

Council 2021-2022 Strategic Initiatives

March 22, 2021 Draft

Ensure Engagement of and Accessibility for Entire Community is Woven Into All Aspects of the Operation

2019: Identify Opportunities to Bolster Diversity and Inclusion Outreach

Background

1. The City adopted a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in 2011 and ADA Transition Plan in 2018. Within the Executive Summary of the Bike/Ped Plan is that it is a tool to guide the long term efforts (25 years or more) to physical projects, programs and policies that will support biking and walking. That suggests that the plan was intended to guide actions and activities between then and about 2040. The ADA Plan found that 10.5% of City intersections and 15.8% of sidewalks were ADA compliant. The stated policy goal was compliance over the next 30 years. Essentially, this is compliance prior to 2050. As goals of either plan are achieved they also achieve goals of the other.
2. The City has been aggressive in seeking grants to accomplish accessibility infrastructure project improvement. A Safe Routes to School grant for sidewalk on Bidwell north of Thompson was awarded in 2016 but needed to be turned back due to errors in cost estimating. The City has been applying for funding each year since and this project has received funding for 2023. The City and County received a federal grant in 2018 to construct walkway on Marie and Oakdale, which was substantially completed in 2019. These same partners received a federal grant toward the trailway on Wentworth Avenue for 2019 construction and anticipate receiving similar funding toward an Oakdale trailway from Wentworth to Butler in 2021 for 2023 construction.
3. The City has constructed recent additional sidewalk projects on Livingston in 2019 with reconstruction of the pedestrian and transit facilities on Robert Street from 2014-2017.
4. In 2020 the City began efforts on transit projects through participation in a transit study conducted by East Metro Strong/Dakota Regional Chamber and in support of a Robert Street BRT route.

Issues/Opportunities

1. County is constructing Robert Street tunnel for 2021 completion along with the trail segment to the Library and also on Livingston to Wentworth.
2. County has proposed providing substantial funding to reconstruct the Garlough Marthaler trail to regional standards in 2021 or 2022.
3. The City is receiving grants for sidewalk on Bidwell and walkway on Oakdale and will be completing walkway on Moreland as part of the 2021 street construction project.
4. The 2021 budget includes a \$500,000 annual allocation going forward to construct sidewalk gaps which will provide revenue of \$4.5M before 2030.

5. Upon completion of the above the City will have completed over 30% of the trail gaps that currently exist within the community.

Priorities

1. Goal to accomplish substantial completion of projects with the Ped and ADA plans by 2040
2. Goal to continually seek third party funding for bikeway/walkway/trailway and ADA improvements.
3. Goal to leverage pedestrian facility resources with street reconstruction projects.
4. Goal to improve accessibility to transit and transit frequency for the community.

Diversity: Included Above

Background

1. In 2017 and 2018, the City created a diversity initiative which ultimately was terminated.
2. During 2019, through the Police Chief search effort a portion of the community expressed a desire to re-energize such an effort which was placed within the 2020 Police Department work plan. This plan has not proceeded due to COVID-19 impacts.
3. Recruitment and retention efforts with a focus on improving diversity within the operational workforce has created results.
4. The following recognition days have been affirmed
 - February: African American History Month
 - March: Women’s History Month
 - May: Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
 - June: LGBTQIA Pride Month
 - September 15-October 15: Hispanic Heritage Month
 - November: American Indian Heritage Month (27th recognized)
 - December: International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Issues/Opportunities

1. Opportunity for partnership between Human Resources and the Police Department on areas of focus for the City [internal and external].
2. Opportunity to identify the means to gather input and source educational methods and materials for internal and external education. Understanding that Diversity includes a wide range of interests, backgrounds, experiences. It encompasses every facet of each other’s make-up.
3. Recognition days/months provides the opportunity to identify what external organizations can support our recognition of these groups. Provide education/materials for the groups.
4. Recruitment efforts provide the cross purpose of branding and communicating our message:
 - * Continue participation in career fairs in the area to promote the City.
 - * Expand our College/Technical schools reach to a more active role.
5. Develop forum/means to involve employees in our Diversity efforts.
6. Keep Diversity in the forefront of City efforts.

Priorities

1. Goal of continual improvement in diversity hiring metrics.
2. Goal of collaboration with SD197 to leverage their efforts in this area.
3. Goal of seeking opportunities to receive input on City programs and projects from all populations.

Expand Communication Methods Reinforcing Our Brand to All Constituencies

2019: Branding and Identity

Background

1. Current tag line is “West St. Paul close to it all” which suggests significant proximate amenities but is not inclusive of those within the community.

