



Village of Lincolnwood

Strategic Plan and Goal Development 2021-22

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Governmental Studies**

Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development



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Executive Summary

Strategic planning helps guide an organization’s future more effectively than making decisions issue by issue. The Village of Lincolnwood (“the Village”) engaged the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to facilitate a strategic planning workshop with board and senior staff members in October 2021. It is important to note that the Village started the strategic planning process in spring 2020 but made the decision to postpone the process due to the impact of COVID-19. Prior to delaying the process, six focus groups were conducted (please see Appendix to review the comparison between the 2020 and 2021 focus group feedback). The process resumed in fall of 2021 and the Village re-engaged CGS to complete the strategic planning process. Prior to the two half-day strategic planning workshops in October 2021, three focus groups were conducted virtually in August 2021 with residents, intergovernmental/civic organizations, and the business community to gather input on the Village’s future vision and goals.

With the focus groups as a starting point for discussions, the strategic planning workshops provided a positive atmosphere for the board and senior staff members to collaboratively review and develop a vision for the Village’s future. Ultimately, workshop participants created strategic goals focusing on where the Village wants to go as an organization and community in both the short- and long-term. As was discussed and reviewed during the workshops, executive-level strategic planning sessions are a staple of good governance and leadership for progressive organizations and are recommended every other year.

Strategic Goals

After a series of environmental scanning discussions regarding the Village’s visions for the future, current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, participants were asked to identify short- and long-term goals. Upon completion of an updated list of goals, participants were then asked to classify each goal according to a matrix model of time and complexity. Agreed upon criteria were used to classify a goal as short- or long-term and as complex or routine (please see full report for defined criteria).

After the strategic planning workshop retreat, the Village Board was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. In total, the group developed six short-term routine goals, eleven short-term complex goals, four long-term routine goals and twelve long-term complex goals. The *top three goals* from each category are offered as a process “snapshot” representing the most important strategic goals or priority areas for the board and staff to address in the months and years ahead (see below). For a full review and appreciation of all the strategic goals developed, discussed, and ranked, please refer to the full report.

Short-term Routine

- Define and promote a “Service First” culture to transform the organizational culture of the Village and enhance the Village’s customer service experience.
- Undertake community development improvements to enhance customer service and streamline efficiencies.
- Develop a financial forecast plan for Village revenue and expenses.

Short-term Complex

- Replace land and license building permit software.
- Complete the Lincolnwood Town Center Concept Plan and identify a purchaser.
- Develop and implement a plan to identify a hotel to be located at 1860.

Long-term Routine

- Implement the financial forecast plan for Village revenue and expenses.
- Transform the Village’s organizational culture to one of Service First through development and implementation of a “Service First” training program and onboarding protocols for new staff along with periodic audits and review of programs.
- Identify, coordinate, and construct a new location for Parks and Recreation Department.

Long-term Complex

- Identify strategies to redevelop the Lincolnwood Town Center Mall.
- Develop sites adjacent to District 1860 to attract visitors, businesses, and residents to the Village.
- Identify strategies to have the Northeast Industrial District (NEID) redevelopment well underway.

Strategic Priorities

Ultimately, five key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process highlighting activities and initiatives that the Village should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below (in no particular order).

