

CITY OF
Elgin

Strategic Planning Process

Community Input Session Summary / November 2022

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Background

In June 2022, the City of Elgin engaged Raftelis to assist with the City’s strategic planning process. This work included the facilitation of a series of community input sessions to support ongoing efforts to gather feedback on the draft Strategic Planning Framework developed by the Mayor and Council.

Four community input sessions were scheduled in October 2022, with two in-person sessions and two virtual sessions available. These sessions were open to all members of the community. They were advertised in both English and Spanish, and Spanish interpreters and materials were available for each session. A total of 78 community members participated in the four community input sessions, which took place between October 18 and 27, 2022.

During the community input sessions, the draft Strategic Planning Framework was shared with participants. Participants were asked a set of common questions to learn what parts of the framework resonated with them and what specific initiatives or projects the City should consider as part each strategic outcome area. Participant feedback was collected and synthesized, and this document summarizes the key themes that were shared by participants throughout the sessions.



Figure 1: Draft Strategic Planning Framework

Key Themes

Vision

Elgin is an authentic city that honors its history while aspiring to be inclusive, innovative, and vibrant.

To facilitate conversations about the vision statement, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- How can we honor our history while aspiring to be inclusive, innovative, and vibrant?
- What does the City need to do to achieve this Vision for the future?

Participants frequently discussed the City's many amenities that share the history of the City, including museums and the historic home tour. They identified opportunities to broaden the City's lens as it considers its vision for the future. Common themes that emerged in these discussions included the following:

- **Embrace a wider version of Elgin's history.** Participants had a shared sense of pride in Elgin's rich history and the idea that the City's history is made richer by every generation of residents who call the City home. They expressed a desire to expand the lens through which the City's history is explored and celebrated, to promote events that highlight and share the histories of all Elgin's residents, and enhance inclusive interpretive signage throughout the community.
- **Recognize the contributions and distinct voices of all our community's diverse residents.** Participants frequently identified Elgin's diversity as one of its greatest assets. To support and enhance efforts at inclusion, participants suggested that the City support events that highlight the City's diversity and ensure that translation services are available for community meetings and celebrations.
- **Enhance engagement strategies to bring more voices to the table.** A common idea shared by many participants is that there is a need to do a better job at outreach to get residents from all corners of the community involved in City matters. This could ultimately lead to board and commission members being more representative of the community, a value that many participants shared as important to them.

Connected, Engaged, and Inclusive Community

Elgin promotes education, resources, and incentives to foster co-created community-building efforts and events in an effort to strengthen our social fabric.

To facilitate conversations about this strategic outcome area, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What contributes to a connected, engaged, and inclusive community?
- Are there any specific initiatives you would like the City to consider that would contribute to Connected, Engaged, and Inclusive Community?

In discussing Elgin as a connected, engaged, and inclusive community, participants acknowledged that Elgin is already a welcoming City with a vibrant arts community and impactful non-profit sector. Common themes that emerged in these discussions included the following:

- **Robust communication and community engagement is key.** Participants shared an array of ideas for enhancing the City's communication and engagement strategies, including dedicated staff communication

resources, proactive outreach from the Mayor and Council, and working to enhance outreach to the Spanish speaking portions of the community.

- **Support culturally diverse and inclusive community events and organizations.** Many participants identified the International Day festival as an example of a past event that would support this strategic outcome area. In addition, participants recommended promoting events in areas beyond downtown Elgin, and events that are walkable, affordable, kid-friendly, and held year-round. Partnering with and adequately funding the community's non-profit organizations was frequently identified as an important approach to supporting a connected, engaged, and inclusive community.
- **Focus on affordability and accessibility.** Specific issues with accessibility and affordability such as housing and homelessness, and limited public transportation options were frequently identified by participants. In addition, the importance of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Spanish language accessibility were noted by participants.

Financially Sustainable Infrastructure and Services

Elgin provides high-quality services and reliable infrastructure through innovative approaches and long-term planning in a fiscally responsible manner.

To facilitate conversations about this strategic outcome area, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What City services do you rely upon the most?
- Are there any specific initiatives you would like the City to consider that would contribute to Financially Sustainable Infrastructure and Services?

When discussing the City services that they rely upon and value most, participants most frequently cited the City's core services such as police, fire, 311, utility and sanitation services, and snow removal. When discussing potential initiatives to support this strategic outcome area, the common themes included the following:

- **Invest in high impact infrastructure, including the Fox River.** Throughout their conversations, participants identified infrastructure investments that would support the long-term success of the community. Examples cited frequently include lead service line replacement, storm sewer replacements, dam removal, and other investments that would improve water quality in the Fox River.
- **Continue the City's investment in high quality emergency services.** Participants frequently mentioned the Elgin Police Department's reputation amongst peer agencies as a point of pride, and identified continued investment in emergency services as important to them.
- **Adopt updated, customer-centric Citywide policies and procedures.** Several participants identified the importance of revising City operating policies and procedures to be more customer focused. Areas where this was identified as being most important are communication and outreach, economic development, and front-line customer service.

Diverse Housing and Livable Neighborhoods

Elgin advances the creation of safe and affordable neighborhoods by supporting a variety of housing that allows aging in place and encourages neighborhood involvement.

