



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

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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.

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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

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**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.**

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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"> <li>•Leaders are completely aware of each others' needs and limitations</li> <li>•Advisory Board has set a clearly defined common agenda/vision to achieve specific goals</li> <li>•Identify needs of employers and create curriculum/school tailored to employer's needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Advisory Board achieves or implements three key goals that strengthen the community and the business environment</li> </ul>
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"> <li>•Over half of all community priorities as outlined in <i>West Des Moines 2036</i> have active workgroups and achieved significant milestones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•West Des Moines 2045 is underway, to prepare the region for the next 20 years</li> </ul>
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. <a href="http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/social_sector/doing_well_by_doing_good_a_leaders_guide">http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/social_sector/doing_well_by_doing_good_a_leaders_guide</a>. This is based on the successful cross-sectional leadership in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN</p>		

## STRATEGY 2

## WEST DES MOINES IS FINANCIALLY STRONG & SOLVENT

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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."<sup>1</sup>

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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.

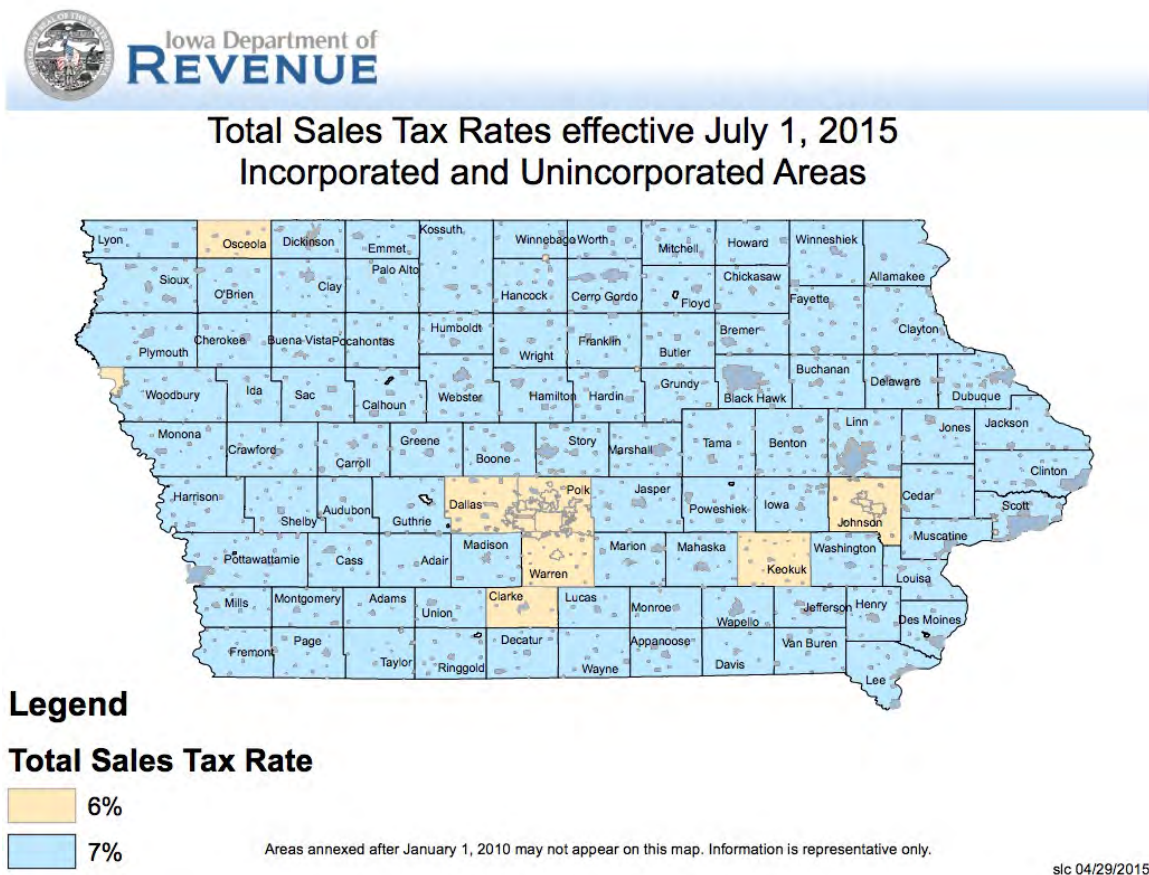
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<sup>1</sup> Des Moines Business record, accessed on Nov. 15, 2015: <http://businessrecord.com/Content/Default/-All-Latest-News/Article/West-Des-Moines-credit-rating-is-tops-in-two-books/-3/248/67888#ixzz3sWFY8y>