Strategic Priority Areas

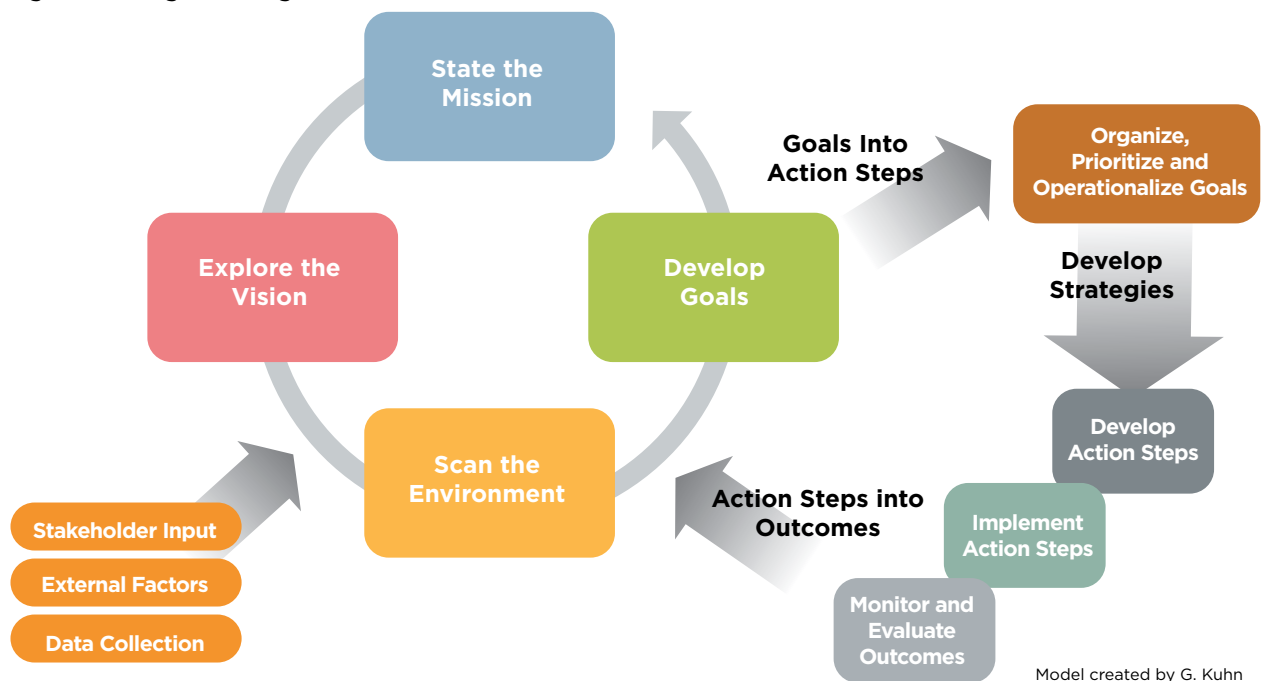


Introduction

As an organization, the Village has placed itself among the special class of entities that have made a commitment to formalized strategic planning and goal setting exercises (Figure 1). As Village leaders are aware, strategic planning is not a new phenomenon for progressive communities and government agencies. Policymaking boards and staff in both private and public organizations recognize the value of such processes. This important work will serve the Village of Lincolnwood and the community well into the coming years. The board and senior staff members gathered in October 2021 to discuss the Village’s vision, important policies, key topics, and issue areas, and to develop goals to ultimately establish a future direction for the Village. The strategic planning workshops provided a positive atmosphere to set aside time to methodically, strategically, determine where the Village wants to go as an organization. As was shared with the board and senior staff members at the conclusion of the workshops, the Village should resist the temptation to rearrange priorities as the fiscal year moves along. It is important to adhere to the results of the board’s and senior staff members’ efforts throughout this process and the Village’s budgeting process.

Keep in mind that the judicious use of the Village’s limited resources (including financial resources and professional staff time) will be the key to good results. These high standards can place a strain on the organization, as excellence requires adequate staff time, expertise, and resources. In the end, quality policies and quality implementation equate to tough choices in setting priorities and allocating resources. Only a limited number of goals and objectives can be effectively managed and implemented at any given time. In a very realistic sense, clear and stable priorities must be maintained if the Village desires to stretch its resources as far as they can go.

Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model*



Model created by G. Kuhn

*Model generally represents the steps that are taken for this type of initiative.

Pre-Workshop:

Taking Stock, Stakeholder Engagement Process

Stakeholder engagement is an important pre-workshop component designed to help ground the environmental scanning portion of the process. Listening is vital to planning, and these steps help the organization “take stock” and understand current Village policies and operational perspectives, perceptions, and preferences. In August 2021, three focus groups were conducted virtually with the Village’s residents, intergovernmental/civic organizations, and business community.

The focus group sessions were designed to serve as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information presented next in summation was shared at the workshops and added *exploratory* and *thematic information* for the Board and Senior Leadership Team to consider. As a result of the focus group sessions’ responses and feedback, the facilitators identified six overarching themes, presented in no particular order (Figure 2). The themes represent important topic areas that the Village leadership and board were asked to consider as they went through the workshop exercises and developed short- and long-term goals. Therefore, it is not unusual to see alignment between the focus group themes and the priority areas identified as part of the entirety of the process. Please see [Appendix](#) for a full summary of all focus group questions and aggregated responses for each theme.