To facilitate conversations about this strategic outcome area, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What are the greatest housing needs in Elgin?
- Are there any specific initiatives you would like the City to consider that would contribute to Diverse Housing and Livable Neighborhoods?

These conversations were generally centered around the ideas of housing affordability, creating walkable and connected neighborhoods, and homelessness. Common themes identified by participants included the following:

- **Housing affordability is a major concern in Elgin.** Participants shared concerns about the lack sufficient affordable housing options in Elgin to meet the current needs of the community, and fears that as the community grows and the residents attempt to age in place, the situation will continue to worsen. They shared ideas for addressing this issue, including education and grant programs for first-time homebuyers, landlord and rent regulations, and housing programs for seniors.
- **Elgin should support neighborhood walkability and diversity.** The need for investment in trails and sidewalks that promote neighborhood walkability was identified by many participants. Additionally, participants suggested that diverse neighborhoods that included walkable access to different types of housing, food stores, and other amenities, should be prioritized through updates to City code and infrastructure investments.
- **The City should address homelessness directly.** While participants recognize that homelessness is a challenging issue to address systemically, they identified it as an important issue for the City to undertake in conjunction with community partners.

Vibrant Destinations

Elgin creates and supports inviting and accessible venues and outdoor spaces for recreation and entertainment events, supported by food and retail amenities.

To facilitate conversations about this strategic outcome area, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What types of venues, outdoor spaces, and events are most important to you?
- Are there any specific initiatives you would like the City to consider that would contribute to Vibrant Destinations?

Participants generally focused their conversations on the value of high-quality events as a draw for the City of Elgin, and what more could be done to make these events and the City even more vibrant. Common themes identified by participants included the following:

- **The key to being a vibrant destination is a vibrant food scene.** Many participants identified the limited food and drink options available for event-goers as a limiting factor for the City. Incentivizing bars,

restaurants, and food trucks to locate near event venues, and making it easier for them to do business in Elgin, were identified as important steps the City could take to help make the City a vibrant destination.

- **Appropriately invest in the City's existing parks and open spaces.** A frequent topic of these conversations was the City's Lords park pool. Participants believed that City should spend what is necessary to attract and retain lifeguards so that this amenity can open next year. Also mentioned were the City's municipal sports facilities and the riverfront. These were identified as valuable assets that required additional cleanup and maintenance to reach their full potential.

Environmental Stewardship

The City of Elgin partners with residents and businesses to foster a tradition of ownership of our shared environment, while also preparing for shifting climate impacts.

To facilitate conversations about this strategic outcome area, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What are the most important environmental issues facing Elgin?
- Are there any specific initiatives you would like the City to consider that would contribute to Environmental Stewardship?

Participants identified a mix of shorter-term tactical issues and initiatives and longer-term more policy-oriented matters that they felt the City should undertake as part of its commitment to environmental stewardship. Common themes identified by participants included the following:

- **Invest in strategies that would have an immediate positive impact on the environment.** Ideas that were shared by several participants include electric vehicle charging stations, single stream recycling, and street cleaning.
- **Adequately staff and fund sustainability efforts in the City.** Participants appreciated the City's recent creation of a staff position for sustainability, but share concerns that this will become a siloed or solo function. Many participants identified the importance of sustainability becoming an organization-wide priority.
- **City development and transportation requirements and plans should be updated to support long-term environmental sustainability.** Participants identified a number of areas in which they believed the City should evaluate its existing code and plans through a sustainability lens, including transportation transit, building codes, and neighborhood design standards.

Diversified Growth

Elgin's diversified growth is intentional and determined by a welcoming community for residents and businesses alike.

To facilitate conversations about this strategic outcome area, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What types of growth are most needed in Elgin?
- Are there any specific initiatives you would like the City to consider that would contribute to Diversified Growth?

Residents agreed that Elgin should be welcoming and attractive for diverse young professionals and businesses of all types, and promote development strategies that incentivize diversified business and residential development. Common themes identified by participants included the following:

- **Growth strategies should be targeted toward specific areas of opportunity and need.** Participants identified young professionals, affordable neighborhoods, childcare centers, and bars and restaurants as specific areas of focus. They also discussed the need to streamline development and permitting processes to support a more welcoming environment for businesses looking to locate in Elgin.
- **Invest in infrastructure that promotes thoughtful development.** As participants discussed the types of connected, multi-use neighborhoods and communities they value, they identified the need for corresponding, potentially proactive, infrastructure investments in walkability, connectivity, parking, electric vehicle charging, lead service line replacement, and water intake.

Additional Insights

Participants were asked to identify any key issues that they thought were missing from the strategic planning framework.

- When you consider the draft strategic planning framework, which is intended to cover the next 3-5 years, are there any key issues that you think are missing?

Several participants responded to this prompt, and the key issues that were identified by multiple participants are summarized below along with the number of participant comments associated with each issue.

- **Diversity (6)** – Participants identified diversity, accessibility, and equity as key issues that should be called out specifically in the strategic planning framework.
- **Accountability (4)** – These participants identified the need for specificity and performance metrics to track the success of the strategic plan over time.
- **Traffic Safety (3)** – Comments related to safety were addressed enhancing traffic enforcement.
- **Small Business Support (3)** – These participant comments were related to small business attraction and retention.
- **Human Services (3)** – Participants identified the need to support Elgin’s youth, help the poor, unhoused, and undocumented, and set social services-related goals.