



FULL REPORT

Village of Winnebago

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE 2025-2028

PREPARED MARCH 2025



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
**Center for
Governmental Studies**
Outreach Engagement and Regional Development



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VILLAGE OF WINNEBAGO COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Village would also like to thank all the community members who participated in the stakeholder feedback phase of the process. An effective strategic plan includes feedback from stakeholders to ensure that needs and expectations are shared and understood by leaders of the organization.



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Contents

<u>Village of Winnebago Background</u>	1
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Pre-Workshop Environmental Scanning and Stakeholder Input</u>	2
<u>Leadership Workshop Outline of Exercises and Discussion Sessions</u>	3
<u>Post-Workshop Goal Prioritization and Ranking Exercise</u>	9
<u>Conclusion</u>	13
<u>Appendix A: Focus Group and Leadership Interview Feedback</u>	14
<u>Appendix B: Surrender or Lead Exercise</u>	18
<u>Appendix C: Strategic Priority Area Goal and Stakeholder Feedback Alignment</u>	19

Village of Winnebago Background

The Village of Winnebago began as Winnebago Township when it was settled by David Adams Holt in 1835. In 1849, the Village was officially named Elida. The Chicago and Galena Union Railroad, encouraged by Chicago merchants in all the urban communities, arrived in Rockford on the east side of the Rock River in August 1852. In 1853, the Railroad extended to the west from Rockford to Freeport, forging a track through Elida (Winnebago) and Pecatonica, igniting local growth.



In 1855, the citizens of Elida petitioned to change the Village's name from Elida in favor of Winnebago. The Village was formally incorporated in 1877. D.C. Lewis was elected Village President and Reuben Alworth, was elected the Village Clerk.¹

Located in Winnebago County, the Village's population is 2,903 (98% urban, 2% rural) in a total area of 1.95 square miles.² Winnebago's school district (CUSD #323) has one high school, one middle school, and two elementary schools.³ The Village of Winnebago has a president-trustee form of government. A village president, six trustees, and a clerk are elected in nonpartisan, at-large elections. Trustees serve staggered four-year terms, with three elected every two years, while the president and clerk are elected every four years. The Village Administrator is the Chief Administrative Officer and manages daily operations, implement ordinances and policies, support the Village Board in strategic initiatives, act as a liaison between staff and the Board, and oversees community and economic development.

To read more about the Village of Winnebago, visit www.villageofwinnebago.com.

¹<https://www.villageofwinnebago.com/community/page/village-history-0>
²"G001 - Geographic Identifiers - 2010 Census Summary File 1". United States Census Bureau. Archived from the original on February 13, 2020. Retrieved December 25, 2015.
³<https://www.winnebagoschools.org/>

Introduction

Strategic planning is an effective way to identify and confirm a Village's vision for the future and set organizational purpose and direction by incorporating clear priorities and measurable goals. To this end, the Village of Winnebago (the "Village") engaged the Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies ("NIU-CGS") in August 2024 to facilitate its strategic planning process (Figure 1). The value of such processes continues to be recognized by policy-making boards, councils, and executive staffs in both private and public organizations.

From December 2024 through January 2025, the NIU-CGS team gathered internal and external stakeholder input that was shared at the strategic planning leadership workshop held in March 2025. The workshop offered elected officials and administrative

leadership an opportunity to reaffirm and refine the Village's future vision, explore the Village's mission, and establish short- and long-term goals. It also provided a positive atmosphere where workshop participants could discuss the best ways to serve the Village and the broader community in the coming years.

It is important to keep in mind that the judicious use of the Village's limited resources (including financial resources and professional staff time) is key to achieving good results. Only a limited number of goals and objectives can be managed and implemented effectively at any given time. In a very realistic sense, clear and stable priorities must be maintained if the Village desires to stretch its resources as far as they can go.

Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model



* Model generally represents the steps that are taken for this type of initiative.

Pre-Workshop

Environmental Scanning and Stakeholder Input

The Village's leadership recognizes the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of their organization and the broader community they serve by gathering input from various stakeholders. During the environmental scanning phase of the strategic planning process, NIU-CGS aimed to examine factors that shape the Village's future direction. To accomplish this, the NIU-CGS team conducted focus groups and interviews involving external and internal stakeholders. The results from the stakeholder input phase were shared in thematic form at the strategic planning leadership workshop, providing valuable insights to guide discussions.

EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

Incorporating external perspectives into the Village's strategic plan helps capture the diverse needs and aspirations of the community, ensuring the plan is responsive to stakeholders' concerns. This approach fosters greater public trust and engagement, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. To that end, the NIU-CGS team conducted focus groups at the Village's Town Hall. Detailed summaries are provided in [Appendix A](#).

- **Focus groups** are designed to be a highly interactive approach, allowing for a robust and informative conversation with and between participants. In December 2024, three focus groups were conducted with the Village's external stakeholders, as outlined below. The number of participants in each group ranged from 9-11.
 - » *Business Community*
 - » *Intergovernmental Agencies and Civic Institutions*
 - » *Winnebago Residents*

INTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

Gathering internal perspectives when developing the Village's strategic plan is crucial, as it ensures the plan is informed by the insights and experiences of those who best understand Winnebago's unique operations and challenges. This comprehensive input fosters a more effective and inclusive strategy, aligning with the community's needs and goals. The NIU-CGS team conducted interviews with the Village's leadership team and elected officials as well as facilitated a focus group with staff at the Town Hall. Detailed summaries are provided in [Appendix A](#).

- In December 2024, a **focus group** was conducted with Village Administrative Staff, Police Officers, and Public Works Staff. Participants included 10 staff members across different Village departments.
- **Interviews** result in highly personalized participation and the in-depth sharing of ideas. The focus of the interview sessions is to gain an initial perspective by building a balanced and informed view of the Village from each stakeholder's unique vantage point. In January 2025, virtual interviews were conducted with the Village's administrative leadership and the Board of Trustees.

Figure 2. 2024-2025 Stakeholder Feedback Themes

Top Priorities for All Stakeholders

Alignment of all stakeholder feedback (focus groups and interviews)



**INFRASTRUCTURE
IMPROVEMENTS**



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND STRATEGIC GROWTH**



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
AND QUALITY OF LIFE**



**ORGANIZATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND
GOVERNANCE**

Leadership Workshop

Outline of Exercises and Discussion Sessions

All discussion sessions at the strategic planning leadership workshop employed highly participative and interactive approaches. The workshop facilitators utilized a group discussion approach that assures each participant an equal opportunity to speak and share opinions with the larger group. Participants were also able to weigh alternatives and refine their thinking through dialogue in small-group activities at the workshop. As ideas were shared and debated, the group worked steadily toward a consensus regarding the Village's mission, future direction, goals, and priorities.