Figure 2. Aggregated Focus Group Identified Themes



Outline Of Workshop:

Leadership Exercises and Discussion Sessions

All of the discussion sessions used in the planning effort employed approaches that were highly participative and interactive. The process was informed by the environmental scanning components and the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for the Village. The workshop facilitators utilized a group discussion approach called ‘*Nominal Group Technique*’ where the facilitator assured that participants had equal opportunities to speak and share opinions. During the workshop sessions, individuals had the opportunity to generate and share their ideas, as well as participate in group activities allowing them to weigh alternatives and refine their thinking through dialogue. As ideas were shared and debated, the group worked steadily toward a consensus regarding organizational values, purpose, future directions, and priorities.

Introduction/Icebreaker Exercise

Describing The Village and Future Visioning

Participants engaged in introductory/ice breaker exercises designed to stimulate conversation by providing a few key words to describe the Village. The board and senior staff also participated in a visioning exercise to describe the desired future direction and condition of the Village by answering the following visioning question: “In 10-15 years, when I return to the Village of Lincolnwood, what do I hope to see, or think I will see, with regard to the Village and its activities?” Participants were asked to think about their ideas ahead of time and then be ready to share them with the group during the first session of the workshop. This was a brainstorming exercise – all ideas about the Village’s future were encouraged and shared. No evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session. Below is a summary of those answers.

Words Used to Describe the Village of Lincolnwood: Word Cloud



Exploration of the Village of Lincolnwood’s Desired Future Condition: Visions of the Future

Visions of the Future

Board Responses

More walkable community and sidewalk connectivity that leads to destinations.

More visible/exciting place, bustling downtown at the Mall site.

More amenities/attractions to bring people into the community, more culture and entertainment options, enhance regional connectivity to draw people in – become a destination.

Better utilize Lincoln Avenue – make it a focal point.

More vitality – people want to be here. Some sort of attraction to draw visitors (e.g., museum) – for all ages.

More youth activities to attract families.

Have the same core values – family, housing, trees/environment, and more development.

Enhanced connectivity across the community – multi-modal with multiple attractions. Public transportation to Chicago and around town.

More people being accepting of each other.

“We are on the way.”

Staff Responses

More development and growth in the built environment but the family and residential community still prospering among the changes.

Walkable downtown created/central destination.

Pratt, Lincoln, Crawford – maximize on the opportunities for redevelopment – vacant buildings and land parcels – residential and commercial, more multi-family residential options – broad range of housing for all stages of life.

Planning for the future – in the middle of these plans, focused on hiring a diverse/quality workforce – be the place people want to work. Proactive culture – attract and retain residents and staff.

Police: Use of more technology to enhance efficiency and make things more available to the community, and slower traffic. Body cameras integrated into record management. Use of technology for reporting – automatic integration with police authentication.

Public Works: Community invested in itself – streetscaping, infrastructure, transportation to attract businesses and residents, pave gravel alleys to mitigate stormwater issues and maintenance. Embrace technology – use GIS to track assets and enhance efficiency, alternative fuel sources – more environmentally friendly.

Finance: Downtown district (Lincoln/Pratt) close proximity to Village Hall – row of shops, restaurants, people walking around. Diversify businesses – investing in technology, front counter is a one-stop shop (pay for permits, bills, etc.) – process improvement and customer service, maintain staff for one-on-one interaction with online payment options.

Community Development: Sustaining strong housing stock. More emphasis on commercial development into a series of things rather than individual – more unified approach to the corridors to enhance connection, safety, unity, etc. Become more business-friendly – through policy make things easier to reach the vision.

Fire: More of a non-emergency response (community paramedics – home checks) – less transportation to the hospital and more focus on home health, more use of social workers on staff, use of technology to put out fires, e.g., non-lethal grenade. Most buildings with sprinkler systems – less emphasis on fire – maybe medical services department.

Parks & Recreation: State of the art amenities – entertainment venue, recreation center, expansion of outdoor parks and recreation, diversified programming, e.g., mental health to support other services – police/fire/public works.

Administration: Mall redeveloped, 1860 development completed, continue to do more with same or less – need to leverage resources, live-time information sharing, changes in staffing structure – remote work, balance between human resources and technology. Technology integrated in all functions. EMS Department with nurses on staff instead of the Fire Department. Village workforce more representative of the community. Second floor on Village buildings to enhance space.

