



2025 Strategic Plan

Introduction

The City of Independence is a progressive and growing community in scenic Northeast Iowa, operating under a Mayor-Council form of government with a population of over 6,000 residents. As the county seat of Buchanan County, Independence serves as a vital hub for the region, balancing small-town appeal with the conveniences of a larger city.

Our community has a rich history, once known as the "Lexington of the North" for its famed horse-racing legacy, and we take immense pride in preserving our historical character through beautifully maintained homes and landmarks. Today, our economy is driven by strong manufacturing, healthcare, and retail sectors.

This Strategic Plan is the result of a collaborative session held on April 26, 2025, with all City Council members and Department Heads. It reflects a unified commitment to guide the city's future by addressing challenges and building upon our strengths, from our natural resources along the Wapsipicon River to our engaged, philanthropic community. This document will serve as a framework for policy-making and budget development, ensuring we work cohesively toward a shared vision.

Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

Vision Statement

Balancing resilience with progress, Independence aspires to honor its past while fostering a thriving environment for businesses and families alike, improving the quality of life for everyone in our community.

Mission Statement

Committed to resilience and progress, our mission is to celebrate history while actively developing a vibrant future and an enhanced quality of life for all.

Guiding Principles

Our decisions and actions will be guided by a commitment to:

- **Quality of Life:** Ensuring Independence remains a friendly, safe community with excellent services and opportunities for families, citizens, and businesses.
 - **Fiscal Responsibility:** Pursuing financial stability for the city and its residents through efficient and effective planning and prioritization of all available resources.
 - **Resilience and Progress:** Proactively preparing for challenges while embracing opportunities for growth and continuous improvement.
 - **Community and Collaboration:** Fostering a strong sense of community through engagement, involvement, and strategic partnerships.
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Summary of Strategic Outcomes & Objectives

This summary outlines the key outcomes the city will focus on. Following this summary, each outcome is explored in greater detail.

Strategic Goal 1: Support high-quality City Services

We will support and enhance the essential services that ensure public safety and community well-being.

- **Objectives:**
 - Support high-quality services in all city departments.
 - Ensure city services can adequately handle future growth.
 - Support employees through adequate resources and opportunities for growth.

Strategic Goal 2: Encourage a supportive environment for businesses, workforce, and economic development

We will encourage a supportive environment for businesses, workforce training, and sustainable economic growth.

- **Objectives:**
 - Promote an environment that supports new and existing businesses.
 - Retain quality paying jobs in the City.
 - Create opportunities for students to learn trades with current employers.
 - Encourage the development of tourism and historical sites.

Strategic Goal 3: Support and enhance City infrastructure

We will support, enhance, and maintain the city's core infrastructure.

- **Objectives:**

- Invest in water, sewer, streets, and stormwater systems.
- Address and prevent infrastructure failures, including on key bridges.
- Ensure efficient and effective planning for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP).

Strategic Goal 4: Efficient and effective planning and prioritizing of all available resources

We will ensure efficient and effective planning to manage community growth and available resources.

- **Objectives:**

- Continue to pursue and support the financial stability of the city.
- Support the availability of quality housing for all.
- Maintain the ability to handle growth with existing services and utilities.
- Position Independence as a regional hub for Buchanan County.

Strategic Goal 5: Promote and encourage community involvement and engagement

We will promote and encourage active participation and communication throughout the community.

- **Objectives:**

- Encourage community involvement and engagement.
- Ensure all voices are heard by catering to both the loudest and quietest voices.
- Combat the spread of bad information with correct information.

Strategic Goal 6: Support and encourage tourism and historical sites

We will celebrate and promote our unique historical assets to attract visitors, strengthen community pride, and boost our local economy.

- **Objectives:**

- Support the preservation of key historical sites.
- Actively promote the city's history and attractions to draw tourism.
- Integrate tourism as a key component of the city's economic development strategy.
- Strengthen partnerships with community organizations to create a unified tourism message.

Detailed Strategic Outcomes

This section provides a detailed overview of the six strategic goals that form the foundation of the City of Independence's 2025 Strategic Plan. Each goal is supported by a set of objectives designed to guide city operations, policy decisions, and resource allocation.

Strategic Goal 1: Support high-quality City Services

We will support and enhance the essential services that ensure public safety and community well-being.

The high quality of life in Independence is a direct result of the excellent and reliable services the City provides. Our commitment is to **support high-quality services in all city departments**, from ensuring public safety through our dedicated police and fire departments to enriching the community with our modern public library and well-maintained parks. As our city of over 6,000 residents continues to attract new families, we must **ensure city services can adequately handle future growth**. This involves strategic planning to scale our capabilities, ensuring that response times remain low and public facilities do not become overburdened. Achieving this requires a steadfast commitment to our dedicated city employees; therefore, we will **support employees through adequate resources and opportunities for growth**. By investing in training, competitive compensation, and the necessary equipment, we recognize that our employees are essential to delivering the world-class services our community deserves and expects.

Strategic Goal 2: Encourage a supportive environment for businesses, workforce, and economic development

We will encourage a supportive environment for businesses, workforce training, and sustainable economic growth.