INTRODUCTIONS AND ICEBREAKER EXERCISE

Participants were asked to introduce themselves and share how long they have been involved with the Village. Next, they engaged in an icebreaker exercise titled, "Garage Sale." In this exercise, workshop participants selected an item from the "garage sale" table that represented to them an important issue, initiative, or big idea they felt should be a part of the Village's future and be discussed as part of the strategic planning process. This was a brainstorming exercise, and no evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session. Next is a list of those answers (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Icebreaker: important issue, initiative, or big idea that should be part of the Village's future

Garage Sale Item	Workshop Participant Responses
Flashlight	Brighter future for the Village. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the Village over time in a controlled manner (development, youth activities, events) More commercial business (grocery store, Walmart, Meijer, etc.)
Police Car	Residents support the Police Department – need the police to keep the community safe, especially to support growth in the Village.
Fish	Water system upgrades are going to be a large project. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stormwater utilities, infrastructure, wastewater treatment, maintenance, etc.
Pipe	Drainage issues need to be addressed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stormwater maintenance, upgrades
Brick	Strategic Plan is the foundation for Village growth, expansion, and change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactivity, Support of the Board
Hart hat 1	Need to focus on commercial development, construction, and infrastructure.
Hard hat 2	Development, "if you build it, they will come". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Village needs more development because development means population growth
Softball	Community events, things to do for residents, what are neighboring communities doing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addition of a Community Center to provide opportunities to gather, host events, sports, indoor track, etc.
Beads	Community events need to be expanded but need more resources to do so. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication about events needs to improve Creative fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and engagement
Prairie Path	Focus on utilization of the Prairie Path – biking and walking, revenue generation, connected events that incorporate the path. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find unique ways to connect communities, bring in visitors, Prairie Path is one of those (e.g., Cheese Trails in Wisconsin) Collaborate with other small communities along the path to get upgrades completed

VISIONING FOR THE FUTURE

The workshop participants next engaged in a visioning exercise to describe the desired future direction of the Village by answering the following question: “**If you left the community and didn’t return for 10-15 years, what do you think you will see or what do you hope you will see when you return in terms of development, services, programs, improvements or changes?**” Participants were asked to think about their ideas ahead of time and then be ready to share them with the group during the first session of the workshop. Responses are listed in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Visions of the Future—Hope or think you will see in 10-15 years

Workshop Participant Responses

Currently owned Village property has been developed, purchased to provide employment opportunities.

- Consider an overnight parking lot on some of the Village’s vacant property

Would like to see more school safety resources such as an additional School Resource Officer, other initiatives to maintain a continued focus on school safety.

The Village gets a Community Center.

More diverse offerings in restaurants, some food-only establishments (not alcohol-centric), more family-oriented.

- Learn why some businesses don’t last through the implementation of an “exit interview” with those that leave
- Attract traffic from Rt. 20 into town to visit businesses using a Welcome Sign, beautified entryways
- Additional promotion, marketing, or communication of Village businesses (website, lit sign on Elida Street, etc.)

Zoning code has been re-evaluated to focus on more intentional growth.

- Explore partnerships with the Park District promoting economies of scale

Village creates a downtown district, corridor to establish a draw to downtown.

- Consider TIF District

Village reapplies for the State Rebuild Downtowns and Main Streets grant.

- Connect trails and paths to downtown

Police Department and Public Works are fully funded, no longer need to apply for grants.

- Evaluate resources involved in applying for grants

Community pulls together – events, clubs, more volunteers.

- More engagement, continue to evaluate streamlining regulations and processes

Less siloing within Village departments.

- Collaboration and team working toward one mission

Filled developments – disincentivize development that is not at full capacity or sitting dormant.

Simplify Village processes.

- Make processes more community-friendly by eliminating red tape and working with community partners and having business-friendly permitting and zoning

Consider adding more “one-off” volunteer opportunities – low commitment, only have to volunteer for one day (e.g., Plant Your Town, Clean Up Town, etc.).

- Could also be another driver for family activities

Commercial and residential developments are complete – infrastructure is already in place but not being used.

- Willingham subdivision built out with 30 homes per year being built, so it will all be built out in 10 to 15 years, along with condos and apartments being built near the school and retail businesses to allow for that type of much needed housing

Complete street repairs including drainage, roundabouts, and pedestrian safety measures (“Complete Streets” program).

Make necessary zoning updates that will allow developers to create a “community nucleus” or strip mall with popular amenities such as a gym, grocery, etc. at the center of neighborhoods.

Village growth to the north of US 20 with businesses – both manufacturing and retail increasing at Winnebago corners.

Village gets a hotel and one or more attractions that draw people from all around to come visit on a regular basis.

A FRESH LOOK AT THE VILLAGE'S MISSION

The next exercise at the workshop provided Village leadership with an opportunity to review and discuss a mission statement for the Village. The exploration of the Village's overall mission began with these formative questions: Why are we here? Why do we get up in the morning? Why do we expend time, money, and personnel resources? Who are the Village's key stakeholders and how do we respond to them?

Participants were organized into small groups and asked to compile a list of key words or phrases to help them craft a draft mission statement for the Village (Figure 5). Groups then shared their mission statement words, phrases, and draft statements with the larger group for discussion, suggestions, and modifications. Using the groups' rough drafts, NIU-CGS shared some mission statement possibilities with workshop participants. While follow-up revisions are needed to finalize the Village's mission statement after the workshop, the words, phrases, and draft statements are a solid foundation to start from. Below are two options created at the workshop as well as a word cloud representing the words and phrases developed in the small groups.

Draft 1

Village of Winnebago Mission Statement Developed During Workshop:

We strive to keep our community safe and welcoming by managing resources wisely, supporting schools and local businesses, and fostering connections. Our goal is to create a place where families and neighbors can live, grow, and thrive together.

Draft 2

Village of Winnebago Mission Statement Developed During Workshop:

We are committed to a safe, thriving, and connected community through responsible leadership and strategic growth, creating a welcoming home for all generations.

Figure 5. Village of Winnebago Mission Statement key words or phrases developed in small groups

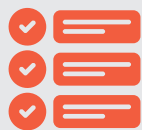




ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PART I—SURRENDER OR LEAD

Next, participants were introduced to a leadership exercise titled, “Surrender or Lead.” During this exercise, participants organized into the same small groups as the mission exercise to respond to a series of structured questions. These questions aimed to reveal hopes, perspectives, challenges, opportunities, and possible barriers based on the collective view of each group. The responses were recorded and the combined themes from the three groups are reported next. For a full list of Surrender or Lead responses from each individual group, see [Appendix B](#).