Environmental Scanning Part I

Surrender or Lead

Participants were introduced to a leadership exercise entitled “Surrender or Lead.” They were asked, in small groups, to respond to a series of structured questions designed to initiate discussion and reveal hopes, perspectives, challenges, opportunities, and possible barriers based on the collective view of each participant’s group. The group’s responses were recorded and are reported below. The **bolded** and underlined sections are key phrases that the group provided in response to the exercise’s open questions and prompts.

Group #1

1. We want to **have growth and development, but have vocal opposition and need to find a balance.**
2. The two most important things to focus on are **infrastructure** and **business development** because **these are the future.**
3. If it weren’t for **lack of funding**, we would have **better facilities to support the community.**
4. We need to finally **break ground on the purple hotel site.**
5. **A unified board** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #2

1. We want to be **business friendly**, but **we receive resident opposition.**
2. The most important things to focus on are **being pedestrian-friendly, infrastructure** and **attracting businesses** because of **the need for quality of life enhancement.**
3. If it weren’t for **limited revenue**, we would **resolve flooding issues.**
4. We need to finally **establish Lincoln Avenue as “Main Street.”**
5. **Clearly defining permitting/zoning expectations for prospective businesses** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #3

1. We want to be **diverse**, but **integrate and include everyone in the community.**
2. The two most important things to focus on are **access** and **service** because **without access and service we wouldn’t be a community.**
3. If it weren’t for **objections**, we would have **no audience.**
4. We need to finally **define our plan (identity).**
5. **Commercial development** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #4

1. We want to **fund all projects and address all needs of the community (infrastructure, technology, development),** but **are financially constrained.**
2. The two most important things to focus on are **financial stability** and **a diverse and represented community** because **it will allow us to move into the future and achieve goals.**
3. If it weren’t for **cyclical uncertainty**, we would **be able to achieve our desired goals more quickly.**
4. We need to finally **move ahead to the 21st Century.**
5. **District 1860** will have the biggest impact on the Village in the coming 2-3 years.

Environmental Scanning Part II

Large Group S.W.O.C. Analysis

The next step of the strategic planning workshop involved reviewing and accounting for the internal and external factors present in the environment that can potentially influence the success of the Village, both negatively and positively. Given the exploratory statements and challenges raised in the Surrender or Lead exercise, participants were then asked to identify what constraints and practical difficulties are likely to be encountered that will make it challenging to achieve the desired future state. These elements included both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, resources, etc. Furthermore, participants were asked to identify the organization’s **strengths (S)** and **weaknesses (W)**. In what areas does the Village regularly excel, and in what areas are there difficulties or shortcomings in terms of expertise, resources, training, etc.? What **opportunities (O)** are on the horizon that can be used to the Village’s advantage? Conversely, what **challenges (C)** lie ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? Those answers are captured next.

S.W.O.C. EXERCISE (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges)

Internal

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Schools • Parks/recreation • Pool • Our Village staff • Tax base • Excellent restaurants • Library • Touhy corridor/traffic • Culturally diverse • Diversity • Population supportive of environmental initiatives • Talent of both elected officials and staff • Community pride • Vocal community • Fire and police • Village Board • Foresight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size • Access to transit • School system • Hidden • Lack of downtown • Lack of indoor recreation center • Government facilities — age, space, maintenance, etc. • Lincolnwood history • Lack of clear identity • Infrastructure • Maintenance • Facilities • Lack of complete capital program • Environmental policy • Limited options for businesses • Lot layout and sizes • Varying perceptions • Varying expectations • Council-Manager form of government by ordinance

External

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Access to transit • School system – programming/community • Downtown – (Pratt, Crawford, Lincoln) • Recreation Center – school facilities could help with this – partnership • Technology • Traffic – drive economic development • Critical mass – Mall/redevelopment • External communication/community outreach • Comprehensive CIP • Tax levy • Environmental initiatives • Vocal community/community pride • Community supports development • Translation services • Centennial Park • Sales tax rate – follow neighbors • Holistic long-term review of revenues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capital, operations, streamline - 2-year budget • District 1860 – increase population • 2020 Census – capture the population increase • Village Board – Foresight, establish downtown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make the decision to develop a downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Vocal community • Size of community • Access to transit • Diversity • Language barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement • School system • Community identity – “hidden gem” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gateways need improvement - Perceptions vs. reality • Technology • Village facilities – aging, maintenance, space, etc. • Community pool maintenance/aging • Traffic on Touhy • Traffic congestion • No critical mass • External communication • Infrastructure • Environment – impact on infrastructure (in general) • Federal and State unfunded mandates • Limited opportunity for business, e.g., space • Lack of parking for businesses • Community layout – proximity of conflicting uses • Lack of trust in government • Varying expectations from residents on government standards, norms, services • Very wide socioeconomic gap • Minimum wage • Pressure to maintain low taxes equal to peers • Tax base • Nonprofits coming off tax roles • Imbalanced funding • Police pension funding