→ 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 option<sup>2</sup>, 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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"> <li>•The City has a continual improvement process in place that measures efficiencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The City has a public and private partners who help the city achieve efficiencies</li> </ul>
2.2 Stable balance sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Maintain *high bond rating</li> <li>•Pass local option sales tax</li> <li>•Explore and implement best practices in behavioral economics, to nudge citizens, businesses and others to behave in a financially responsible way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reduce the property tax burden by increasing other forms of revenues, including those outlined on the previous page</li> </ul>
2.3 Maintain property development *balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Single family v. multifamily</li> <li>•Commercial v. residential</li> <li>•Explore options to adjust the 1975 tax levy limits to more current levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increase sustainable development while maintaining a balance of services</li> <li>•Offer public programs for local small businesses, to retain them and help them grow</li> </ul>
2.4 Explore public-private partnerships for major investments, e.g. infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Continue and/or strengthen public/private and regional partnerships including WRA, MPO, MWA, West Com, West Pet and others</li> </ul>	
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](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](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"> <li>•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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•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.</li> <li>•West Des Moines improves its scores in two of the seven indexes outlined on the previous page</li> </ul>
3.2 West Des Moines wins national awards for its commitment to quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•West Des Moines has completed one capital project, e.g. complete streets, that have a measurable impact on citizens’ reported quality of life</li> <li>•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.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>•The City has codified “quality of life” standards into its development and comprehensive plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•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</li> </ul>
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](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:

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**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.

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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"> <li>All areas have been mapped, and appropriate policy and/or infrastructure improvements have been completed or planned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over half of all environmentally sensitive areas are protected, and the remainder will be protected within 5 years</li> </ul>
4.2 Infrastructure withstands severe climate events, i.e. severe storms, floods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies for new development are in place</li> <li>Plans to retrofit existing infrastructure are in place</li> <li>Partnerships to meet climate needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25% of current infrastructure meets new standards</li> <li>West Des Moines has twice as many LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified buildings in 2026 as 2016</li> </ul>
4.3 West Des Moines is recognized as the region's most resilient community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MidAmericanCity Hall implements a site improvement that serves as a demonstration project, e.g. a rain garden, native plantings, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Property owners, e.g. residential and commercial, are encouraged or incentivized to increase property resilience, i.e. rain gardens, native, drought-resistant plantings, etc.</li> <li>City Hall and its partners use over 30% of local foods at all public meetings and events, to promote food security and resilience</li> </ul>
4.4 Public and private partners work together on greenway development/connections and watershed and water quality planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10% increase in greenway connections/development</li> <li>Watershed convenes a stakeholder group to identify goals for water quality and planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>West Des Moines receives peer or national recognition for innovations in greenway and watershed partnerships and projects</li> </ul>
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"> <li>City Hall has made progress on over half of the goals included in its Climate Action Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City Hall has accomplished "80X80", 80% completion in 80% of the Climate Action Plan's goals.</li> </ul>
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

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

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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?

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**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.**

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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."<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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"> <li>•A public-domain, all-city fiber network is in development with 20% of the population having access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•80% of WDM has access to 1000 mobs download speeds</li> </ul>
5.2 Increase in the number of online businesses in the 50265/66 zip codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small business usage of the City's public network generates \$250K in revenue, in excess of the costs of maintenance</li> <li>•This surplus is reinvested for expanded services and better quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Revenue from small business usage increases to \$2.5M</li> <li>•Target market is tech businesses and entrepreneurs</li> </ul>
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"> <li>•All existing city and government apps are integrated into a single, user friendly app</li> <li>•A roster of private sector partners are identified and working in collaboration with the City</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Local government, businesses and citizens are interacting use the WIN app.</li> <li>•The app expands to include charity information, care fair updates, polls, notifications, etc.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>→ 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: <a href="http://muninetworks.org/">http://muninetworks.org/</a></li> </ul>		

## 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"> <li>•Public-private partnership to leverage best practices in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•65% of all STEAM teachers have been trained through Project Lead The Way</li> </ul>
6.2 West Des Moines has more patents per capita than Boston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A STEAM incubator is launched in West Des Moines, attracting national attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•High schoolers begin applying for patents as part of upper level coursework in engineering and science</li> </ul>
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"> <li>•West Des Moines has a targeted economic development plan that focuses on the retention and attraction of high growth businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•West Des Moines 5-year unemployment average is lower than the national average</li> <li>•West Des Moines’ employment base grows by 15%</li> </ul>
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.

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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*

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# 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.





