



## STAFF REPORT

DATE: February 18, 2025  
REGULAR

**AGENDA ITEM:** 2025 Lake Elmo Strategic Plan

**SUBMITTED BY:** Nicole Miller, City Administrator

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Council, Department Heads, Consultant Staff and Commission Representatives, held work sessions on January 15-16, 2024 to develop both long-term strategies and short-term goals for the organization. The discussion was facilitated by Phil Kern and included long-term vision, organizational values and expectations, and short-term goal setting. The group heard presentations from all departments, contracted staff and commission representatives.

### **ISSUE BEFORE COUNCIL:**

Should the council adopt the 2025 Strategic plan?

### **PROPOSAL:**

A copy of the 2025 Strategic Plan is attached.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

TBD

### **OPTIONS:**

- 1) Adopt 2025 Lake Elmo Strategic Plan
- 2) Adopt 2025 Lake Elmo Strategic Plan with amendments
- 3) Table to further date

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

***“Motion to adopt 2025 Lake Elmo Strategic Plan”***

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- Lake Elmo 2025 Strategic Plan
- Lake Elmo 2025 Strategic Plan Presentation



# LAKE ELMO STRATEGIC PLAN

JANUARY 2025

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# STRATEGIC PLAN

## PROCESS

On January 15-16, 2024, the Lake Elmo City Council and Staff Leadership Team held work sessions to develop both long-term strategies and short-term goals for the organization in 2025. The sessions focused on three key areas of strategic planning: long-term vision, organizational values and expectations, and short-term goal setting. The group explored the elements of the long-term vision, crafting strategy statements to define that vision. They then assessed the current state of the City and organization to create a list of goals for both the Council and staff, aligning with that vision. Through discussions, participants reflected on strengths, weaknesses, potential impacts, and emerging opportunities. The group also reached consensus on how various functions of local government must collaborate to succeed, establishing shared organizational values and expectations. The City Council will now review the outcomes of these sessions as part of adopting the 2025 Strategic Plan.

## LONG TERM VISION

One of the primary outcomes of the Strategic Planning process is the development of a long-term vision. The vision is a description of the future the participants see for the community and the organization, often expressed in aspirational terms. The purpose of the vision is to establish a long-term direction that can be communicated both within the community and the organization, providing stakeholders with an understanding of the leadership's direction. The vision is communicated through a series of descriptive and detailed organizational strategy statements, labeled core strategies. These statements can be both the embodiment of the areas the organization values and the direction of its leadership. Accomplishing progress on the core strategies will bring the organization closer to achieving its vision and provide the areas in which more manageable, short-term goals can be derived.

Prior to the session, participants were asked to consider the characteristics and qualities they hoped would describe Lake Elmo and the organization in 2050. Participants individually shared their thoughts in writing in advance. The comments and input were collected and shared anonymously with the group in the first exercise of the session. The participants were given the opportunity to discuss the results of the pre-session work, identifying areas of consensus, emphasis, and importance to the long-term vision of the City and organization.

The participants then reviewed a draft of core strategies areas based on the input from this activity. The core strategies are action statements that identify the organization and City's long-term key areas of focus. The group refined the strategy areas before breaking into small groups to work constructively on developing strategic objectives that support each core strategy area. The strategies provide consistent and stable organizational priorities for the years to come, and serve as organizational guideposts for day-to-day action, policy formation, and program decision-making. It is anticipated that the core strategies may be modified over the long-term, but generally all agreed as to the key priorities of the leadership team.

The core strategies are supported in this plan by strategic objectives. These objectives provide more specific action areas that the City's leadership team believes are integral to achieving success with the core strategies. Each objective addresses an internal or external area of action or improvement. The strategic objectives, combined with the core strategies, provide direction for all areas of leadership.

Following the presentation of draft core strategies and strategic objectives, the full group reviewed and discussed the body of work and modified the proposed statements of the Leadership Team's vision. Without objection and subject to further modification prior to adoption, the group agreed to the following draft core strategies and strategic objectives:

### **Core Strategies and Strategic Objectives**

The City of Lake Elmo is committed to leading and guiding the City towards the following long-term Core Strategies and Strategic Objectives:

#### **1. Building a vibrant, inclusive, and connected community through celebration, engagement, and shared spaces.**

- Actively communicate and promote achievements and milestones to foster pride and unity among residents.
- Support events and initiatives that cater to diverse age groups, cultures, and interests, ensuring everyone feels welcome and valued.
- Develop and maintain parks, gathering spaces, and a thriving downtown core that serve as destination-worthy hubs for community connection.
- Prioritize clean, safe environments to encourage active use of public spaces.
- Expand and diversify recreational assets and opportunities to meet the interests and needs of community members.
- Promote walkability and connectedness through planned and maintained sidewalk and trail systems.

