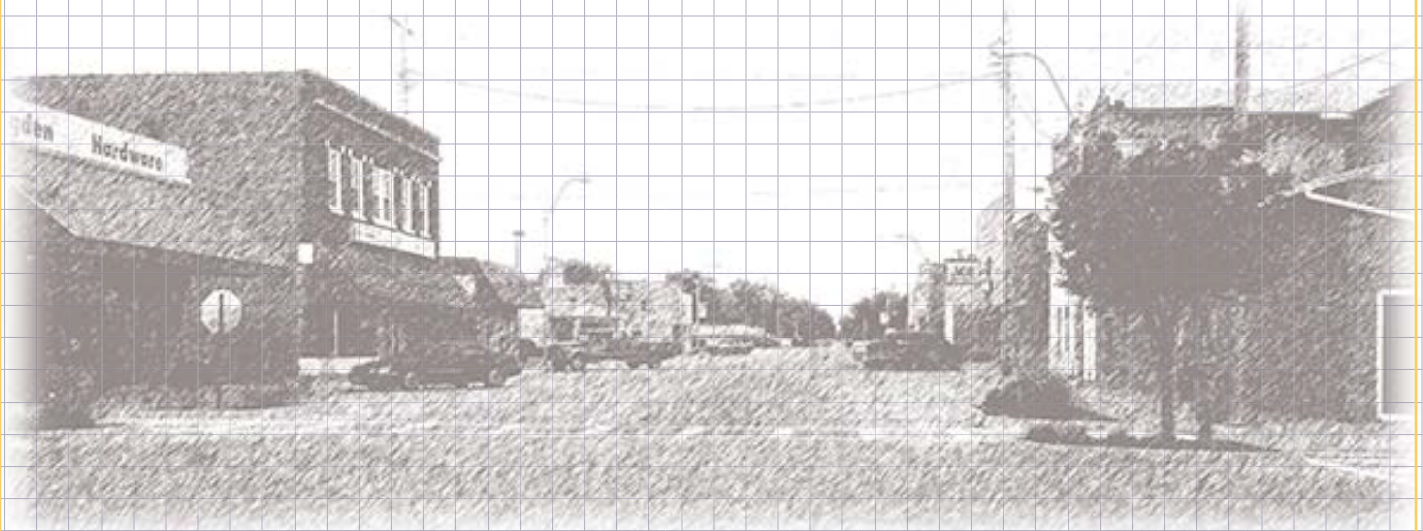


STRATEGIC PLAN 2016



for the
City of Atkinson, Nebraska

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Acknowledgments

This Strategic Plan would not be possible without the diligent efforts of City employees, elected and appointed officials, and other community leaders and stakeholders. This Strategic Plan maintains priorities for growth and continual improvement by incorporating goals and objectives relating to quality of life, economic development, housing, and public infrastructure.

Atkinson's Strategic Plan will help guide the City through the next five years. The Strategic Plan details where the City is going and how it plans to get there. Atkinson will lead the way in building a solid community through financial health, community involvement, beautification and aesthetic improvements, additional amenities to serve residents of all ages, improved public infrastructure, and upgraded public safety services.

The City of Atkinson is committed to building a healthy future and providing services residents have come to expect. The City will strive to effectively and efficiently develop and strengthen assets that make the City a great place to live, work, and play.

Goal setting is an important step for any person, family, business, and even community. City leaders need to have clear goals, both short and long term, with strategies to reach those goals. These goals need to be comprehensive in nature, looking at every aspect of the community, and they must all align with a single vision for the future of the community. Personal and business goal setting is no different; however, it may be more challenging at a City level because of all the varying aspects and components City leaders must constantly assess and direct in order to grow and change in an organized, efficient, and effective manner.

The City of Atkinson completed their Comprehensive Plan Update in 2015 with an outlook to 2026. This Plan allowed residents and community leaders to come together to create long term growth and development goals for the City. The following list shows the City's broad, long-term goals determined by residents and stakeholders and included in the Comprehensive Plan.

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Goals

These goals are a combination of information gathered from the public input sessions held during the planning process, data gathered from a Community Needs Assessment Survey, research, and data analysis. The importance of these goals is that they are realistic in nature, and give the community a vision to strive towards over the next five years. Long term goals are important to keep in mind; however, feasible, short-term goals are crucial for stakeholders to accomplish. The long-term goals are ten-year goals as outlined in the City's Comprehensive Plan. Public input sessions, multiple surveys, and data analysis from the planning process for the Comprehensive Plan was utilized to determine feasible five-year goals for the City's Strategic Plan. These goals cover different aspects of the community including housing, infrastructure, and commercial development to name a few.

