

Brief Summary of Five Council Priorities

Five Priorities

At the September retreat, Council informally selected its top five priorities, and since that time staff has seen that these five areas are the dominant focus of the Council's policy deliberations. The selected priorities are:

1. Economic Development
2. Infrastructure
3. Financial Planning
4. Reduced Emergency Response Times
5. Downtown Implementation Plan

The value in naming priorities is to establish policy direction, make that direction known to stakeholders and guide policy, budget and operational decisions. As we work to develop the City's FY17 budget, staff would find value in formalizing the five priorities for the next fiscal year.

Prior to formalization, we have prepared this brief summary to begin the dialogue about what each priority means, where it stands and what it will take to advance each going forward.

1. Economic Development

- A. Economic development was overwhelmingly recognized by the Council as **essential to the financial sustainability** of the community. It is our prime means to diversify our tax base and expand our revenue streams.
- B. City of Bloomington economic development is undertaken in parallel with **regional collaboration** and economic development initiatives of the EDC, B/N Advantage and others.
- C. The time is right to review our **economic development strategic plan and incentive policy**. Tools such as TIF are invaluable for the redevelopment of areas such as Colonial Plaza, and will be key to our success.
- D. Economic development cannot stand alone and depends on sound infrastructure and quality of life to successfully ensure a financially-sound future for our community.

2. Infrastructure

- A. The City is decades behind in funding much-needed **infrastructure maintenance**, estimated to total \$400M or more. Reliable infrastructure with the capacity to handle growth is essential to economic development, quality of life and the City's financial long-term stability.
- B. Our City's recently completed **infrastructure Master Plans**, encompassing streets, sanitary sewers, storm water, facilities, sidewalks and more provide detailed inventory, condition rating and make it possible for us to assess and prioritize critical needs.
- C. The next essential step is to develop a **five year Capital Improvement Plan** to address the most urgent/timely needs, AND a funding strategy.
- D. Some projects included in the City's Master Plans are prime candidates for borrowing. Financing options are many, and Council will determine a preferred strategy, ranging from conservative to aggressive.

3. Financial Planning

- A. Since the Great Recession, we are all adapting to a new economy that requires us to have a **long-term, continuously evolving plan for financial sustainability**, including a plan for appropriate reserves. We must have a balanced budget to avoid the pitfalls and reputational damage that many other governments continue to experience.
- B. A deficit in the City's General Fund was averted in the near term through Budget Task Force recommendations and the Council's recent adoption of a 1% sales tax increase. However, the City's expenses, especially those tied to Police and Fire pensions and labor costs, will continue to increase over the years. The **potential for a General Fund structural deficit** will continue to threaten future budgets.
- C. It will take all of us, including our citizens, to develop solutions for achievement of financial sustainability. We must focus on refining our financial projections, re-forecasting when appropriate, identifying programs and services, establishing appropriate levels of service performance measures, and prioritization.
- D. A **Capital Improvement Plan and funding** is critical to the City's financial strategy now and going forward.

4. Reduced Emergency Response Times

- A. Despite the excellent efforts of our first responders, the Fire Master Plan identified that **service to the City's northeast portion is inadequate and response times are below our standards**. Long-term, the Master Plan recommends a new Fire Station facility to serve the northeast area of the City. In the short-term, we must identify creative and innovative methods to reduce EMS and fire suppression response times.
- B. Quality public safety services are essential to a community's Economic Development and, with so many financial resources devoted to public safety, **finding efficient solutions to public safety issues** contributes to the long-term financial health of the community.

5. Downtown Implementation Plan

- A. The Downtown Master Plan was adopted by the City Council in 2013 without an Implementation Plan. Increased interest in Downtown economic development, notably in the proposed addition of hotel and/or convention center space, indicates this is the time to **design the City's role** in success of the Downtown.
 - a. It will take inside and outside **resources to vet potential Downtown projects**.
 - b. We must determine the amount and type of **public engagement** that is appropriate for Downtown development proposals.
 - c. Traditionally, municipalities play a role in Downtown **streetscape improvements** and meeting its **parking needs**.
- B. We can **build upon the qualities that make our Downtown special**, such as our ties to President Lincoln and Route 66, both expertly displayed in the new Visitors Center at the McLean County Museum of History. Smart economic development in Downtown will expand on existing assets and attractions like the Museum, the BCPA and the Coliseum.