Nominal Group Goal Identification

With the preceding workshop sessions as a sound foundation for goal setting, the final workshop session was a healthy group discussion of goals and/or action items needed to achieve the future visions as expressed by the group. Agreed upon criteria were used to classify a goal as short- or long-term. The purpose of the exercise is to group goals of roughly the same type together so when prioritization occurs, the participants can avoid the problem of comparing “apples to oranges.”

The agreed upon criteria used for classifying goals as either short- or long-term involved the following: **Short-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway in the next one to three years. **Long-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway within a three-to-eight-year time frame. **Complex goals** were goals that required extraordinary resources, specialists, funding, or the agreement of outside organizations or agencies. **Routine goals**, although not necessarily simple, were goals that could be accomplished upon unilateral decision of the board and within present budget streams or with minor revenue enhancements or reallocations.

To begin the process, participants returned to the groups they had worked with during the previous Surrender or Lead exercise. Each member was allotted time to highlight the three or four most important policy and program goals they thought the Village should accomplish in the next one to three years as well as establish long-term goals focused on a three-to-eight-year time frame. The groups then shared their short-and long-term goals with the larger group for feedback and discussion. Goals that participants developed could be highly specific or general.

Open Group Discussion and Consolidation of Goals

This final phase of the discussion served as the forum for board and staff members to discuss, evaluate, and debate the ideas and goals offered by each participant in the previous sessions. Participants were asked to give their opinions, evaluations and judgments of the worthiness and value of different policy objectives. Participants were also asked to confirm each goal as short- or long-term, especially where similar goals were developed.

Post-Workshop:

Goal Prioritization and Board Ranking Exercise

After the workshop, each Board member was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The Board was provided an online ranking tool where point values were assigned to each goal in each quadrant of the time and complexity matrix by individuals. The calculation of goal prioritization consisted of “forced ranking” where the ranking of each identified goal is an average of the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal were given the scores of 2, 5, 6, 6, 1, 2 and 3, the average total would be 3.57. **The lower the score, the higher the priority.** Again, the average totals were based on the ratings provided.

The following illustration presents the dashboard of *high, medium, and lower* priority levels for the short- and long-term strategic goals based on the consensus ranking exercise conducted by the board (Figure 3). The priority levels were determined based on the goal’s average score calculated by the individual board rankings. The goal priority dashboard demonstrates the most important strategic goals, tasks, and objectives for the board and staff to address in the months and years ahead.

Figure 3. Strategic Goals - Priority Dashboard

Short-term Routine Goals	Priority Level
Define and promote a “Service First” culture to transform the organizational culture of the Village and enhance the Village’s customer service experience.	High
Undertake community development improvements to enhance customer service and streamline efficiencies.	High
Develop a financial forecast plan for Village revenue and expenses.	Medium
Enhance opportunities to improve communication with the use of multiple platforms to reach all demographics (e.g., translation services, newsletters, senior wellness checks, etc.).	Medium
Identify strategies to host more community-building and cultural events to celebrate the Village’s diversity and continue to promote a sense of welcoming/belonging.	Lower
Undertake strategies to complete the redevelopment of Whistler’s.	Lower

Short-term Complex Goals	Priority Level
Replace land and license building permit software.	High
Complete the Lincolnwood Town Center Concept Plan and identify a purchaser.	High
Develop and implement a plan to identify a hotel to be located at 1860.	High
Conduct a Village-wide water rate analysis.	Medium
Identify and implement quality control strategies for street storage to help mitigate flooding and other stormwater issues.	Medium
Review and update the 2016 Comprehensive Plan to help support the goal of developing a downtown district.	Medium
Undertake a Village-wide facilities audit and develop a facilities plan, including a space needs assessment.	Medium
Develop a Parks and Recreation Master Plan.	Lower
Develop an environmental sustainability plan.	Lower
Develop a Village-wide sidewalk accessibility plan to enhance ADA compliance, community connectivity and walkability, and for Village Parks.	Lower
Develop plans to locate, fund, and construct a Village-owned dog park.	Lower