Long-Term Goals

Improve the Existing Housing Market
Improve Public Infrastructure
Promote Commercial Development
Further Enhance Amenities/Promote Tourism
Develop Marketing Campaign
Enhance Highway Corridors & Community Beautification

Short-Term Goals

Improve the Downtown District
Develop/Market Shovel-Ready Sites for Commercial Development
Demolish Substandard Housing
Enforce City Ordinances
Maintain and Update Public Infrastructure
Enhance/Market Amenities within the Community
Continue Economic Development Programs and Efforts

Objectives

The following information lists the different objectives the City needs to accomplish in order to reach the previously outlined goals. Each goal has a set of objectives the City can and needs to accomplish to reach each goal. Community stakeholders emphasized “growth” as their main theme. Some objectives overlap and will benefit the City’s task to accomplish multiple goals. This was discussed as both population and economic growth, which stakeholders believed were both extremely important for the community.

Short-Term Goals

The City of Atkinson will work to complete several short-term goals over the next five years; to accomplish this, each goal has a list of objectives that must be completed. Many of these objectives will be completed by the City and its staff and elected officials; however, not all of the goals and objectives should solely rest on the shoulders of the City. Many other community groups and organizations including the Atkinsonettes, Betterment Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Community Foundation, LB840 Committee, Lion's Club, Men-4-Men, and other local organizations and businesses will need to assist the City and see these projects through.

Improve the Downtown District

A thriving and active Downtown District has long been a signal of a prosperous community. Some of the properties in Atkinson's Downtown District have suffered from years of neglect. Therefore, the City is encouraged to work on downtown revitalization efforts. The goal for the City is to apply for Downtown Revitalization grant funds to develop a Downtown Revitalization Plan and make physical improvements within the District. The Downtown Revitalization Plan will help the City understand the opportunities for growth, change, and improvements. Once the plan has been created the City can work, in phases, to see the plan come to reality. The City will first apply for Downtown Revitalization Phase I grant funds through NDED, then will procure for a planning consultant and work with the consultant to develop a Downtown Revitalization Plan. The Plan will focus on improvement goals and the feasible phases necessary for the City to successfully reach those goals. After the Downtown Revitalization Plan has been completed, the City will apply for Phase II funds, as well as procure and hire engineers/architects to complete designs and specs for the downtown improvements. The City will then hire a contractor to complete the improvements. Phase II improvements must be approved by NDED prior to construction.

The City of Atkinson will complete the following objectives over the next couple of years in order to complete Downtown District improvements:

- Submit Leadership Community Application to receive designation;
- Determine budget options for matching funds required for DTR Phase I and Phase II grants;
- Submit Downtown Revitalization Phase I grant application;
- Once awarded, procure for Grant Administrator;
- Once Grant Administrator is hired, City should procure for Planner to complete study/plan;
- Hold public input meetings, assist Planner with data gathering;
- Work with Planner to complete Downtown Revitalization Plan;
- Submit final DTR Plan to the State for review and approval;
- Formalize budget for matching portion of funds;
- Finalize list of grant-eligible projects to be completed;
- Submit Downtown Revitalization Phase II grant application;
- Once awarded, procure for Grant Administrator;
- Once Grant Administrator is hired, City should procure for Engineer to complete design;
- Work with Engineer to complete design of projects, hold any necessary public input meetings;
- Finalize design and hold bid letting;
- Hire contractor and complete construction phase; and
- Hold ribbon cutting ceremony for completion of project.

Other improvements within the Downtown District include the desire to create an incubator business space from the old library building and encourage property owners to utilize downtown building space for commercial businesses. A commercial incubator space was discussed during multiple public input sessions as well as during the Economic Development Strategic Plan surveys. Residents would like to see a space available for new business start-ups, which will encourage entrepreneurship in Atkinson and provide locations for additional commercial businesses. These spaces will benefit the community and provide services/amenities to residents. Through regulations and education, the City can encourage downtown property owners to utilize the main floor of downtown buildings for businesses. There are minimal vacancies in Atkinson's Downtown District; therefore, existing spaces should be used for commercial businesses, restaurants, services, and offices.

Develop/Market Shovel-Ready Sites for Commercial Development

The presence of two highways, especially Highway 20, provides Atkinson with many commercial development opportunities. Land along the highway corridors is prime commercial real estate because of the close proximity, visibility, and access to the larger transportation network. The City has a few lots, on the southeast side of Atkinson, along Highway 20 available for commercial development. Most recently a bank, greenhouse, and attorney's office have been constructed on these lots. The City and Economic Development Office had the foresight to develop these sites and market them to businesses. There are only a few lots still available; therefore, the City and ED Office should be evaluating other prime commercial real estate opportunities. Visibility and land availability are important aspects for commercial business ventures; and should therefore be analyzed when locating prime commercial and light industrial real estate. This land should be close to the existing corporate limits and public infrastructure and adjacent to existing commercial and/or light industrial businesses.