#### **2. Manage Growth with Purpose and Intent.**

- Protect historical charm and character.
- Enhance infrastructure and spaces that bring people together.
- Align growth with community values to nurture a shared sense of pride.
- Focus on projects that reflect long-term community goals.
- Balance growth with efforts to maintain the city's unique sense of community.
- Support local business and encourage new businesses through community collaboration

#### **3. Balancing finances consistent with current needs and future growth.**

- Align financial decisions with current needs and long-term sustainability.
- Maintain transparency and clear communication with stakeholders.
- Manage resources carefully to support city services and future growth.
- Explore alternative funding sources to reduce and eliminate debt.
- Coordinating growth and development to provide financial resources to support City services
- Prioritize well-planned, thoughtful investments for lasting impact.

#### **4. Maintain responsive, transparent, and adaptive governance.**

- Proactively address current needs and future challenges while responding to immediate needs.
- Foster open communication and active collaboration with stakeholders.
- Uphold ethical, transparent, and fair decision-making processes.
- Embody principles of servant leadership for the well-being of the community through selfless service and guidance.
- Ensure actions are purposefully aligned with long-term community objectives.
- Welcome new ideas and collaborative solutions to address evolving opportunities and challenges.

#### **5. Deliver efficient, reliable, and innovative public services.**

- Foster a safe and secure community by investing in and maintaining engaged police, fire, and public works services.
- Maintain a highly trained, responsive staff dedicated to excellence.
- Be innovative and adaptable with services to meet the community's changing demands.
- Embrace a team approach centered on serving the community effectively.

#### **6. Build and sustain resilient infrastructure to support a thriving and sustainable community.**

- Implement effective water management strategies to ensure long-term availability of safe drinking water.
- Manage Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to align asset management with fiscal responsibility.
- Construct and maintain street and utility systems with care and foresight with appropriate management.
- Adopt environmentally responsible practices for infrastructure and resource management.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND VALUES**

The second part of the session focused on how the organization desires to conduct its matters and how the different members of the leadership team interact with each other. Effective local governance requires respect and understanding of the difference in roles between the elected body, the City Council, and its professional staff. The City Council should focus on governance through establishing policy, providing direction, and acting on official matters before the City. Staff, through the City Administrator, focus on execution of services and implementation of Council directives. Understanding those roles and what each body provides for the other is important in setting the context for a strong, working relationship and good governance.

For this exercise, the City Council and staff leadership teams respectively split into two groups to discuss two questions: what it expects of the other group and what it provides for the other group. The Council and staff leadership team then reconvened and shared with each other providing an opportunity for discussion and feedback.

The outcome of this work are the following expectations and values for the City of Lake Elmo.

<b>City Council Provides for Staff</b>	<b>Leadership Team (Staff) Provides for City Council</b>
Clear direction	Transparency
No surprises	Information and data, facts
Communicate need for additional information	Options, comparisons, recommendations
Respect	Background and solutions
Support staff within the community	Financial implications
Resources needed for their roles/support	Perspective
Collaborative	Continuity
Encouragement in career growth/advancement	Connection and communications
No late meetings, reasonable	SME

<b>City Council Expectations of Leadership Team (Staff)</b>	<b>Leadership Team (Staff) Expectations of City Council</b>
Critical thinking	Resources to meet Council expectations
Professionalism	Clear, direct expectations
Data/research	Support, respect, and trust
Anticipation of future risks/needs	Feedback – Council and community awareness
Collaborative space	Collaboration
Analysis of problems/issues	Stay in your lane, respect the different roles
Follow through on Council actions	Cohesive Council
Reporting back on issues	Council/staff relationships

Realistic communication of capacity	Perspective
Situational awareness	Boundaries
Know and understand your role	
Respect diversity of elected leaders (different needs, tones, styles, backgrounds, etc.)	

The second session also included a brief discussion of the organization's values. The chart below indicates the nine current values. Prior to the session, the participants were asked to each identify their three priority values from a long list of organizational values. As a session activity, the group reviewed the similarities between the existing values and the brainstormed values of the group's participants.