Themes from Surrender or Lead:



Strategic and sustainable growth through thoughtful and steady planning



Developing plans to maintain and develop Village infrastructure



Financial sustainability and diversify funding, revenue generation, additional resources



Proactive and action-oriented leadership focused on engagement, communication, and collaboration

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PART II—LARGE GROUP SWOC ANALYSIS

The next exercise at the strategic planning workshop allowed participants to further review and account for the internal and external factors present that could potentially influence the Village, both negatively and positively. Workshop participants were asked to identify the Village’s **strengths (S)** and **weaknesses (W)**. In what areas does the Village regularly excel, and in what areas are there difficulties or shortcomings in terms of expertise, resources, or training? What **opportunities (O)** are on the horizon that can be used to the Village’s advantage? Conversely, what trends or **challenges (C)** lie ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? These elements could include both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, and resources. The full list of responses to the exercise are provided in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Large group rapid fire SWOC Analysis

S

STRENGTHS

- Strong working-class community and residents
- Safe community, low crime rate
- Location off Route 20 – high daily traffic count
- Employee and Board commitment – a great resource
- Development opportunities
- Cash reserves
- Strong infrastructure
- School District
- Amenities such as the Library, local businesses, parks
- Parks and recreation – Pecatonica Prairie Trail runs through Winnebago
- Water and wastewater capacity
- Village is fiscally responsible
- Above average income for residents
- Many amenities (e.g., discount stores, pharmacy, grocery store, restaurants)
- Somewhat rural, but close to a major city (Rockford)

W

WEAKNESSES

- Village-served land that is currently vacant
- Volunteerism is lacking
- Infrastructure needs and the cost to update and maintain
- Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) needs updating
- Building maintenance – currently no process in place, no Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
- Need better Police Department facility
- Village Hall is outdated and not large enough for current needs
- Need new garage to house Public Works and police vehicles and equipment and allow for wash and maintenance bays
- Village-owned assets and facilities
- Lack of affordable housing
- Need more communication
- Improving the Village's website and web presence, website needs a fresh and modernized look
- Working with other taxing bodies (e.g., Park District, School District, etc.)
- Lack of community events due to lack of volunteers
- Need to review and update zoning codes
- No hotel
- No major attractions to draw people to the Village
- Not enough industry or manufacturing type jobs
- Property tax relies too heavily on residents and not enough on industry or manufacturing

O

OPPORTUNITIES

- Close proximity to Route 20
- Vacant land served by the Village utilities and infrastructure
- Annexation corridors – unincorporated land surrounding the Village.
- Especially to the north on the other side of Rt. 20, but also to east, west, and south to allow for controlled growth and development
- Communication, marketing Village safety, success stories, good schools
- Can improve web presence, modernize with the help of social media
- Collaborating or finding efficiencies with other intergovernmental organizations or taxing bodies
- Add more community events – collaborate with other intergovernmental organizations to eliminate red tape
- Engage residents
- Become more business-friendly
- Village-owned development property
- Gateway to downtown
- Update the property that is the current site of the Police Garage and create a 'gateway' to downtown
- Buildable land available to increase and diversify the housing stock
- Creative ways to provide commercial space downtown
- Consider capitalizing on the Village's charm with old houses as businesses, emphasize the rich history
- Reevaluate zoning codes to rezone the Village
- Downtown zoning district – special zoning, development, ordinances district
- Focus on the Village's parks and recreation opportunities
- Housing – at least 70 residential lots platted and ready to be built on and bring new residents to the Village

Figure 6. Large group rapid fire SWOC Analysis (cont.)

C

CHALLENGES

- Development opportunities
- Managing incentives, sales, marketing, political climate
- Unfunded mandates
- Future annexation and encroachment issues
- State-impacted revenue fluctuation
- Siloing in cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations
- Lack of volunteers for community events
- Small footprint downtown
- Limited commercial vacancies, lack of available modern storefront space
- Lack of continuity of business districts
- Parks and Recreation – working with other agencies to maintain paths, trails, parks, etc.
- Stormwater and drainage issues
- Community engagement
- Volunteering and keeping residents informed, involved
- Traffic congestion in town during school pick up and drop off
- Future growth at corners:
- Village relies on developer-owned property to develop it
- Land to the north of Rt. 20 is not in the Village limits and any growth now would not benefit the Village in terms of receiving property taxes or other tax revenue generated from property north of Rt. 20
- Growth may contribute to traffic flow concerns, which might deter people from stopping in Winnebago to and from their ultimate destination
- Attracting industrial or manufacturing businesses to locate to the Village and employ people
- Maintaining a fully staffed Police Department

NOMINAL GROUP GOAL IDENTIFICATION

With the preceding discussion sessions and exercises acting as a sound foundation for goal setting, the next exercise provided time for a healthy group discussion and development of goals and objectives to achieve the future visions as expressed by workshop participants.

Participants reconvened in the same small groups from earlier in the day for goal development. Each group was allotted time to develop, and then report out, at least three to four important policy and program goals they thought the Village should accomplish. Groups were asked to create goals using two different time frames: short-term goals, which could be started or accomplished in the next one to three years, as well as those that would be considered long-term goals, which could be accomplished in a four- to eight-year time frame. Each small group then shared their goals with the larger group. Goals could be highly specific or general, but all goals pointed to important outcomes that leadership hopes to see in the years ahead.

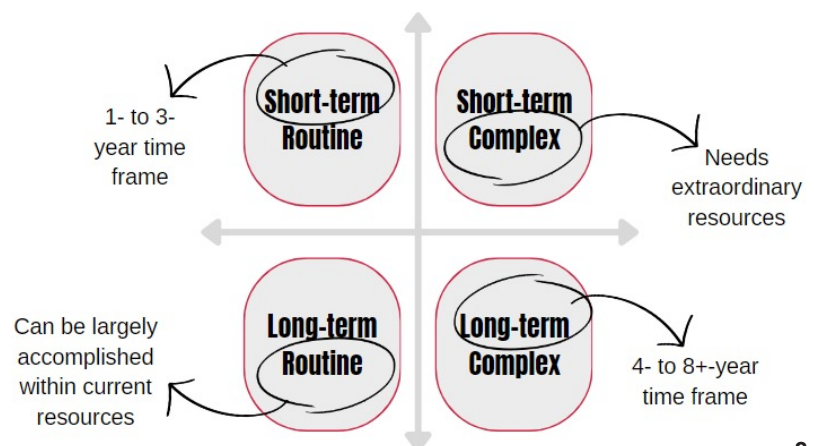
Short-term goals are those goals or objectives that could or should be completed or substantially underway in the next one to three years.

Long-term goals are those goals or objectives that could or should be completed or substantially underway within a four- to eight-year time frame.

Open Group Discussion and Consolidation of Goals and Objectives

This final phase of the goals discussion served as a forum for workshop participants to refine and compare the ideas and goals offered by each participant. Participants gave their opinions and further explained the fit, ideas, and policy outcomes expressed in the goals and discussed if additional goals or details were needed. Lastly, the group categorized each goal as routine or complex (see Figure 7). Routine goals are not simple or easy but could largely be accomplished by the Village with required budget and staffing allocations or with minor external assistance. Complex goals are complicated, multi-layered goals that require extraordinary resources, such as technical specialists, funding, or the collaboration or agreement of another unit of government or an outside organization, business, or agency.

Figure 7. Strategic Goal Matrix



Post-Workshop

Goal Prioritization and Ranking Exercise

The Village's senior-level staff and Board of Trustees were asked to delineate, via a post-workshop online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. Each participant was provided an online ranking tool where they ranked each goal within the four quadrants of the goal matrix (STR, STC, LTR, LTC) in order of priority, or "forced ranking". Participants were asked to rank all short-term routine goals against each other, all long-term routine goals against each other, and so on.

