



City of Big Rapids

Strategic Plan 2022-2023

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I. OVERVIEW

On January 24, 2022, the Mayor, City Commissioners, City Manager, City Clerk, City Attorney, and Department Heads met to review the Vision for 2024 that was developed in 2019 and the four goals established in that previous process. The team identified key objectives for each goal area and one-year tasks to be accomplished in 2022-2023. Through this process, the Strategic Plan reflects the decisions of the Big Rapids Leadership Team.

City Commission

Fred Guenther, Mayor
Robert Andrews
Jennifer Cochran
Jon Eppley
Karen Simmon

City Staff

Mark Gifford, City Manager
Tamyra Gillis, City Clerk
Aaron Kuhn, City Treasurer
Eric Williams, City Attorney
Danielle Haynes, Police Chief
Heather Bowman, Director of Public Works
Paula Priebe, Community Development Director
Steve Schroeder, Fire Chief and Airport Manager
Tim Moslener, Director of Information Technology

Adopted

April 4, 2022

II. VISION TOUR 2024

The Elected Leaders were asked to create a vision of what a visitor to the City of Big Rapids would see in 2024. Their vision for a Big Rapids includes the following elements, categorized into three groups: development, government, and people.

- Development: new developments, redevelopment, economic development
 - Neighborhood revitalization
 - Housing Study, with a renewed vision for rental neighborhoods
 - Property Development:
 - 906 N State St, former site of Hanchett Manufacturing
 - 910 Maple St, the Railroad Depot
 - No more gravel streets
 - More, and more connected, sidewalks
 - Technology, including WIFI and Broadband access
 - Full storefronts in the downtown
 - Completed runway extension at Roben-Hood Airport
- Government: strong local government and positive community relations
 - Strong community outreach and participation
 - Improved newsletter
 - Interactive community engagement
 - New zoning ordinance utilizing Form Based Code methodology
 - Coordinating Government Services
 - Joint meetings, shared vision, and a unified approach to strategic planning between City Commission, staff, and other boards
 - Planning Commission, Park and Recreation Board, Downtown Development Authority
 - Stability in city staff positions, including Code Enforcement Officer
- People: services and support that make Big Rapids a great place to live and work
 - Making Big Rapids attractive to:
 - FSU Student – jobs
 - FSU Faculty – housing
 - Families for work and child care
 - Education
 - Literacy
 - Financial
 - Making people aware of services
 - Jobs: housing, environment, and cultural opportunities available

III. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND TASKS

Goal One: Livable Community

The City of Big Rapids is an attractive, livable community.

Objectives

- Community engagement
- Walkable and bikeable community
- Development of Depot and Hanchett sites
- Child care services
- General redevelopment
- Form-based codes
- Increased downtown retail and food options

One Year Tasks

- Move forward with the Hemlock Park Improvement Project
 - Continue to work with the Hemlock Park Improvement Project citizen committee to see this project through to completion, including making decisions about the full scope of the project (*March 2022*) and complete Phase I of the Project (*October 2022*).
 - Submit MEDC Placemaking Grant application. *April 2022*
- Explore and promote creation of a local Conference Center
 - With the closing of the Holiday Inn Conference Center, there is a gap in the local area for rental conference and event spaces. Work with The Right Place to explore and promote the creation of a new local Conference Center in Big Rapids. *August 2022*
- Sell 906 N State Street (the Hanchett Property)
 - Working closely with City Realtor Joe McNally of Remax Together, sell this City-owned, remediated property for a future purpose that meets the City's established goals of a new housing or mixed-use development. *December 2022*
- Continue making progress with Walkability and Bikeability
 - Allocate funding for established walkability/bikeability priority projects such as the Eastside Onstreet Bike Loop and connecting key destinations to sidewalks. *May 2022*
- Riverwalk Repairs
 - Continue this annual project to make necessary repairs to the Riverwalk to ensure it remains a stable, accessible public facility. *July 2022*

Goal Two: Attractive to Residents

The City of Big Rapids is a top choice for area professionals and others to live, having a variety of housing types and strong neighborhoods.