Issues/Opportunities

1. West St. Paul is ideally located to attract homebuyer, renter, investor and business interest due to its market reach, small town feel, well developed retail market and, as the tag line suggests, short commute to downtown St. Paul, two airports (without airport noise), the Mississippi River, and other regional amenities.
2. In surveys of local residents, respondents report that housing choice metrics include low crime, quality schools, walkability, neighborhood aesthetics, and parks, open space and trails most highly.
3. Concerns of survey respondents have been aging infrastructure, housing maintenance, and walkability. Crime and taxes always appear as issues but these have not been among the highest concerns noted (except for 2020 which was a very limited survey). Recent survey input has been limited by COVID-19. Respondents typically have opined that more resources should be allocated toward infrastructure, trails and shopping with property tax/debt reduction and the police department after that.
4. Over the past few years, the City and/or other governments have completed the following notable improvements within the community:
 - Completion of the Robert Street corridor and roadway improvements to the Smith/Dodd area.
 - Improvements to most County roads within the community.
 - Rehabilitation of some of the more visible local collector roadways with additional significant improvements in the queue over the next six years.
 - Myriad trail improvements led by the Marie/Oakdale project, Wentworth Avenue and the R2R trailway currently under construction.
 - Have turned the fiscal corner to allow for future moderation of the property tax.
 - Have introduced additional housing and rental maintenance code and housing rehab programs.

Priorities

1. Goal of receiving improved community input on satisfaction and satisfiers as well as issues and concerns from a broad spectrum of the community (owners/renters, various ethnicities etc.).
2. Goal of creating a process for feedback on tag line/moniker.

Expand Debt Retirement Strategy Allocating Future Savings Toward Infrastructure and Facilities Long Term Funding Targets

2019: Invest in Infrastructure and Public Facilities

Background

1. In 2018 and 2019, the City Council adopted policy changes which direct that all facilities and infrastructure projects be funded on a pay-go basis except for sanitary sewer lift station and forcemain projects.
2. In 2018, the City requested voter consideration of a request to the Legislature to receive authorization for a local option sales tax to fund high priority and collector street reconstruction. Authorization from the voters and the State was received with sales tax implemented in 2020 with use of revenues programmed beginning in 2021. This is a 20 year authorization which raises an estimated \$1.3M/year (or a total of \$28M).
3. In 2018, the City developed a Pavement Management Program that identified \$65.8M in highest priority street reconstruction needs and \$68.8M in second priority streets.
4. Within the current CIP, the City projects spending about \$3.2M/year on collector streets and has begun budgeting \$300,000/year beginning in 2021 toward local street projects in the future. At that funding level, it will take roughly 38 years to address priority 1 and 2 streets. To accomplish Priority 1 and 2, streets within a 25 year timeframe allocation to pavement management would need to rise from \$3.5M/year to \$5.4M/year.

Issues/Opportunities

1. Sales Tax authorization is limited to 20 years. At some point, prior to retirement of this authorization, the City will need to consider if a legislative request to extend the authorization is necessary. Given the current reconstruction backlog, this legislative request appears necessary.
2. Council has adopted policy to pay down existing debt and limit issuance of new debt. Currently, the annual debt levy is at approximately \$4M. As this debt retires, is refunded or called, the City has the opportunity to re-direct those levy dollars to property tax reductions, infrastructure/facilities projects, or other needs of the community.

Priorities

1. Goal to allocate reductions in debt levy primarily toward facility and infrastructure needs until funding metrics are achieved. If sales tax revenue is secure, the residential street levy goal should be \$2M/year (plus maintaining other existing revenue sources into pavement management). If the sales tax terminates this goal would need to increase to \$3.5M/year.
2. Goal to continue to prioritize infrastructure projects that leverage third party funding.
3. Goal to plan for long term extension of sales tax if alternative sources are not implemented
4. Goal of adding annual mill/overlay projects to preserve streets at a much reduced cost before they fall into reconstruction PCI's.

Facilities: Included Above

Background

1. In 2020, the City completed a four year \$2.3 million project to rehabilitate the City Hall/Police/Fire facilities. The final phase of the project included an upgrade to upper and lower police facilities and support areas. Prior improvements had been replacement of HVAC, roofing, parking lot, windows and placement of a solar array on the building.
2. The adopted Capital Improvements Program allocates revenue to the building maintenance fund to accumulate resources sufficient to provide ongoing maintenance needs of the City Hall and Public Works facilities. Maintenance needs of the Ice Arena, Dome, and Pool facilities are addressed within the individual budgets for each facility and projections are that there will be sufficient revenues for those needs unless an expansion or similar unforeseen major improvement is brought forward. Parks buildings would be upgraded from within the Park fund.