A vibrant and resilient local economy is crucial for the long-term prosperity of Independence. Our focus is to **promote an environment that supports new and existing businesses**, from the entrepreneurs launching new ventures in our historic downtown to our established cornerstone employers in manufacturing and healthcare. A key measure of our success will be our ability to **retain quality paying jobs in the City**, which provides stability for our families and strengthens our community's economic foundation. To build a sustainable workforce for the future, we will work with our local schools and partners like Hawkeye Community College to **create opportunities for students to learn trades with current employers**. By fostering these relationships, we can establish a direct pipeline from education to rewarding careers right here in Independence, ensuring our businesses have the skilled labor they need to flourish.

Strategic Goal 3: Support and enhance City infrastructure

We will support, enhance, and maintain the city's core infrastructure.

Reliable and modern infrastructure is the physical backbone of our community, essential for public health, safety, and economic activity. We are committed to making strategic, proactive **investments in our water, sewer, streets, and stormwater systems**, ensuring they are resilient and efficient. A critical component of this commitment is our focus to **address and prevent infrastructure failures, including on key bridges**. Given the central role of the Wapsipinicon River, protecting vital crossings from potential flood damage is paramount to our community's connectivity and emergency response capabilities. All of these efforts will be guided by a pledge to **ensure efficient and effective planning for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP)**, making certain that taxpayer dollars are used wisely to build and maintain an infrastructure that will support our city's residents and industries for decades to come.

Strategic Goal 4: Efficient and effective planning and prioritizing of all available resources

We will ensure efficient and effective planning to manage community growth and available resources.

Prudent, forward-thinking governance is the key to achieving all our strategic goals. This means managing our resources wisely to **continue to pursue and support the financial stability of the city**, ensuring a balanced budget and healthy reserves. Our planning will address fundamental community needs, and we will actively **support the availability of quality housing for all** residents, from single-family homes to rental options, to attract and retain a diverse population. As we grow, it is critical that we **maintain the ability to handle growth with existing services and utilities**, ensuring development is sustainable and does not outpace our capacity. Through this deliberate and effective planning, we will solidify our standing and **position Independence as a regional hub for Buchanan County**, leveraging our status as the county seat to become a center for commerce, services, and community life.

Strategic Goal 5: Promote and encourage community involvement and engagement

We will promote and encourage active participation and communication throughout the community.

An engaged community is a strong community, building on our town's well-known friendly and neighborly spirit. Our goal is to foster a culture of open, transparent, and two-way communication that builds trust between the city government and its residents. We are committed to creating accessible channels to **encourage community involvement and engagement**, from serving on boards to participating in public forums, so citizens can share their ideas and stay informed. A core principle of this

effort is to **ensure all voices are heard by catering to both the loudest and the quietest voices**, making our decision-making process more inclusive and representative of our entire community. To empower our citizens and maintain public trust, we will actively **combat the spread of bad information with correct information** through official city channels, ensuring our communications are timely, factual, and clear.

Strategic Goal 6: Support and encourage tourism and historical sites

We will celebrate and promote our unique historical assets to attract visitors, strengthen community pride, and boost our local economy.

Our city's history is one of its greatest assets and a core component of our community's identity. Our strategy begins with a commitment to **support the preservation of key historical sites**, protecting the landmarks that tell our story, from the Wapsipinicon Mill to the legacy of the Gedney Hotel and our "Lexington of the North" heritage. With that foundation, we will **actively promote the city's history and attractions to draw tourism**, sharing the unique character of Independence with a wider audience through attractions like the Heartland Acres Agribition Center. This is not just a cultural goal; we will **integrate tourism as a key component of the city's economic development strategy**, recognizing that visitors support our local shops, restaurants, and breweries. To succeed, we will **strengthen partnerships with community organizations** like the Chamber of Commerce and local historical societies to create a unified tourism message, ensuring a collaborative and effective approach to showcasing our city.

Conclusion: A Commitment to a Vibrant Future

The 2025 Strategic Plan represents more than a document; it is a declaration of our shared priorities and a roadmap for the future of Independence. It articulates a clear vision for a resilient and progressive community that honors its history while building a prosperous future for all. By bridging our legacy as the "Lexington of the North" with the modern needs of a growing economy, we affirm our commitment to honoring our past while fostering a thriving environment for businesses and families alike.

Our roadmap focuses heavily on the physical and economic foundations of our city. We are committed to making strategic investments in our core infrastructure, including water, sewer, and streets, while specifically addressing the resilience of key bridges over the Wapsipinicon River. This physical backbone supports our economic vitality. It enables us to retain quality paying jobs and create pipelines for students to learn trades with current employers, ensuring our workforce remains as robust as our history.

We recognize that prudent governance is the key to achieving these outcomes. We will pursue financial stability through efficient planning for Capital Improvement Projects, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used wisely to support community growth. As we position Independence as a regional hub for Buchanan County, we must ensure our services scale effectively to handle new development without overburdening our resources or our staff. We pledge to support our employees with the training and resources they need to deliver the high-quality services our residents expect.

This plan is not an end, but a beginning. Its success depends on a culture of open, transparent communication. We are dedicated to ensuring all voices are heard by catering to both the loudest and the quietest voices in our community. We will actively work to combat the spread of bad information with correct information to maintain public trust.

The City is committed to a process of continuous improvement, with plans for regular strategic reviews every two years and council retreats to prioritize goals. Achieving these ambitious goals requires a united effort. It depends on the dedication of our city officials and staff, the innovation of our local businesses, and the active engagement of our citizens. By adhering to the principles and pursuing the goals outlined in this plan, we will continue to enhance the quality of life for everyone who calls our community home.