

The Special Strategic Planning Workshop of the Village of Winnebago was held in person on March 1, 2025, at 9:00 AM at the Winnebago Community Historical Society Town Hall, 116 South Benton Street. Notice of the meeting was posted at both the meeting location and Village Hall in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The meeting was called to order at 9:07 AM by Trustee Mike McKinnon.

ROLL CALL: ACKERMAN – KIM – LEFEVRE – MCKINNON (ABSENT: EUBANK, PITNEY, SMITH)

A motion was made by Kim, seconded by Lefevre, to appoint Trustee McKinnon as Temporary Chair. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Guests: Village Administrator Joseph Dienberg, Chief Jeff White, Lieutenant Nick Haff, Public Works Director Chad Insko, Treasurer Dana Novinson, and representatives from Northern Illinois University's (NIU) Center for Governmental Studies (CGS), including Mel Henriksen and Ali Hoebing.

3. DISCLOSURE OF ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST - No conflict of interest was noted.

4. GOAL SETTING DISCUSSION FOR THE VILLAGE OF WINNEBAGO (Led by NIU Center for Governmental Studies)

The workshop was facilitated by NIU's CGS and followed the structured agenda. Discussions were free-flowing, with NIU leading interactive exercises aimed at refining the Village's mission, strategic priorities, and long-term goals. Board members, Village staff, and NIU representatives actively participated in the process.

Icebreaker and Introductions

To start the session, NIU led an icebreaker activity to encourage engagement and discussion.

Visions of Tomorrow

NIU opened the session with an activity designed to help participants think strategically about Winnebago's future. Each participant was asked to respond to the following two forward-looking questions:

1. If you left the area tomorrow and returned in 10–15 years, what do you think you'll see—or hope to see—in the community?
2. What is the biggest challenge facing the Village in achieving that vision?

Key themes that emerged from this exercise included:

- Hopes for the future: A thriving local economy, new businesses, and improved public spaces. Many participants envisioned Winnebago as a well-maintained, attractive place to live and work, with a strong business corridor and expanded community amenities.
- Challenges to achieving this vision: Participants noted concerns about budget constraints, infrastructure maintenance, and the ability to attract developers. Some cited public perception of growth and change as a barrier that may need to be addressed through better community engagement.

Mission Review

NIU facilitated a small group mission exploration where participants evaluated examples of mission statements from other municipalities. The groups discussed:

- What elements resonated with them.
- What should be reflected in Winnebago's mission statement.

Based on input, two draft mission statements were developed:

1. *“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.”*
2. *“We are committed to a safe, thriving, and connected community through responsible leadership and strategic growth, creating a welcoming home for all generations.”*

Stakeholder Focus Groups – Review of Key Themes

NIU presented findings from stakeholder focus groups that had been conducted prior to the workshop, incorporating feedback from residents, business owners, government/civic groups, and Village staff. These findings were discussed with attendees, who were asked to assess whether the themes accurately reflected their own experiences and priorities.

The themes identified aligned closely with the insights shared by workshop participants earlier in the session, reinforcing the importance of these priorities across all stakeholder groups.

External Stakeholders (Residents, Business Owners, and Civic Groups):

- Communication & Engagement – Stakeholders emphasized the need for clearer and more frequent communication from the Village. Many felt that communication should be proactive rather than reactive and suggested improvements such as regular updates, better online resources, and expanded engagement efforts to increase public trust and participation.
- Commercial Growth & Development – Many residents and business owners expressed a desire for more retail, family dining, and commercial opportunities in Winnebago. Stakeholders identified the need for targeted business recruitment efforts and highlighted barriers such as infrastructure limitations and a perceived lack of economic incentives for new businesses.
- Community Resources & Village Facilities – Feedback indicated that residents would like to see expanded recreational opportunities and improved Village buildings and public spaces. Specific suggestions included:
 - Enhancing parks and green spaces to improve access and usability.
 - Upgrading community facilities to support gathering spaces
 - Enhancing Bike and Pedestrian Paths
 - Improving the Pecatonica Prairie Path