Issues/Opportunities

1. The Park fund is growing such that the financial target is met within a few years while completing desired projects in a deliberate manner. Development related park dedication fees may allow some identified projects within the CIP to move forward.
2. Funding is allocated over the next 4-5 years to maintain the Pool at necessary levels.
3. There is a desire by customers to push additional investment into the Ice Arena in the \$1.5M to \$2.0M range. There is no identified funding within financial plans to complete such a project and third party funding would need to be the most significant piece of necessary funding.
4. The Dome is on target to have sufficient funds for turf and dome fabric replacement on schedule.
5. The 2021 budget allocates some funding to the Building replacement/maintenance fund but it is not sufficient to conduct necessary building major maintenance at the desired schedule. To be allocated would be an upgrade in the administrative and fire facilities portion of City Hall along with addressing major systems replacements at Public Works within the next five to ten years. The general government upgrade is estimated at \$2.4 million with the Fire Department at \$850,000 (2020 dollars). Public Works future needs are estimated at \$700,000 (total need of just under \$4M in 2020 dollars).
6. Resources into the technology fund appear sufficient to meet replacement/upgrade needs.

Priorities

1. Goal to gain resources sufficient to replace major systems (HVAC/Roof/Parking) at the Public Works facility and create a replacement schedule accordingly.
2. Goal to gain resources sufficient to upgrade/remodel the General Government and Fire Department office areas and create a timeline within which each can occur. Accomplishment of priorities 1 and 2 within a ten year timeframe would require an annual increase in funding to \$400,000 absent third party or similar funding.
3. Goal of review of all Park Buildings to determine which should be eliminated, replaced, or repaired within the Capital Improvement Plan.
4. Goal of seeking third party funding for facilities upgrades where appropriate.

Build on Our Strong Environment/Park System and Implement Maintenance and Redevelopment Plan Within the Ten Year CIP

2019: Increase Maintenance of Parks and Plan for Improvements

Background

1. Since 2012, the City has constructed a Sports Dome and completed significant upgrades to the Sports Complex and Harmon Park. The financing of these improvements as of YE 2020 is at \$7,735,000. It has also completed a Master Plan for a future renovation of Marthaler Park, which due to outstanding municipal debt is programmed on a pay-go basis.
2. In 2020, the Parks Committee began reviews of park amenities of the non-community scale parks within the community.
3. As part of the Wentworth reconstruction project, the City was able to leverage project activities to construct a parking lot on the north side of Marthaler Park and also to reconfigure a playground and related amenities at a very low cost.

Issues/Opportunities

1. Dakota County and the City are collaborating on design for a future R2R regional trail through Garlough and Marthaler Parks. It has been intended that this be a cost share project due to the regional nature of the trailway potentially in 2021.
2. Beyond the trail project, the capital plan denotes additional funding toward Marthaler from 2023 to 2028 at an estimated cost of \$1.4M (\$250,000/year for the first four years). With received park dedication revenues this project timeline is proposed to be expedited.
3. The park fund is currently benefitting by an allocation of LGA and Franchise revenues which is projected to achieve the fund balance targets by 2026. Achievement of these targets provides additional park development flexibility at that point. However, should the state experience budget shortfalls LGA transfers to cities could be impacted.
4. Council policy directs that park developments that are eligible to leverage third party funds can move forward on the development priority. Park fund balances provide the opportunity to provide required local grant matches.

Priorities

1. Goal to continue toward redevelopment of Marthaler Park as the Capital Plan and third party revenues permit as the first priority in coordination with the County R2R trailway development as a preference.
2. Goal to develop a strategy to improve neighborhood Park facilities concurrent with street reconstruction projects abutting park properties.
3. Goal to create specific recommendations for additional park system improvements once the needs analysis is complete.
4. Goal to utilize recommended best practices for park maintenance.
5. Goal to maximize use of seasonal park maintenance staff.
6. Goal to create naming rights program for park facilities and seek local business and corporate sponsorship for park improvements.

Leverage Strong External and Internal Partnerships to Provide Recreational Opportunities for All Ages and Abilities

2019: Provide Recreational Opportunities for All Ages and Abilities

Background

1. In 2014, the City added the position of Recreation Programmer. This 32 hour per week position focuses primarily on programming opportunities. Prior to this time there was one staff, a Recreation Superintendent, that took care of programming, steered park improvements and oversaw management of all recreation facilities (pool, arena, and golf course). Due to work load, expansion of programming was previously limited.
2. The main goal of the Programmer is to evaluate current offerings, research new recreation opportunities, and consider partnerships. During 2020 COVID-19 crisis, recreation program opportunities were greatly impacted. Staff was forced to cancel most in-person offerings and create new virtual and social distanced programs. The Programmer schedule was transferred primarily to cover the vacant building technician position within Community Development.
3. The current Recreation Programmer started with the City in March 2020. She is still learning about the community and existing programs and partnerships. She brings a fresh perspective to the program.