The group was asked to consider the organizational values and if fewer values (suggested 3, up to 5) would better serve the organization. Current research and trends on organizational effectiveness suggests that organizations are better served by fewer values that are both memorable for people within the organization and meaningful for the community. Several members of the group spoke up and supported the idea of trimming the goals to 3, if possible, or perhaps 4-5 if needed. Within that conversation, there were several guiding suggestions from the group that seemed to have consensus:

- Both the existing City values and the brainstormed responses place a high emphasis on excellence when it comes to performing the work the City does. Excellence can describe many elements of the City's efforts, from the quality of the services it provides to the value of continuous improvement and not settling for satisfactory or good within staff and organizational performance.
- There were a number of character traits in both lists, and perhaps finding a value that summarizes the key responses from the group related to the character expectations would be helpful. Some of the character values that were high on both the existing values list and the brainstormed list included integrity, transparency, accountability, trusting, and professional.
- The responses also provided value statements related to the City being a service-driven organization, and not just simply a service provider, but one that is engaged, collaborative, and strives to meet its stakeholders needs. In keeping with the concept of servant leadership, the value of serving the community was a common response.

With this group feedback and input in mind, I am recommending the City consider the following values and value statements to summarize and support the City's mission and how it expects the organization to perform.

**The mission of the City of Lake Elmo is to provide planned, quality public services consistent with the City's character in a fiscally-responsible manner in partnership with our community.**

The organization intends to meet this mission by committing to performance consistent with the following values:

- **Excellence**
  - We strive for excellence in everything we do, ensuring the highest quality in the delivery of services. Our commitment to excellence is reflected in our continue pursuit of improvement and innovation.
- **Integrity**
  - We uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity in our actions. We are transparent and accountable, fostering trust and respect among our stakeholders.
- **Service**
  - We are committed to serving our community through collaboration, innovation, open communication, valuing diverse ideas and creative solutions. By respecting individuality and actively engaging with the community, we ensure our efforts are inclusive and responsive.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

As the session moved into the short-term actions phase, a key activity was conducting an environmental scan of the City and organization. This scan aimed to assess both the external (community) and internal (organization) environments from multiple perspectives. Throughout the two work sessions, participants were regularly prompted with questions to guide their analysis of Lake Elmo's strengths, challenges, and emerging trends. These discussions were conducted in small groups and also as a whole, where participants explored issues and opportunities facing the City in the years ahead. The insights gained from this environmental scan formed the foundation for developing the organization's goals later in the sessions.

The questions posed throughout the sessions included the following:

- What do you most appreciate about the City of Lake Elmo?
- Where is your City/Organization momentum present?
- What are you doing well?
- What challenges are you facing or see coming?
- What are you doing that you shouldn't be doing?
- What aren't you doing that you should be doing?
- What trends/opportunities do you see coming?

One of the key activities to help highlight the assessment involved individual presentations by departments and service providers for the City. Every department of the City offered a brief presentation of primary activities, opportunities, challenges, and areas of focus. Additionally, representatives of the City's Parks and Planning Commissions, along with the Economic Development Authority, presented areas of focus and potential projects for the coming year. The group also heard from Metro I-NET and the Clark Schroeder regarding water issues.

These questions and discussions helped frame the present status of the City and the organization, setting the stage for goal setting to meet the challenges and opportunities in a fashion consistent with the City's long-term vision.



## SHORT-TERM GOALS

The third portion of the Strategic Planning process was to develop a short-term goals platform and workplan to guide the organization in the coming years. Participants were offered the opportunity to present draft goals that addressed any of the following objectives - short-term actions that lead to a core strategy or strategic objective, goals to address weaknesses, opportunities, or potential impacts discussed during the assessment process, or other goals that individual members viewed to be important for the City. The process encouraged the brainstorming of SMART goals - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (2-3 years) - and objectives that would support the core strategies and vision.

Following the brainstorming process, a prioritization process was used to develop the following list of high priority and priority goals. Participants were given the ability to choose a limited number of brainstormed goals as their top priorities. As each participant's choices were collected, the draft goals were bunched into three categories. The categories and prioritization followed these guidelines:

- High Priority Goals - goals that were identified by at least three members of the Mayor/City Council as top priority and also received support from City Staff.
- Opportunity Goals - goals that were identified as a top priority by at least two of the Mayor and City Council or a majority and received support from City Staff.
- Other Goals - goals that did not have an initial priority ranking by more than one of the Mayor and City Council. (Included as an appendix to the report.)