The overall ranking of each goal is calculated using the average of the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal was given scores of **2, 5, 6, 6, 1, 2**, and **3**, the average total would be **3.6**. The lower the score, the higher the priority. Again, the average totals were based on the rankings provided by all Village senior-level staff and the Board of Trustees.

The outcome of the Village's goal ranking exercise, along with the assigned priority levels for each goal, are presented in Figure 8. The dashboard demonstrates the strategic goals, tasks, and objectives for the Village's leadership team to address in the months and years ahead. Following the ranked goals, the Village's broader priority areas are shared and defined.

Figure 8. Prioritized goals dashboard

SHORT-TERM ROUTINE STRATEGIC GOALS <i>Short-term goals have a time frame of 1-3 years. The term "routine" does not mean the following goals are simple or easy, but that they could largely be accomplished by the Village with required budget and staffing allocations, and/or with minor external assistance.</i>	PRIORITY LEVEL
Village maintains checks and balances to remain fiscally responsible, sustainable, and innovative. - Increase the Village's reserves and investigate creative, "think outside the box" funding options - Investigate ways to replace the Grocery Tax in town – may be resolved by completion of plan - Simplify the permitting and zoning process and make online access available	High
Ensure the Village communicates with a unified voice and message. - Update and modernize the Village's website to be a resource hub and use social media to increase residents' awareness of Village services, events, success stories and more - Resume offering the community newsletter by publishing quarterly - Provide promotion and marketing of Village businesses on website with links to business pages - Host "Meet the Board" events or Board Q&A via social media	High
Update the Village's comprehensive plan and make necessary upgrades or changes to the Villages Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). - Reduce "Red Tape" to streamline development processes by removing unnecessary or overly burdensome steps along the development process - Review current design standards of the UDO to ensure they are designed for desirable outcomes	High
Maintain or enhance the Village standards for service delivery.	Medium
Develop a 5-year organizational, staffing, and processes plan for the Village to ensure it can maintain quality service levels. - Improve interdepartmental communication, consider regular staff meetings to share success stories and project updates, help eliminate siloing - Evaluate and simplify Village processes and create a uniform manual for all employees to access - Review staffing levels for each department and determine any new positions of need	Medium
Develop a branding plan that examines the Village's mission, vision, values, and other marketing and branding-related activities for any updating needs, based on community priorities. - Establish the Village's identity and future vision	Lower

SHORT-TERM COMPLEX STRATEGIC GOALS <i>Short-term complex goals have a time frame of 1-3 years. The term “complex” means the following goals are complicated or multi-layered and they require extraordinary resources such as technical specialists, funding, or the collaboration or agreement of another unit of government, or an outside organization, business, or agency.</i>	PRIORITY LEVEL
Support growth and development for the current and future businesses, strengthening Winnebago’s “business-friendly” reputation. - Utilize business recruitment strategies to attract developers and entrepreneurs to invest in the downtown area and explore incentives for businesses to locate to Winnebago - Diversify the business mix in the Village to include more service-focused businesses such as a veterinarian and additional restaurant options that are family-friendly - Follow up with interested businesses, help during start-up, and learn from closing businesses through an “exit interview”	High
Continue to focus on completing and filling the Village’s Willingham subdivision. - Explore incentives such as delayed property taxes a certain number of years to new buyers or possibly waiving water hookups with the Village	Medium
Explore establishing a TIF District in the most appropriate regions of the Village, including the possibilities of: - Willingham Subdivision, Route 20 /Winnebago Corners, or Downtown	Medium
Revisit, refine, and execute the Village’s overall economic development incentives.	Medium
Investigate locations and costs for a new Village Hall/Police Department/Community Center building and a Public Works wash bay.	Lower

LONG-TERM ROUTINE STRATEGIC GOALS Long-term routine goals have a time frame of 4-8+ years. The following goals are “routine”, not simple or easy, but could largely be accomplished by the Village with required budget and staffing allocations, and/or with minor external assistance.	PRIORITY LEVEL
Maintain positive relationships with all taxing bodies.	High
Using the Village’s evaluation of staffing levels, implement staffing recommendations including considering new full-time or part-time positions where necessary. - Human Resources (HR) professional - Position in Planning, Zoning, and Development to help streamline permitting and zoning processes - Marketing and Communications	Medium
Examine service delivery methods and approaches.	Lower



