisms for appreciation of native landscape aesthetic and function; emphasize realtors and developers
5. Identify environmentally sensitive areas and improve protection mechanisms through policy, mapping and physical infrastructure

SUSTAINABILITY

Priority Steps

1. Introduce, for education and discussion, policies related to soil and water health as derived from the work of area watershed plans
 - i. Consider adoption of the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual and its Unified Sizing Criteria (CMO-led: DS/Parks/SASS Team/ENG)
2. Incorporate natural resources-based demonstration projects at City Administration Complex (Parks/SASS Team/ENG)
3. Create and fill a stormwater management position (CMO/HR)
4. Write a Conservation Plan with steps to preserve water, air and environmental quality. (CMO-led: Public Safety/Hazard Mitigation with DS/Parks/SASS Team/ENG)
5. Launch greenways planning (See Part A-#5) (Parks)

PART E. Continue the trajectory of highly effective city services but with new emphasis on the “livability” directions outlined in WDM 2036

Measures: Set benchmarks for measurement through citizen survey; Action Plan Team recruited and actively monitoring, supporting and reporting on the plan; communications audit executed and recommendations implemented; service/personnel/facility benchmarks established; department work plans set and implemented

1. Improve communication tools to enhance quality and frequency of exchange between CMO and City Council (CMO with Council)
 - a. Employ a communications audit of existing methods to identify best action steps, consider:
 - i. Council and CMO work in partnership for information exchange and to address citizen interests
 1. Avoid council-to-staff lines of communication that can upend work plans and schedules; coordinate through CMO
2. Identify and routinely convene an Action Plan Team (APT) to aid in the implementation of this plan and report to council (CMO with Department Representatives)
 - a. APT should routinely report on the progress of this plan
 - b. APT can identify challenges to efficiency and develop steps to address
 - i. Include mechanisms to root out wasteful/unnecessary practices
 - ii. Work with IT to identify ongoing technology needs and technology tools to aid in plan implementation
 - iii. Identify means to monitor measures and improve measurement methods
 - iv. Identify means to support staff/departments working to address plan goals/action items
 - v. Use participation in APT as leadership development for staff members (also, see work plans below)
3. Maintain an ongoing analysis of positions/services and routinely update City Council (HR, CMO, Finance with Department Heads)
 - a. Identify shortfalls and excesses in positions and available services due to attrition, community growth/expansion, or change in service standards
 - i. Staff needs clear direction of council/CMO on established benchmarks for service delivery and associated personnel/positions
 - b. Use gap analysis to ensure timely hiring, training and orientation to meet service demands
 - c. Use this work to set service delivery and personnel benchmark and identify council-approved mechanism for ensuring city services/expectations are maintained

Note: A quality and quantity of service benchmark often depends on a mix of population, geographic reach and other factors
4. Maintain ongoing growth projections and associated facility demands to ensure timely facility development (paralleling service delivery/personnel benchmarks identified in no. 3 above)

EFFECTIVE SERVICES

Priority Steps

1. Launch and complete an internal plus staff/council communications audit (CMO, Council, Comm Auditor)
2. Establish organizational chart (recognizing its shifting nature) at a point in time; include clarity on roles and responsibilities of departments and key personnel (HR)
3. Benchmark current service delivery, performance metrics and associated personnel to support ongoing gap analysis; current succession planning may serve as a key tool (HR, CMO, Department Heads)
4. Each department develop work plan at conclusion of this strategic/action process (Department Heads and staff)
5. Recruit and convene APT members. Establish ongoing plan implementation mechanism(s) and develop structure/method for progress reports to council. Implement with initial feedback from council for refinement. (CMO with Department Heads and APT Members)
6. Implement Succession Plan (available on “L” drive) (CMO and HR)



- a. Build from foundational tool that assesses facility/systems in terms of age and conditions for operations, maintenance, replacement schedules and budgeting (i.e., facility plan and ongoing updates)
5. Manager to introduce new Council-Staff strategic planning approach as developed through this document, sharing rationale of maintaining community vitality through attracting millennials, families and 21st Century jobs (CMO)

Note: In-progress

 - a. Departments create work plans using this document as a guide with regular semi-annual updates for CMO (Each Department; CMO provide deadlines)
 - i. Plans need CMO affirmation of direction/key steps
 - b. Use development of work plans as leadership development for staff members



Guiding Principles

- **Community safety.** Residents feeling safe and secure is a fundamental city function.
- **A balance of social, economic and environmental health.** Maintain this three-legged stool of community health and West Des Moines will stand the test of time as a beloved, valued community. This balance delivers high levels of service with competitive tax rates.
- **All welcome here.** Welcoming all inspires new ideas and partnerships to keep the city vibrant and strong.
- **Public health promotion.** The physical and mental well-being of city residents requires people-to-people connections, public gathering places and facilities that support healthy, active lifestyles.
- **Community identity.** An increasing understanding of West Des Moines' community history and character will serve the community's identity and brand of the future.
- **Forward-thinking.** The city must continue to anticipate and address future needs.
- **Regional collaboration.** The city leads in many regional partnerships. Successful collaborations breed more partnerships of value.
- **Efficient, effective and transparent government.** The principles above lead to a government that achieves these watchwords.