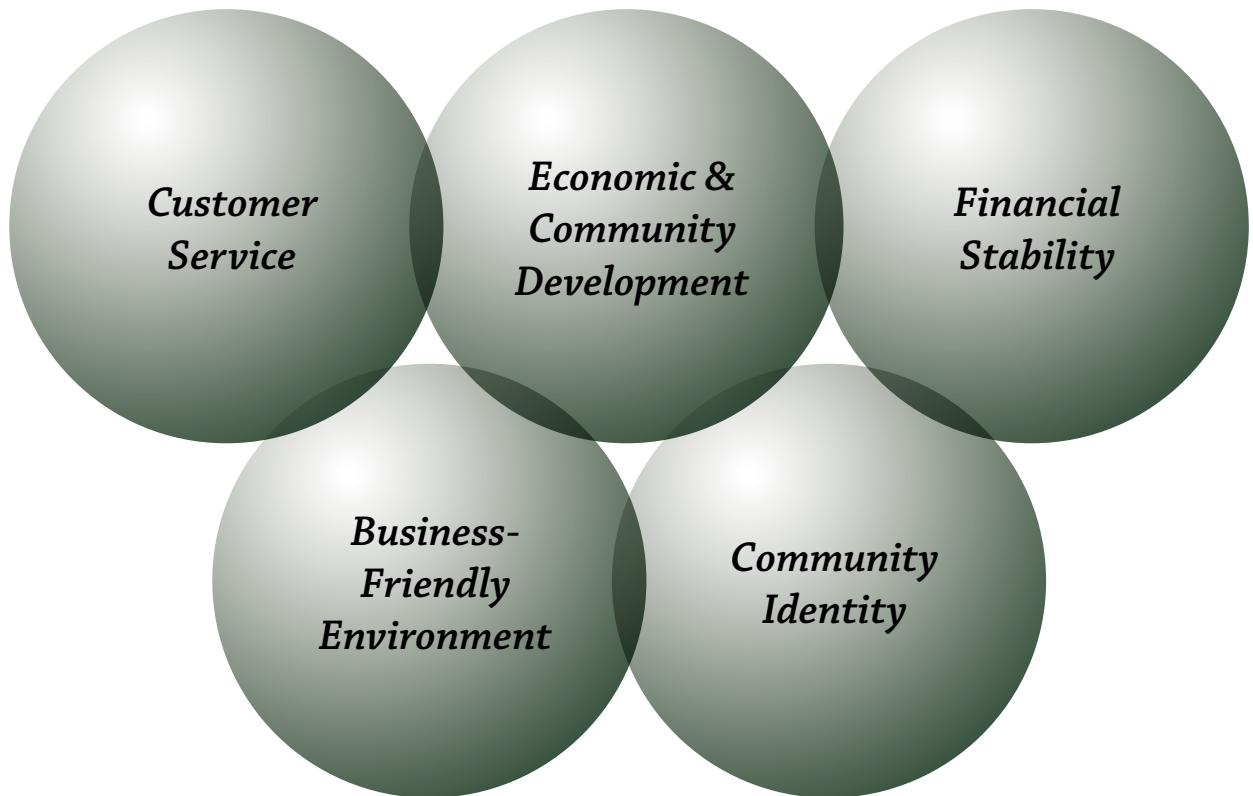
Long-term Routine Goals	Priority Level
Implement the financial forecast plan for Village revenue and expenses.	High
Transform the Village’s organizational culture to one of Service First through development and implementation of a “Service First” training program and onboarding protocols for new staff along with periodic audits and review of programs.	Medium
Identify, coordinate, and construct a new location for Parks and Recreation Department.	Lower
Continue to re-evaluate, update, and fine-tune a long-term infrastructure plan, which includes Parks and Recreation, including identified funding strategies.	Lower
Undertake a facility/space needs assessment/evaluation for Village Hall specifically Admin/Finance/Building & Zoning.	Lower