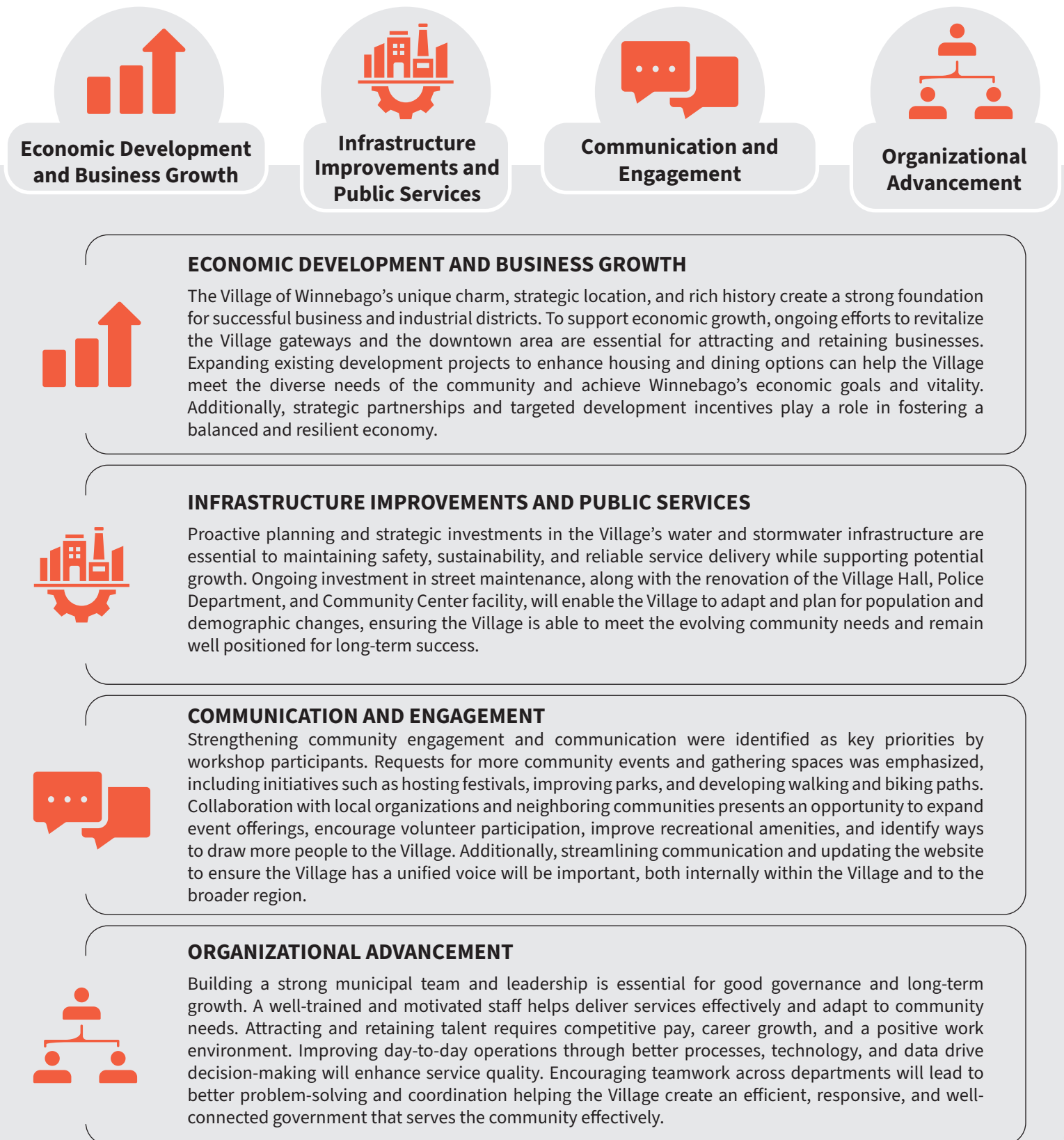
<p>LONG-TERM COMPLEX STRATEGIC GOALS</p> <p><i>Long-term complex goals have a time frame of 4-8+ years. The following goals are complicated or multi-layered goals that require extraordinary resources such as technical specialists, funding, or the collaboration or agreement of another unit of government, or an outside organization, business, or agency.</i></p>	<p>PRIORITY LEVEL</p>
<p>Develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that establishes maintenance schedules and identifies funding sources for infrastructure improvements and facility upgrades including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Securing a new Village Hall/Police Department/Community Center building - Building a Public Works garage and wash bay - Acquiring and razing the former Bud's Automotive building downtown - "Complete Streets" projects – stormwater drainage, pedestrian safety - Identify potential funding sources, including revenue allocation, bonding, CDBG grant funding, establishment of a TIF District, and collaboration with regional partners - Explore the option of a possible roundabout at Landmark Drive and Elida Street to work to improve the intersection 	<p>High</p>
<p>Work with developers to focus on building out current Village-serviced residential and commercial developments.</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Consider continuing to strategically grow the Village's boundaries through strategic annexation and pre-annexation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Properties that are key to TIF contiguity- Expanding North of Highway 20 - Falling in line with the current comprehensive plan or updating plan 	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Increase community events and engagement opportunities through strong relationships with Village partners including the Fire Department, Park District, School District, and Chamber of Commerce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider adding more "one-off" volunteer opportunities that are less time commitment and more focused on the volunteer (e.g., Plant Your Town, Clean Up the Trails, Senior Yard Clean Up, etc.) - Partner to improve communication about events, engagement opportunities, fundraising, community calendar, marketing on website and in newsletter, etc. - Evaluate the possibility of sharing facilities, where appropriate – include exploration of regional partnerships - Work with the Winnebago Park District to maintain all parks in the Village area and promote the parks to those outside of Winnebago 	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Examine the traffic patterns near School District properties to improve the traffic flow and create a more efficient school pick-up/drop-off process.</p>	<p>Lower</p>
<p>Review all beautification and upgrade needs for entryways into the Village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a Village Welcome Sign at the gateway into the Village to take advantage of the traffic off Route 20 	<p>Lower</p>
<p>Further implementation of Village Comprehensive Water System Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and other plans.</p>	<p>Lower</p>



Strategic Priority Areas

Based on a careful evaluation of the entirety of the process, including stakeholder feedback, discussions at the workshop, and the goals developed, several high-level strategic priority areas were identified. These priority areas highlight the activities and initiatives that the Village will focus on in both the short and long term. The Village of Winnebago's strategic priority areas are illustrated in Figure 9 and fully defined next. For a breakdown of strategic goal and stakeholder feedback alignment with each priority area, see [Appendix C](#).

Figure 9. 2025 Strategic priority areas





Conclusion

The strategic planning process will only be effective if this report serves as a practical guide for Winnebago's leaders and community. It captures key discussions throughout the strategic planning process and supports Village leadership in creating action plans to achieve strategic goals and advance priority initiatives.

As the Village evolves, it must adapt to changes in demographics, community trends, technology, and best practices. The strategic plan provides a flexible roadmap to navigate these shifts. To stay aligned with community needs, regular reviews of the strategic planning goals—monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually—are recommended, along with a full update of the plan every three to five years.

The discussions and idea-sharing during the strategic planning process highlighted Winnebago's forward-thinking leadership, who are committed to embracing strategic thinking and ensuring thoughtful planning for the Village's future.

We wish you well with the ambitious years that lie ahead.

Melissa Henriksen A. Hoebing Jeanna Ballard

Mel Henriksen, Alli Hoebing, and Jeanna Ballard
NIU-CGS Project Coordinators and Session Facilitators.

Appendix A

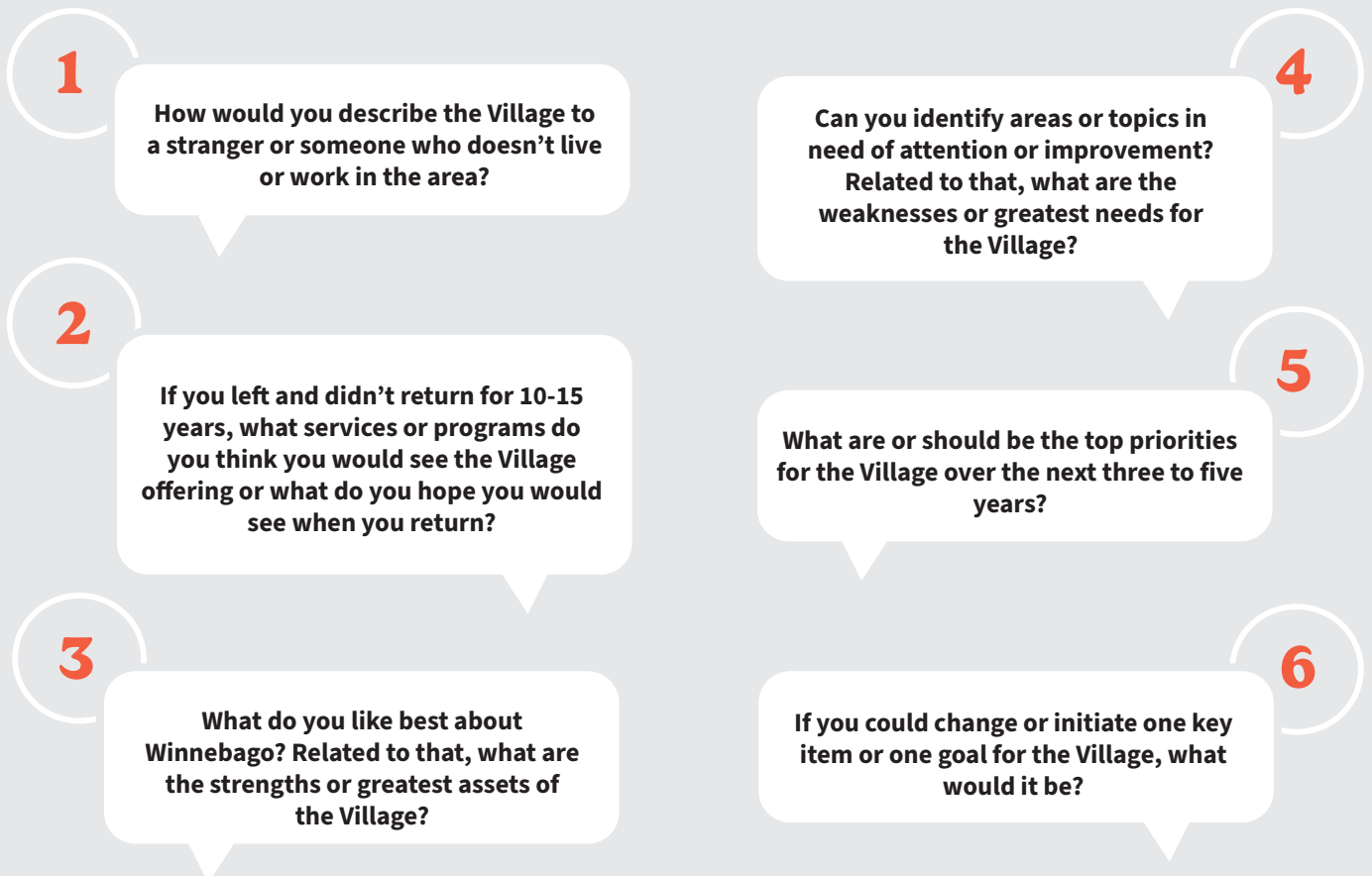
Focus Group and Leadership Interview Feedback