### **Proposed 2025 Short-Term Goals**

**High Priority** - goals that are the top priority of the organization in the coming two-year period.

1. Develop Master Plans, including community engagement for recently purchased 77 acres, and existing 180 acres (Core Strategy #1).
2. Address water appropriations and PFAS with appropriate agencies and promote water conservation (Core Strategy #6).
3. Develop comprehensive financial strategy that encompasses multiple long-term goals (Core Strategy #3).
4. Develop vision for Comprehensive Plan including future MUSA area development (Core Strategy #2).
5. Keep external and internal communications fresh and innovative – connect with all ages and cultures (Core Strategy #4).
6. Develop Old Fire Station site (Core Strategy #2).
7. Work with community and partnering agencies to evaluate emergency service response to southern portion of the city. Including future growth of city, response times, roadway designs and intersection improvements. (Core Strategy #5 & #6).
8. Analyze and assess water, sewer, and street light fees (Core Strategy #3).

**Opportunity** - goals that have organizational support, to be pursued when opportunity is available.

9. Examine and meet staffing appropriate for desired service level needs, including fire and police, based on current and future service level expectations (Core Strategy #5).
10. Create working group of property owners (City, 834, Fury) to establish a work plan for redevelopment (Core Strategy #2).
11. Identify location for water treatment plant (Core Strategy #6).

12. Start development process for 180-acre parcel (Core Strategy #2).
13. Improve GIS mapping (Core Strategy #5).
14. Explore and develop plan for future of old City Hall (Core Strategy #2).
15. Adopt CIP to include deferred maintenance on City buildings (Core Strategy #3).

## NEXT STEPS

The next step in the goal-setting process is to develop action plans for each short-term goal and establish benchmarks to measure progress. A key recommendation is identifying measurable outcomes to evaluate the City's success in achieving each goal. These benchmarks will also help guide the creation of action plans to reach desired results. It's important to revisit the goals periodically to hold both the Council and staff accountable. Additionally, integrating these goals into the organization's processes will further drive success. Building on Lake Elmo's past successes, while exploring new strategies to keep these goals at the forefront of leadership efforts, is encouraged. It was a pleasure working with Lake Elmo again to assist your team in establishing a strategic plan for the years ahead.



# City of Lake Elmo

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2025 Strategic Plan



# 2025 Strategic Plan

- Develop a Long-Term Direction
- Establish Organizational Norms – Values, Mission, Roles & Responsibilities
- Discussion and evaluation of current conditions
- Development of a Goals Plan



# The Process

- Pre-work questions
  - Characteristics and qualities to define the community and organization
  - Values of organization to community
- Presentations from Department Heads, Contract Staff, Commissioners
- Brainstorming-small group and large group
  - Vision
  - Core Strategies
  - Strategic Objectives
  - Organizational Values
  - Roles and Responsibilities
  - Strengths, Challenges, Threats, Opportunities
  - Identify Short term goals and prioritize



Lake Elmo Community Room  
3880 Laverne Avenue  
Lake Elmo, MN 55042  
January 15 & 16, 2025





# Build a vibrant, inclusive, and connected community through celebration, engagement, and shared spaces.

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- Actively communicate and promote achievements and milestones to foster pride and unity among residents.
- Support events and initiatives that cater to diverse age groups, cultures, and interests, ensuring everyone feels welcome and valued.
- Develop and maintain parks, gathering spaces, and a thriving downtown core that serve as destination-worthy hubs for community connection.
- Prioritize clean, safe environments to encourage active use of public spaces.
- Expand and diversify recreational assets and opportunities to meet the interests and needs of community members.
- Promote walkability and connectedness through planned and maintained sidewalk and trail systems.

# Short Term Goals

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- Develop Master Plans, including community engagement for recently purchased 77 acres, and existing 180 acres.



## **Community Engagement**

**Build a vibrant, inclusive, and connected community through celebration, engagement, and shared space.**



# Manage Growth with Purpose and Intent.

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- Protect historical charm and character.
- Enhance infrastructure and spaces that bring people together.
- Align growth with community values to nurture a shared sense of pride.
- Focus on projects that reflect long-term community goals.
- Balance growth with efforts to maintain the city's unique sense of community.
- Support local business and encourage new businesses through community collaboration

# Short Term Goals

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- Develop vision for Comprehensive Plan including future MUSA area development
- Develop old fire station site.
- Create working group of property owners (City, 834, Fury) to establish a work plan for redevelopment.
- Start development process for 180 acre parcel.
- Explore and develop plan for future of old city hall.