Objectives

- Eclectic housing
- Housing standards
- Form-based code
- Renewed vision for rental neighborhoods
- Attract businesses
- Improved literacy

One Year Tasks

- Plan for new housing developments
 - The final Housing Study demonstrated a need for additional housing in Big Rapids and can be utilized to direct actions and new policies. New housing developments can be jumpstarted by the City through the development of infrastructure, such as streets and water utilities, to support residential development. Two projects include construction of the Rust Avenue Extension (*September 2022*) and financing for the Mechanic Street Area Development (*May 2022*).
- Secure funding for the development of Depot Park.
 - The newly named, and now City-owned, Depot Park remains largely undeveloped. A Task Force has had plans drawn up for this future park development, but funding is the major limitation. Drafting a strategy and applying for grants to support this project is vital. *December 2022*.
- Codify residential standards
 - As part of the ongoing zoning changes the Planning Commission is working on, include residential design standards in the Zoning Ordinance to ensure quality, attractive residential development. *October 2022*
- Replace Downtown Twinkle Lights
 - Working with the Downtown Development Authority, replace the twinkle lights on the downtown trees. *November 2022*

Goal Three: Infrastructure

The City of Big Rapids maintains and expands vital infrastructure with detailed plans and sustainable funding sources.

Objectives

- No gravel streets
- Complete sidewalks
- Ongoing water and sewer system improvements
- Financial sustainability and capital investments

One Year Tasks

- Pave remaining gravel streets in the City.
 - Pave Jackson Street and N Third Avenue. *June 2022*
 - Plan for the future reconstruction of all remaining gravel streets in the City. Set aside funding in the 2023-2024 Budget for another such project. *November 2022*
- Lead Service Line Replacement Program
Continue with the ongoing Lead Service Line Replacement Program to explore water service line connections in unknown areas and replace any past lead connections with copper pipe. *September 2022*
- Replace Airport Fuel Tank
 - Replace the 100LL Fuel Tank at the Roben-Hood Airport with a new tank, as required by recent safety checks of the tank. *September 2022*
- Continue the Sidewalk Program
 - Complete the 2021-2022 planned New Sidewalks. *June 2022*
 - Complete the 2022-2023 Sidewalk Repair and Replacement. *September 2022*
- Upgrades to Dial-A-Ride Transit Facility
 - Upgrades to the DART Facility include a new air compressor and hoist to the garage, paving the parking lot, residing the building, and updating the breakroom. *October 2022*
- Wastewater Treatment Plant Clarifier Rehabilitation
 - This Phase 2 Clarifier Rehabilitation project completes the work begun in 2018 by repairing the concrete tanks, replacing skimmer beach structures, replacing tank pressure relief valves, and recoating exposed interior and exterior concrete tank surfaces. *July 2022*
- Street Repair Program
 - Continue the planned program to repair of City streets with the scheduled mill and fill project for Spring Street and Chestnut Street (*July 2022*) and the scheduled mill and fill project for Maple Street (*August 2022*).

Goal Four: Government Services

The City of Big Rapids continues to improve local government services through coordination with other governments and organizations and through professional development.

Objectives

- Coordination with other local governments (townships, county, etc.)
- Coordinate with other local organizations (like FSU, BRPOA, others)
- More coordination of plans City Commission, Planning Commission, DDA, etc.
- Continued professional development
- Sustainable elected leadership
- Informed public

One Year Tasks

- Continue with the Police Department Accreditation Process.
 - Continue working on this large project to achieve Accreditation for the Police Department in 2023. *Ongoing*
- Provide staff development training.
 - Provide training in Big Rapids and encourage staff to attend workshops and conferences to grow their knowledge and skills. *Ongoing*
- Hire a new City Attorney.
 - The current City Attorney is retiring at the end of the 2022 Calendar year. Establish a committee to oversee the process of hiring a new City Attorney in a timely fashion to allow for three months of overlap between City Attorneys. *August 2022*
- Redesign the City Website
 - Establish a committee to work with the website hosting company to redesign and modernize the City's website. *December 2022*
- Continue relationships with local stakeholder groups.
 - City staff are involved in many groups with local stakeholders, including Ferris State University, the Big Rapids Property Owners Association, and others. It is important to maintain a City presence in these groups. *Ongoing*

IV. NEXT STEPS

- Upon final adoption, the Commission should be updated each quarter regarding progress made toward implementing the one year tasks.
- Seven months after adoption the Commission and leadership team should dedicate a work session to reviewing the Strategic Plan and adjust action as required.
- Thirteen months after adoption the Commission and leadership team should dedicate a work session to reviewing progress toward the Goals and Objectives and to determining the next year's one-year tasks.