Internal Stakeholders (Village Staff and Leadership):

- Village Services & Infrastructure – Staff and leadership emphasized the need to maintain and improve Village infrastructure, particularly roads, water systems, and drainage. Concerns were raised about aging infrastructure and the long-term costs of deferred maintenance.
- Organizational Development & Governance – A major theme among internal stakeholders was the need for stronger internal processes, improved communication, staff development, and improved operational efficiency. Priorities included:
 - Investing in training and professional development.
 - Enhancing interdepartmental coordination.
 - Streamlining Village operations to improve service delivery.
- Village Facilities & Equipment – Internal feedback strongly emphasized the condition and capacity of Village-owned buildings.
 - Administrative Offices & Public Meeting Space – Some departments feel that current office space is not adequate for long-term needs, citing limited storage, workspace constraints, and outdated layouts. There was interest in evaluating potential improvements to Village Hall or alternative options.

- Public Works Facilities – Staff noted concerns with space limitations, aging equipment storage areas, and the long-term sustainability of existing structures. It was specifically noted that Public Works needs a wash bay.
- Police Department Facilities – There was a general sense that current facilities may not fully meet future operational demands, particularly as the department continues to modernize and adapt to new technology.
- Community & Recreational Spaces – There was discussion about expanding or improving spaces available for public gatherings, recreational programming, and civic events to accommodate future growth.

Assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (Two-Part SWOC)

NIU facilitated a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) exercise. Each small group brainstormed ideas and then shared findings with the larger group. Below is a general summary of some of the ideas discussed:

- *Strengths:* Strong community identity, good schools, dedicated Village staff and residents.
- *Weaknesses:* Aging infrastructure, limited commercial growth, lack of consistent messaging, revenue.
- *Opportunities:* Served Village Parcels for development, well positioned financially, proximity to US 20, and the creation of strategic plan.
- *Challenges:* Budget limitations, rising costs, state-affected revenue and unfunded mandates.

Goal Review and Identification

Attendees reviewed the SWOC findings and refined them into specific goals in small groups. Some of the top priorities identified included but are not limited to:

- Infrastructure Improvements – Developing a Capital Improvement Plan to fund goals and needs, Road resurfacing, stormwater drainage, and water system upgrades.
- Economic Development & Growth – Attracting businesses, filling vacant properties, improving the village's Unified Development Ordinance and evaluating the need for a downtown zoning district, and incentivizing commercial and residential development.
- Community Engagement & Quality of Life – Enhancing public events and improving communication.
- Organizational Development & Governance – Streamlining operations and eliminating red-tape for those seeking village service or starting their business.

Next Steps:

NIU detailed the post-workshop action plan, including:

- Transcription of Notes & Draft Goal Statements:
 - NIU will compile workshop notes over the next 1–2 weeks and send draft goal statements for board review. A ranking survey will be distributed to workshop participants, with a one-week deadline for responses.
- Action Planning:
 - Once goals are ranked, NIU will schedule a virtual action planning session with senior staff. This session will take 1–1.5 hours and utilize an Excel-based framework to develop implementation strategies.
- Final Report:
 - NIU will prepare a comprehensive final report documenting the strategic planning process and goals. The report is expected to be completed by early April, with an executive summary included for easy reference.
- Board Input Worksheet:

- A fillable worksheet will be provided for board members who could not attend. Completed worksheets should be returned by the end of the week for inclusion in NIU's final documentation.

NIU expressed appreciation for the Village's preparation, setup, and coordination, which contributed to a productive session.

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by MR. LEFEVRE, seconded by MR. KIM to adjourn at 2:00 p.m. Motion carried on a voice vote.

UNAPPROVED

Prepared by: Joey Dienberg, Village Administrator