# Balance finances consistent with current needs and future growth.

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- Align financial decisions with current needs and long-term sustainability.
- Maintain transparency and clear communication with stakeholders.
- Manage resources carefully to support city services and future growth.
- Explore alternative funding sources to reduce and eliminate debt.
- Coordinating growth and development to provide financial resources to support City services
- Prioritize well-planned, thoughtful investments for lasting impact.

# Short Term Goals

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- Develop comprehensive financial strategy that encompasses multiple long-term goals
- Analyze and assess water, sewer, and street light fees.
- Adopt CIP to include deferred maintenance on City buildings.



## Sustainability

Balance finances consistent with current needs and future growth.

# Maintain responsive, transparent, and adaptive governance.

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- Proactively address current needs and future challenges while responding to immediate needs.
- Foster open communication and active collaboration with stakeholders.
- Uphold ethical, transparent, and fair decision-making processes.
- Embody principles of servant leadership for the well-being of the community through selfless service and guidance.
- Ensure actions are purposefully aligned with long-term community objectives.
- Welcome new ideas and collaborative solutions to address evolving opportunities and challenges.

# Short Term Goals

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- Keep external and internal communications fresh and innovative-connect all ages and cultures.



## Organizational Culture

Maintain responsive  
transparent, and adaptive  
governance.

# Deliver efficient, reliable, and innovative public services.

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- Foster a safe and secure community by investing in and maintaining engaged police, fire, and public works services.
- Maintain a highly trained, responsive staff dedicated to excellence.
- Be innovative and adaptable with services to meet the community's changing demands.
- Embrace a team approach centered on serving the community effectively.

# Short Term Goals

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- Seek community input on fire response.
- Examine and meet staffing appropriate for desired service level needs, including fire and police, based on current and future service level expectations.
- Improve GIS mapping.



**Safety**

**Deliver efficient,  
reliable, and  
innovative public  
services.**



# Build and sustain resilient infrastructure to support a thriving and sustainable community.

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- Implement effective water management strategies to ensure long-term availability of safe drinking water.
- Manage Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to align asset management with fiscal responsibility.
- Construct and maintain street and utility systems with care and foresight with appropriate management.
- Adopt environmentally responsible practices for infrastructure and resource management.


# Short Term Goals

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- Address water appropriations and PFAS with appropriate agencies and promote water conservation.
- Identify location for water treatment plant.



# Mission



Provide planned, quality public services consistent with the City's character in a fiscally responsible manner in partnership with our community.

# Organizational Values

## Excellence

- We strive for excellence in everything we do, ensuring the highest quality in the delivery of our services. Our commitment to excellence is reflected in our continuous pursuit of improvement and innovation

## Integrity

- We uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity in our actions. We are transparent and accountable, fostering trust and respect among our stakeholders

## Service

- We are committed to serving our community through collaboration, innovation, open communication, valuing diverse ideas and creative solutions. By respecting individuality and actively engaging with the community, we ensure our efforts are inclusive and responsive.

# Roles and Responsibilities: City Council

- Council provides staff
  - Clear direction
  - No surprises
  - Advance communication
  - Respect
  - Support staff within community
  - Resources
  - Collaborative approach
  - Encouragement in career growth
  - No meetings until midnight!
- Expectations from staff
  - Critical thinking
  - Professionalism
  - Data/Research
  - Anticipation of future risks/needs
  - Collaborative approach
  - Analysis of problems/issues
  - Follow-through
  - Realistic communication
  - Situational awareness
  - Know/understand role
  - Respect diversity of elected leaders (needs, tones, backgrounds, etc.)

# Roles and Responsibilities: City Staff

- Staff provides Council
  - Transparent information, data
  - Facts
  - Opinions/comparisons
  - Recommendations
  - Background
  - Financial implications
  - Perspective
  - Continuity
  - Connection/communications
  - Solutions
  - SME
- Expectations from Council
  - Resources to meet Council expectations
  - Clear, direct expectations
  - Support, respect, and trust
  - Feedback – Council and community awareness
  - Collaboration
  - Stay in your lane, respect the different roles
  - Cohesive Council
  - Council/staff relationships
  - Perspective
  - Boundaries

# 2025 Strategic Plan Implementation

- Linking Long-Term Direction to Short-Term Action Plans
- Keep consistency and focus in uncertain times
- Communication within organization and community
- Develop Action Plans - measurables, action steps, resource needs
- Implement and monitor progress