Long-term Complex Goals	Priority Level
Identify strategies to redevelop the Lincolnwood Town Center Mall.	High
Develop sites adjacent to District 1860 to attract visitors, businesses, and residents to the Village.	High
Identify strategies to have the Northeast Industrial District (NEID) redevelopment well underway.	High
Establish an entertainment district to be a local and regional attraction.	High
Implement the Village-wide facilities plan.	Medium
Develop a downtown Main Street.	Medium
Implement the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.	Medium
Implement the Village-wide sidewalk accessibility plan, including for Parks and Recreation.	Lower
Implement the Lincolnwood Facilities and Recreation Investment Act.	Lower
Work to have an established identity/brand (e.g., implementation of signage, street lighting, gateways).	Lower
Implement the Village’s environmental sustainability plan.	Lower
Undertake efforts to improve and expand the Village-owned community pool.	Lower

Strategic Priorities

Ultimately, five key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process, highlighting activities and initiatives that the Village should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below in no particular order.

Strategic Priority Areas



Conclusion

The value of the strategic planning process will only be realized if it is used as an active working guide to both the Village Board of Trustees and staff leadership as they pursue issues explored during the strategic planning process. The strategic plan is designed to capture the content of the discussions and to assist the Village in developing implementation plans for their high priority goals.

In the Village's ever evolving operating environment, adapting to the changes in demographics, community trends, technology advancements, best practices, and development opportunities will be paramount. The strategic plan is meant to be a road map for the Village with the flexibility to adapt to those changes. Therefore, it is recommended that the Village undertake a regular review (monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually) of the strategic plan, its goals, and its implementation schedule to identify the need for updates or modifications. In addition, many communities engage in regular strategic planning process updates/renewals annually or every two to three years.

What is apparent from the exchange of ideas and dialogue during the environmental scanning and strategic planning workshop is that the Village is fortunate to have progressive leadership and a management team that is looking ahead and committed to strategic thinking and planning. One noted observer summarized the challenges of organizational progress this way:

*“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change,
and change amid order..”*

— A.N. Whitehead

We wish you well with the ambitious years that lie ahead.


 The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is for Greg Kuhn, featuring a large, stylized 'G' followed by 'Kuhn'. The second signature is for Jeanna Ballard, written in a cursive script.

Greg Kuhn and Jeanna Ballard, Project Coordinators and Session Facilitators

Appendix:

Focus Group Feedback Summary

One of the key analytical techniques used for focus group notes is an analyst's search for key phrases, words, or terms that emerged during the focus group sessions. Coding is done by analysts' individual readings of the data, followed by key term searches with the aid of document software. The words and phrases listed below are the results of the study team's analysis of the collected focus group notes. At a glance, the reader can discover what terms were used or referred to most frequently in the feedback notes. Using individual analyst's coding, the researcher identifies terms that recur across groups and across questions. The results highlight key topics or issues that should be weighed and considered when proceeding with strategic planning discussions.

The information that follows is a summary of key themes and topics that emerged during the exploratory focus group/outreach sessions. The focus group sessions served as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information that is presented in this summation was designed to add exploratory and thematic information for the Board and Senior Leadership Teams to consider during the strategic planning workshop sessions.

The same exploratory focus group discussion questions were asked to each focus group and are listed below:

1. How would you describe the Village of Lincolnwood to a stranger or someone who doesn't live or work here?
2. If you left Lincolnwood tomorrow, and didn't return for 10-15 years, what do you think you'd see, or what do you hope you'd see, when you return?
3. What do you like best about Lincolnwood? Related to that, what are the strengths/greatest assets of the Village? Opportunities?
4. Can you identify areas or topics in need of attention or improvement? Related to that, what are the weaknesses/greatest needs in Lincolnwood? Threats?
5. What are/should be the top priorities for the Village over the next 3-5 years?
6. If you could change or initiate one key item or thing about the Village, what would it be?

Overall Themes Based on All Focus Group Feedback



Diversity

- Multiple languages spoken.
- More diverse – younger crowd.
- More “hip” community.
- Gives a voice to the younger generation.
- Bring Lincolnwood into the 21st Century – make it more progressive (e.g., marijuana dispensary, video gaming, etc.).
- Diversity of properties, not just people: residential, retail, etc.

Business Environment

- Village helps businesses thrive and supports them.
- Need to review/relax restrictive regulations (e.g., signage, permitting, video gaming, recreational marijuana).
- Feeling that residential community’s opinions outweigh those of the business community.
- Difficult for businesses to break into the community.
 - Inconsistent messaging on ease of doing business may warrant further examination.
- Overcome being known as “the village of no” and be more business-friendly to help with business attraction and retention.