SUMMARY

One of the key analytical techniques used for the focus groups and interview notes is an analyst's search for key phrases, words, or terms that emerged during the stakeholder input sessions, a process known as coding. Coding is an analyst's individual readings of the data, followed by key term searches. The words and phrases listed below are the results of the NIU-CGS team's analysis of the collected focus group and interview notes. At a glance, the analyst can discover which terms were used or referred to most frequently in the feedback notes. Using individual analysts' coding, the researcher identifies terms that recur across participant groups and across questions. The results reveal key topics or issues that should be weighed and considered when proceeding with strategic planning discussions.

The information that follows is a summary of key themes and topics that emerged during the exploratory focus group sessions and leadership interviews. The stakeholder feedback collection served as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information that is presented in this summation was designed to add exploratory and thematic information for the Village's leadership team to consider during the strategic planning workshop.

The same exploratory discussion questions were asked to each focus group and interviewee and are listed below:



Overall Themes Based on **All External Focus Group Feedback**



COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- Coordinate and streamline communication from the Village to businesses and residents (e.g., project updates, plans for vacant properties, Board Minutes posted on Village's social media page, etc.)
 - » *Improve distribution of the Village's newsletter – not all in Village currently receive one*
 - » *Reduce complications or red tape and improve clarity about Village processes*
- Consider fresh ideas and think outside the box to increase the Board's involvement, engagement, and visibility in the community
 - » *Host "Meet the Board" events, attend and be visible at community gatherings, and participate in volunteer initiatives.*
 - » *Host live Q&A sessions via social media where Board members address public concerns and provide updates on Village projects*
- Explore the Village's mission, vision, branding, logo
 - » *Something updated and fresh that represents all that the Village offers – modern with a respect for history*
 - » *Establish the Village's identity*
 - » *Use other communities in the area as benchmarks to consider updated signage for entrances into the Village. Some examples include: Lena, Durand ("Welcome to Winnebago" or "You Are Now Entering Winnebago")*
 - » *Addition of public art or murals that depict the rich history of the Village*



COMMERCIAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Consider CDBG funds and other state grant funding to make necessary improvements to the downtown commercial corridor
- Create incentives for new business development in Winnebago
 - » *Partner to offer regional incentives for businesses (TIF District, for example)*
 - » *Introduce a Welcome sign for the "downtown district" (lit sign advertising businesses)*
 - » *Extend the advertising of businesses past the downtown to heavily-traveled Elida Street*
- Diversify the business mix
 - » *Look to gain more white-collar businesses that give students a reason to stay in Winnebago (in addition to farming)*
 - » *More grocery and shopping options (e.g., Walmart, Meijer)*
 - » *More family-friendly activities and gathering spaces (e.g., bowling alley, arcade, splash pad)*
 - » *Create a Business Welcome Packet*
- Staff follows up with interested business owners, make the process as simple and painless as possible
 - » *Streamline the Village's permitting and zoning processes – Zoning Commission meets more often to discuss and decide on special projects*
- Designate or build business and office suites consisting of multiple small businesses – public and private partnerships
 - » *Dental offices, pet shops, hotels, motels*
- Acquire and raze the old car wash behind Town Hall, can be used for additional downtown parking
 - » *Parking lot should consider electric vehicle charging stations*



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Explore adding more housing across the Village
 - » *Increase the housing options available (e.g., 55+, apartments, rentals, focus on filling the newer subdivision)*
 - » *Offer more resources and assistance to residents such as low-income options for housing or utility bills*
- Improve or enhance the Village's public transportation options
 - » *Expand options for seniors traveling to doctors' appointments, possibly adding a bus stop at Elida Street and Sullivan's*
- Build and seek more improvements to the Pecatonica Prairie Path
 - » *Added pavilion, picnic tables, bike repair station, and exercise stations are options for improvements*
- Add more community events and bring back past events (Jingle Mingle, 4th of July Festival)
 - » *Consider hiring a volunteer coordinator to gather more volunteers*
 - » *Work together with IGOs, Chamber of Commerce, and businesses to eliminate the red tape involved in putting on events (e.g., permitting, permissions, road closures, etc.)*

Overall Themes Based on the **Staff Focus Group Feedback**



Village Services



Infrastructure



Organizational Development



VILLAGE SERVICES

- Maintain the Village's high level of public safety
 - » *Invest in resources, funding, staffing, training for Police and EMS*
 - » *Police are visible in the community, make residents feel safe*
- Police Department does outreach, community policing, smaller department – smaller staff makes the Village a more enjoyable place to work
- Village has a strong roads program and water systems
- Help share assistance and resources for residents such as LIHEAP, low-income housing options, etc.
- Collaborate with regional partners to enhance public safety resources, infrastructure improvements, and social services without increasing the burden on the Village's budget.
- Establish a resource hub or easy-to-use digital platform where residents can find support services, and Village staff can quickly access information to better assist the community.