Issues/Opportunities

1. COVID-19 restrictions are still in place which are limiting the ways we offer recreation programming.
2. The City already shares a strong partnership with Mendota Heights P&R and will look to expand partnerships with others such as IGH, SSP and ISD 197.
3. A good survey and assessment of West St Paul and surrounding communities will help shape and dictate what recreation programs are offered in the future. In many cases, this will be a hit and miss endeavor, with popular programs being expanded upon.

Priorities

1. Goal to expand recreation offerings utilizing new partnerships and collaborations.
2. Goal to provide recreational opportunities for all ages and abilities.

Maintain Our Quality Housing Stock

2019: Improve Housing Stock Through New Housing Plan

Background

1. During 2019/2020, the City approved the Winslow (174 affordable senior housing units), Suite Living Senior Housing (xx senior and assisted living housing units), a CDA housing project at 895 Robert (54 unit first phase deep subsidy affordable housing), Dominionium housing project at Signal Hills(393 units of affordable and senior housing), Town Center 1 (184 market housing units), Oppidan Trilogy at Thompson Oaks (153 market housing units).

Issues/Opportunities

1. With the exception of 2019/2020 housing projects, the preponderance of multi-family housing within the community was constructed in the 1980's or prior with a share of that housing as functionally obsolete.
2. Among multi-housing projects, some are condominium buildings owned and run by the occupants. The City has received requests to consider Housing Improvement Areas to assist in rehab projects of these owner/occupant buildings.
3. Existing single family housing lots or development opportunities of vacant land are not typically available.
4. The City currently owns two properties that are perceived as townhome development sites.
5. A significant portion of existing single family housing is fifty years or older. The CDA operates a housing rehab program for households earning under 80% of area median income. The City introduced a program for households up to 120% AMI and MHFA has a rehab program for incomes above that threshold.

Priorities

1. Goal to reconfigure local housing rehab program to encourage owner/occupant single family property rehab projects.
2. Goal to work with condominium projects to complete an HIA project.
3. Goal to complete sale and development of City owned townhouse properties.
4. Goal of attracting third party revenues toward rehab of multifamily properties.

Continue to Build Retail/Restaurant Diversification and Business Relationships

2019: Create Active Plan to Address Vacant or Blighted Properties

Background

1. By the end of 2020, the City has approved redevelopment of all of the most significant redevelopment properties within the community. Some remain which are associated with both Robert Street and Smith Avenue.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic will have a yet to be fully understood impact on the retail/restaurant community.
3. As of 2019, that portion of community tax capacity value dedicated to TIF projects is at 2.5% which is at historically moderate levels and also at moderate levels in comparison to other redevelopment communities within the Twin Cities metro.

Issues/Opportunities

1. The Smith/Dodd neighborhood presents an opportunity to leverage efforts of Saint Paul on West side development projects, access to the West 7th neighborhood of Saint Paul, and access to Mendota Heights, Lilydale, and Mendota neighborhoods.
2. Small redevelopment opportunities currently exist in various locations along or just off Robert Street.

Priorities

1. Goal to strategize future redevelopment sites within the community.
2. Goal to facilitate enhancement of business and development opportunities within the Smith/Dodd commercial neighborhood.
3. Goal to pursue a Special Services District if developed by local business interests.

Continue to Build Awareness of, and Trust in, Our High Quality Public Safety Programs with Focus on Community Building

2019: NA

Background

1. In 2019, the City conducted a process to fill the police chief position due to retirement of the long term incumbent. The process included external feedback on needs and concerns of the community. A finding of the process is that the community is not well versed on the deliverables of the Police Department which has created some lack of comfort that the Department is addressing community needs in the areas of diversity, mental health, de-escalation.
2. The Minneapolis death of George Floyd in May 2020 created an enhanced awareness of issues of race within the Twin Cities and throughout the nation.
3. Historically, South Metro Fire has required a new hire to have certifications prior to application including EMT, firefighter I and II. The primary way to get these certifications is to join a paid on call fire department. As more metro area departments transition to a full-time staffing model our candidate pool comes from the suburban or outstate departments which employ predominately white males. If we don't identify a pathway for nontraditional candidates, those without the EMT or firefighter training, we will have a very difficult time diversifying our workforce.