Community Brand/Identity

- Still trying to master its identity. Need to find a way to distinguish Lincolnwood from Morton Grove, Skokie, or Evanston.
- Develop a niche to stand out from surrounding areas.
- Need to decide what Lincolnwood wants to be.
- No clearly defined downtown area.
- Lack of community brand/identity can hurt the ability to attract a quality workforce.

Community & Economic Development

- Development on corner of Touhy and Lincoln Avenue.
- Redevelopment of Lincolnwood Town Center.
- Redevelop industrial space with entertainment options – commercial/residential with a park – become a gathering space/community hub.
- Attract a local grocery store.
- More retail options/reduce vacancies.
- Plenty of opportunity to grow (e.g., residential, business, and recreation).
- A shopping district with nice restaurants (not all fast food) with safe walkable paths (similar to Park Ridge) along Touhy Avenue.
- Lack of public transportation/connectivity – more options can help mitigate traffic.

Sense of Community

- The Village has the best interest of all community groups at heart.
- Everybody is somebody here.
- People are appreciated here and it's fun to be involved.
- Friendly, helpful police force.
- Community events – family-friendly, variety, something for everyone.
- Service offerings for non-residents (e.g., pool membership).
- Local governments are accessible and meet the needs of the community.
- Great outdoor community – walking paths, access to nature center, pool, bike paths, parks, etc.

Inter-governmental Collaboration & Communication

- Village assistance with better communication and connections between business and industry partners (e.g., Oakton Community College).
- Better communication and information sharing about different community events to those inside and outside the community.
- Enhanced collaboration between government units and community groups – can help with marketing/advertising to promote Lincolnwood.
- Need to identify and improve communication with all the different community demographics to help address different needs.

Review of the Village's Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- Strategic location.
- Proximity to Chicago.
- Diversity.
- Outstanding schools.
- Great place to raise a family.
- Clean parks.
- Town feels like one large neighborhood.
- Close-knit community; everyone knows each other.
- Good return on investment and taxes.
- Public safety/exceptional police department.
- Friendly, helpful village staff.
- Capital infrastructure plan for improvements and maintenance.

Weaknesses

- Lack of certain amenities, especially grocery stores.
- Lack of community identity.
- Lack of downtown.
- Not much foot traffic/sidewalks.
- Lack of communication/outreach between government and different racial/ethnic groups.
- Village government more partisan than reflective of residents' views.
- A need to be more business-friendly.
- Perceived as the “Village of no.”
- Lack of collaboration with neighboring communities.
- Cumbersome process for modifying or constructing houses.
- Inconsistent code enforcement.
- Road safety.
- Street lighting.

Aggregate View of Top Priorities

- Redevelopment – Touhy and Lincoln, Lincolnwood Town Center, and the Purple Hyatt Hotel site.
- Collaboration and communication across the different levels and units of government and the community.
- Business-friendly environment.
- Progressive and strategic growth.
- Creating a strong and unique community identity.

Similarities and Differences in Focus Group Data

Comparing 2020 to 2021 Data

It is important to note that the Village started the strategic planning process in spring 2020 but had to postpone the process due to the impact of COVID-19. Prior to delaying the process, six focus groups were conducted and the NIU-CGS study team reviewed the 2020 focus group data in comparison to the 2021 focus group feedback. Below is a summary of those comparisons.

Similarities

- Diversity; at least 85 languages, many religions; melting pot.
- Redevelopment – Toughey and Lincoln, Lincoln Town Center, Purple Hyatt Hotel Site.
- Welcoming community; good place to raise a family.
- Excellent schools.
- Needs a local grocery store.
- Fix traffic issues.
- Community lacks a brand/identity.
- Professional, helpful police department; low crime rate.

Differences

- Redevelop Republic Bank of Chicago (not mentioned in 2021 focus groups).
- More emphasis on being business-friendly in 2021.
- A staff focus group was conducted in 2020 but not again in 2021. Staff priorities to highlight:
 - Technology maintenance/integration – streamline.
 - Resources needed – staffing, professional development, training, equipment, flex scheduling, etc.
 - Centralize Parks and Recreation and include a fitness center with flexible hours.
 - Emergency management planning for staff (panic buttons, plexiglass).
 - A space needs study.