INFRASTRUCTURE

- Need to improve and add more sidewalks to improve connectivity and safety
- Expand fiber infrastructure to offer more than one cable company in Winnebago
- Upgrade the Village's water system
- Public Works Department needs a wash bay
- Improve the Village's drainage issues
- Buy or build a new Village Hall building and Police Department facility
 - » *Potentially including a designated space for community events, youth activities, more gathering space*



ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Update the Village's payroll and HR processes, consider hiring an HR professional
- Utilize technology to update and streamline all Village processes such as permitting, HR, etc.
 - » *Lack of follow-through with businesses that are interested in coming to Winnebago*
 - *Need to streamline permit requesting policies – create to do lists, clearly define roles and responsibilities when it comes to permitting and welcoming new businesses*
- Continue to improve communication and engagement
 - » *Help eliminate siloing amongst departments by improving interdepartmental communication*
 - » *Increase Board engagement and visibility at community events*
- Modernize, expand, and evaluate Village facilities and processes

Overall Themes Based on the **Leadership Interviews**



INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC GROWTH



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE



ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE



INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Aging infrastructure and outdated facilities such as Village Hall, Public Works, and the Police Department present significant challenges for the Village. Frequent issues, such as water main breaks, inadequate drainage systems, and other facilities issues, were consistently highlighted as priorities to address. Developing a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was emphasized as essential to providing a clear, financially responsible, and sustainable roadmap for maintaining and expanding critical assets.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC GROWTH

Generating economic development across residential, commercial, and industrial sectors was identified as a key priority. Strategic growth requires a deliberate alignment of economic development initiatives with infrastructure improvements to ensure the Village is prepared to support expansion. Focus areas included revitalizing downtown through improved streetscapes, enhancing walkability by connecting bike paths and parks, and addressing blighted areas to improve the community's appeal. Winnebago Corners was highlighted as a key location with potential to become an economic hub, attracting businesses and supporting infrastructure improvements. The Village's strong school district and safe neighborhoods were noted as valuable assets for attracting families. Participants emphasized the need to balance these initiatives with fiscal responsibility to ensure sustainable growth while preserving the Village's small-town charm.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Strengthening community engagement and enhancing quality of life were identified as key priorities by participants. Many emphasized the need for more recreational activities, events, and gathering spaces, suggesting initiatives such as improving parks, hosting festivals, developing walking and biking paths, and creating public spaces to foster connections among residents and attract visitors. Collaboration with local organizations and neighboring communities was frequently highlighted as an opportunity to organize more events, work collectively to improve quality of life, and identify ways to draw more people to the Village.



ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The addition of a Village Administrator has helped streamline operations, enabling the Board to focus on policy-making and strategic decision-making. The shift to a Committee of the Whole (COTW) structure has further promoted collaboration and a broader approach to governance. Participants highlighted the need to foster open communication and address departmental silos to align goals and create a unified team. Concerns about succession planning and staffing challenges emphasized the importance of professional development, competitive pay, and clear advancement pathways. Additionally, modernizing processes, updating ordinances, and adopting user-friendly technology were seen as critical for maintaining good governance.



Appendix B

Surrender or Lead Exercise

The **bolded and underlined** sections are key phrases that each group provided in response to the Surrender or Lead exercise's open-ended questions and prompts during the leadership workshop.

Group #1:

1. We want to **develop** but **do not have the monetary resources**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **getting the people involved (competent)** and **infrastructure** because **they are essential to successful development**.
3. If it were not for **financial restrictions**, we would **enhance existing community resources and expand community-focused centers**.
4. We need to finally **enhance our communication with the community in an effective and transparent manner**.
5. **Development (commercial and residential)** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #2:

1. We want to **grow** but **we have no plan yet**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are the **maintaining service levels** and **development** because **they will shore up the budget**.
3. If it were not for **limited funding**, we would **increase services**.
4. We need to finally **EXECUTE plans, explore spending the Village's cash reserves where it makes sense**.
5. **Planning and revenue** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #3:

1. We want to **foster a cohesive and engaged community**, but **we need to figure out what they want**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **communication** and **follow through** because **otherwise things won't get done**.
3. If it weren't for **financial limitations**, we could **build a Community Center and a new Village Hall**.
4. We need to finally **collaborate**.
5. **Community engagement** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Appendix C

Strategic Priority Area Goal and Stakeholder Feedback Alignment



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS GROWTH

The Village of Winnebago's unique charm, strategic location, and rich history create a strong foundation for successful business and industrial districts. To support economic growth, ongoing efforts to revitalize the Village gateways and the downtown area are essential for attracting and retaining businesses. Expanding existing development projects to enhance housing and dining options can help the Village meet the diverse needs of the community and achieve Winnebago's economic goals and vitality. Additionally, strategic partnerships and targeted development incentives play a role in fostering a balanced and resilient economy.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS GROWTH-RELATED GOALS DEVELOPED AT THE WORKSHOP:

- Update the Village's comprehensive plan and make necessary upgrades or changes to the Villages Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).
 - » *Reduce "Red Tape" to streamline development processes by removing unnecessary or overly burdensome steps along the development process*
 - » *Review current design standards of the UDO to ensure they are designed for desirable outcomes*
- Support growth and development for the current and future businesses, strengthening Winnebago's "business-friendly" reputation.
 - » *Utilize business recruitment strategies to attract developers and entrepreneurs to invest in the downtown area and explore incentives for businesses to locate to Winnebago*
 - » *Diversify the business mix in the Village to include more service-focused businesses such as a veterinarian and additional restaurant options that are family-friendly*
 - » *Follow up with interested businesses, help during start-up, and learn from closing businesses through an "exit interview"*
- Explore establishing a TIF District in the most appropriate regions of the Village, including the possibilities of:
 - » *Willingham Subdivision, Route 20 /Winnebago Corners, or Downtown*
- Revisit, refine, and execute the Village's overall economic development incentives.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS GROWTH-ALIGNING STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK:

- Create incentives for new business development in Winnebago.
 - » *Partner to offer regional incentives for businesses (TIF District, for example)*
 - » *Introduce a Welcome sign for the "downtown district" (lit sign advertising businesses)*
 - » *Extend the advertising of businesses past the downtown to heavily-traveled Elida Street*
- Acquire and raze the old car wash behind Town Hall, can be used for additional downtown parking.
 - » *Parking lot should consider electric vehicle charging stations*
- Diversify the business mix.
 - » *Look to gain more white-collar businesses that give students a reason to stay in Winnebago (in addition to farming)*
 - » *More grocery and shopping options (e.g., Walmart, Meijer)*
 - » *More family-friendly activities and gathering spaces (e.g., bowling alley, arcade, splash pad)*
 - » *Create a Business Welcome Packet*



INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Proactive planning and strategic investments in the Village's water and stormwater infrastructure are essential to maintaining safety, sustainability, and reliable service delivery while supporting potential growth. Ongoing investment in street maintenance, along with the renovation of the Village Hall, Police Department, and Community Center facility, will enable the Village to adapt and plan for population and demographic changes, ensuring the Village is able to meet the evolving community needs and remain well positioned for long-term success.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AND PUBLIC SERVICES-RELATED GOALS DEVELOPED AT THE WORKSHOP:

- Continue to focus on completing and filling the Village's Willingham subdivision.
 - » *Explore incentives such as delayed property taxes a certain number of years to new buyers or possibly waiving water hookups with the Village*
- Investigate locations and costs for a new Village Hall/Police Department/Community Center building and a Public Works wash bay.
- Examine service delivery methods and approaches.
- Develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that establishes maintenance schedules and identifies funding sources for infrastructure improvements and facility upgrades including, but not limited to:
 - » *Securing a new Village Hall/Police Department/Community Center building*
 - » *Building a Public Works garage and wash bay*
 - » *Acquiring and razing the former Bud's Automotive building downtown*
 - » *"Complete Streets" projects – stormwater drainage, pedestrian safety*
 - » *Identify potential funding sources, including revenue allocation, bonding, CDBG grant funding, establishment of a TIF District, and collaboration with regional partners*
 - » *Explore the option of a possible roundabout at Landmark Drive and Elida Street to work to improve the intersection*
- Review all beautification and upgrade needs for entryways into the Village.
 - » *Establish a Village Welcome Sign at the gateway into the Village to take advantage of the traffic off Route 20*
- Work with developers to focus on building out current Village-serviced residential and commercial developments.
- Further implementation of Village Comprehensive Water System Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and other plans.
- Examine the traffic patterns near School District properties to improve the traffic flow and create a more efficient school pick-up/drop-off process.
- Consider continuing to strategically grow the Village's boundaries through strategic annexation and pre-annexation.
 - » *Properties that are key to TIF contiguity*
 - » *Expanding North of Highway 20*
 - » *Falling in line with the current comprehensive plan or updating plan*

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AND PUBLIC SERVICES-ALIGNING STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK:

- Upgrade the Village's water system
- Public Works Department needs a wash bay
- Improve the Village's drainage issues
- Buy or build a new Village Hall building and Police Department facility
 - » *Potentially including a designated space for community events, youth activities, more gathering space*
- Collaborate with regional partners to enhance public safety resources, infrastructure improvements, and social services without increasing the burden on the Village's budget.



COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Strengthening community engagement and communication were identified as key priorities by workshop participants. Requests for more community events and gathering spaces was emphasized, including initiatives such as hosting festivals, improving parks, and developing walking and biking paths. Collaboration with local organizations and neighboring communities presents an opportunity to expand event offerings, encourage volunteer participation, improve recreational amenities, and identify ways to draw more people to the Village. Additionally, streamlining communication and updating the website to ensure the Village has a unified voice will be important, both internally within the Village and to the broader region.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT-RELATED GOALS DEVELOPED AT THE WORKSHOP:

- Ensure the Village communicates with a unified voice and message.
 - » *Update and modernize the Village's website to be a resource hub and use social media to increase residents' awareness of Village services, events, success stories and more*
 - » *Resume offering the community newsletter by publishing quarterly*
 - » *Provide promotion and marketing of Village businesses on website with links to business pages*
 - » *Host "Meet the Board" events or Board Q&A via social media*
- Develop a branding plan that examines the Village's mission, vision, values, and other marketing and branding-related activities for any updating needs, based on community priorities.
 - » *Establish the Village's identity and future vision*
- Maintain positive relationships with all taxing bodies.
- Increase community events and engagement opportunities through strong relationships with Village partners including the Fire Department, Park District, School District, and Chamber of Commerce.
 - » *Consider adding more "one-off" volunteer opportunities that are less time commitment and more focused on the volunteer (e.g., Plant Your Town, Clean Up the Trails, Senior Yard Clean Up, etc.)*
 - » *Partner to improve communication about events, engagement opportunities, fundraising, community calendar, marketing on website and in newsletter, etc.*
 - » *Evaluate the possibility of sharing facilities, where appropriate – include exploration of regional partnerships*
 - » *Work with the Winnebago Park District to maintain all parks in the Village area and promote the parks to those outside of Winnebago*

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT-ALIGNING STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK:

- Coordinate and streamline communication from the Village to businesses and residents (e.g., project updates, plans for vacant properties, Board Minutes posted on Village's social media page, etc.).
 - » *Improve distribution of the Village's newsletter – not all in Village currently receive one*
 - » *Reduce complications or red tape and improve clarity about Village processes*
- Consider fresh ideas and think outside the box to increase the Board's involvement, engagement, and visibility in the community.
 - » *Host "Meet the Board" events, attend and be visible at community gatherings, and participate in volunteer initiatives*
 - » *Host live Q&A sessions via social media where Board members address public concerns and provide updates on Village projects*
- Explore the Village's mission, vision, branding, logo
 - » *Something updated and fresh that represents all that the Village offers – modern with a respect for history*
 - » *Establish the Village's identity*
 - » *Use other communities in the area as benchmarks to consider updated signage for entrances into the Village. Some examples include: Lena, Durand ("Welcome to Winnebago" or "You Are Now Entering Winnebago")*
 - » *Addition of public art or murals that depict the rich history of the Village*



ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Building a strong municipal team and leadership is essential for good governance and long-term growth. A well-trained and motivated staff helps deliver services effectively and adapt to community needs. Attracting and retaining talent requires competitive pay, career growth, and a positive work environment. Improving day-to-day operations through better processes, technology, and data drive decision-making will enhance service quality. Encouraging teamwork across departments will lead to better problem-solving and coordination helping the Village create an efficient, responsive, and well-connected government that serves the community effectively.

ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANCEMENT-RELATED GOALS DEVELOPED AT THE WORKSHOP:

- Village maintains checks and balances to remain fiscally responsible, sustainable, and innovative.
 - » *Increase the Village's reserves and investigate creative, "think outside the box" funding options*
 - » *Investigate ways to replace the Grocery Tax in town – may be resolved by completion of plan*
 - » *Simplify the permitting and zoning process and make online access available*
- Develop a 5-year organizational, staffing, and processes plan for the Village to ensure it can maintain quality service levels.
 - » *Improve interdepartmental communication, consider regular staff meetings to share success stories and project updates, help eliminate siloing*
 - » *Evaluate and simplify Village processes and create a uniform manual for all employees to access*
 - » *Review staffing levels for each department and determine any new positions of need*
- Maintain or enhance the Village standards for service delivery.
- Using the Village's evaluation of staffing levels, implement staffing recommendations including considering new full-time or part-time positions where necessary.
 - » *Human Resources (HR) professional*
 - » *Position in Planning, Zoning, and Development to help streamline permitting and zoning processes*
 - » *Marketing and Communications*

ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANCEMENT-ALIGNING STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK:

- Update the Village's payroll and HR processes, consider hiring an HR professional.
- Utilize technology to update and streamline all Village processes such as permitting, HR, etc.
 - » *Lack of follow-through with businesses that are interested in coming to Winnebago*
 - *Need to streamline permit requesting policies – create to do lists, clearly define roles and responsibilities when it comes to permitting and welcoming new businesses*
- Continue to improve communication and engagement.
 - » *Help eliminate siloing amongst departments by improving interdepartmental communication*
 - » *Increase Board engagement and visibility at community events*
- Modernize, expand, and evaluate Village facilities and processes.