Issues/Opportunities

1. Opportunity to market and educate about programs and collaborations within the Police Department. Last year for instance the Cops in the Park event at Southview Park was made up of about 70 percent of non-white attendees with over 600 participants. There are so many examples of outreach efforts with Hispanic, POC, etc. that can be marketed and promoted within the City.
2. The Police Chief Round Table discussion group (name not important or finalized) with a diverse pool of community members is a great opportunity. This is also a COPS grant requirement. Members will include representations from many aspects of the community including diverse ethnic backgrounds, renters, home owners, business, faith and the education community.
3. Over the last several years, the number of qualified police officer candidates have dramatically decreased and the candidate pool from the minority population has decreased even more. Have been collaborating with the HR Department and with major partners (colleges, federal agencies, etc.) to promote law enforcement as a career to the minority population in order to gain a more diverse work force. Have been increasing our presence at career fairs and other avenues to market not only the Police Department, but other departments in city government.

Priorities

1. Identify a pathway for nontraditional candidates to pursue a career in the fire service with South Metro Fire Department.

2. Improve communication and community engagement between Public Safety (Police/Fire) and community members.
3. Review opportunities to maintain/improve collaboration with internal departments and external agencies.
4. Continue addressing deficits in technology and equipment and put a plan in place to address any deficits within the 2021-22 timeframe.
5. Review recruitment efforts to improve workforce diversity as part of a staffing plan.
6. Review capacity building needs of staff including areas of cultural competency/implicit bias, mental health/disability, sexual and domestic abuse, drugs, gangs and homelessness.
7. Review opportunities for career development, leadership development, mentorship, and specialty training/assignment.

Maintain Focus on, and Compliance with, Adopted Fiscal Policy

2019: Actively Pursue All Resources to Facilitate Council Initiatives in Recognition of Current Fiscal Constraints

Background

1. West St. Paul currently has the highest municipal tax rate in the County, however, while increasing somewhat in recent years, property tax is not among the greatest concerns of Town Hall survey respondents typically. In part, this may be due to the School District having a moderate tax rate and the County having the lowest tax rate of any County in the State. The West St. Paul tax rate is greater than those of peer communities due to higher debt loads than other communities, moderately higher operating cost metrics than other communities, and lower tax capacities than most peer communities.
2. Resident concerns typically greater than those regarding the property tax appear to be recognition of the need to improve fiscal position and pay down debt along with the desire to allocate funds toward public infrastructure such as roadways, parks and trails.
3. Reductions in tax rate would have somewhat of a negative impact upon fiscal disparities revenues.
4. All existing debt will be paid off by 2035. As debt is retired the City will continue to reduce current annual allocation to debt service currently at about \$4M/year. Ultimately, this \$4M/year can be allocated toward a reduction in tax rate or toward other needs, or both.

Issues and Opportunities

1. Currently, West St. Paul is allocating funding toward roadway infrastructure at about half the level recommended by the City Engineer to gain and then maintain a PCI rating of 70.
2. Sidewalk gaps and transportation trails are now funded at a level to address all identified gaps within 30 years but for the cost of any necessary right of way. The approach of constructing gaps concurrent with roadway infrastructure and continued efforts to raise third party funds would decrease the length of time necessary to complete all identified gaps.
3. The Park fund is growing such that the financial target is met within a few years while completing desired projects in a deliberate manner. Development related park dedication fees may allow some identified projects within the CIP to move forward.
4. Funding is allocated over the next 4-5 years to maintain the Pool at necessary levels.
5. There is a desire by customers to push additional investment into the Ice Arena in the \$1.5M to \$2.0M range. There is no identified funding within financial plans to complete such a project and third party funding would need to be the most significant piece of necessary funding.
6. The Dome is on target to have sufficient funds for turf and dome fabric replacement on schedule.
7. The 2021 budget allocates some funding to the Building replacement/maintenance fund but it is not sufficient to conduct necessary building major maintenance at the desired schedule.

8. Resources into the equipment replacement fund and technology fund appear sufficient to meet ongoing needs.

Priorities

1. Goal of stable to moderate annual declines in tax rate over next 15 years.
2. Goal to continue to budget/allocate in accordance with financial policies toward cash balance targets targeting positive net cash by 2027.
3. Goal of continued allocation of resources to debt mitigation in order to take advantage of call dates to either pay off bond issues early or refund bonds at call dates with shorter terms than at present. Continue to avoid additional debt to the extent practicable through 2035.
4. Goal to allocate reductions in debt levy primarily toward facility and infrastructure needs until funding metrics are achieved.
5. Goal to continue to prioritize infrastructure projects that leverage third party funding.