Prime commercial real estate sites should be marketed to potential businesses and developers. It is important to utilize all marketing sources available especially online sources that could attract developers from outside of the region. The City should not only market each individual site, but also what the City has to offer to the businesses including any local, regional, or state development incentives. Location, lot dimensions, current zoning, ownership, availability of infrastructure, connection to the transportation network, and potential costs along with development incentives should all be marketed to potential businesses. Like the residential infill lot inventory, a database of existing commercial and light industrial sites should be created for the City to attract new commercial ventures. In order to ensure shovel-ready lots are available within or in close proximity to Atkinson, the City needs to take the following steps over the next few years:

- Continue marketing existing shovel-ready sites;
- Target additional prime commercial real estate areas;
- Complete cost/benefit analysis for targeted sites;
- Discuss selling opportunities and/or purchase land;
- Develop public works plan;
- Determine cost/benefit analysis for possible annexation, if necessary;
- Design and construct necessary infrastructure for commercial sites;
- Align development incentives from local, regional, and state sources; and
- Market targeted sites utilizing a variety of sources.

Demolish Substandard Housing

Vacant, substandard housing is a concern for many residents in Atkinson. The City recognizes the need to raze these structures and considers it to be a priority. There are a couple of different avenues the City can take to demolish substandard housing in the community including Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds, City-funded through acquirement of the property, or encouragement to the property owner through nuisance abatement. The City could create a housing committee to take the lead of this process. One option would be to budget a set dollar amount each year towards acquisition and/or demolition of vacant, derelict homes. All vacant lots and vacant, uninhabitable homes are potential properties for infill residential development.

Another option to help rid the community of dilapidated structures is to allow the City to purchase homes listed at or below a specified price point. This limit would be determined by the City Council and would be a benchmark value for homes the City considers beyond repair. With this measure in place, any home on the market and deemed in poor condition and beyond repair may be purchased by the City for the sole purpose of demolition and preparing the site for a new home. The City should access different avenues available to assist with the clean-up of vacant lots and uninhabitable properties. Only a minimal amount of lots are currently available for infill development; therefore, efforts should be made to create more availability. Also, by cleaning up vacant lots and uninhabitable homes the City will rid the community of unnecessary eye sores and safety and health hazards. The following objectives should be completed in order to demolish substandard housing in Atkinson:

- Set aside \$25,000 annually for housing demolition;
- Complete nuisance abatement process on all properties in Atkinson;
- Encourage property owner to demolish vacant, dilapidated structures;
- Take legal action, when required, for nuisance properties in complete disrepair; and
- Determine a strategy for substandard, unsafe properties that become available for purchase.

The City also has long-term goals of encouraging new home construction, developing more transitional housing options, etc. These short-term goals will positively affect the housing market; therefore, it is important to focus efforts on these tasks while ensuring long-term goals are not forgotten.

Enforce City Ordinances

Enforcing City ordinances is an on-going task and a constant work in progress due to the process required for nuisance abatement as well as the ever-changing personal habits of property owners. The City has existing codes and ordinances, but it will take a group effort to enforce the regulations including the Board of Health, Police Officers, City Staff, and the City's Legal Counsel. Nuisance abatement is important to enforce in order to prevent unnecessary safety hazards, blighted conditions, and "eye sores" in the community. The City will complete the following steps in order to ensure necessary enforcement is completed:

- Encourage regular meetings for the Board of Health;
- Review and update existing Ordinances to fit the needs of the City;
- Provide authority to the correct persons to pursue non-compliant properties;
- Follow recommendations from the Board of Health and Authority in charge of pursuing non-compliant properties; and
- Ensure all properties are analyzed equally.

Maintain & Update Public Infrastructure

The City of Atkinson has completed several public infrastructure upgrades in the past several years. However, there are still several areas in need of improvement including water and sanitary sewer mains, paving and storm sewer improvements, and planning for necessary maintenance and upgrades at the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant. The City has recently purchased a closed-circuit video camera to inspect water and sanitary sewer mains throughout the community, which will help the City prioritize main repair/replacement projects. Once the City has completed the closed circuit camera work of the water and sanitary sewer mains, a prioritized list of projects can be completed by City staff. The City would also like to upgrade meter reading to allow for radio read.

The City's Wastewater Treatment Plant was recently built with funds through USDA-Rural Development. The City has a goal of developing a sinking fund for general maintenance and upgrades that will be needed in the future. Paving and drainage projects include improvements needed on Carberry Street and the Community Center parking lot. The City has several necessary public infrastructure updates as well as general maintenance and repair to complete, as needed. The City will complete the following steps to help prioritize and complete the known short-term public infrastructure improvement goals:

- Create sinking-fund for Wastewater Treatment Plant maintenance/upgrades;
- Complete Community Center parking lot paving project;
- Complete closed-circuit video of water and sanitary sewer mains;
- Analyze inspection videos;
- Develop prioritized list of water and sanitary sewer mains and manhole upgrades;
- Follow annual 1-and-6 Year Road Plans;
- Prioritize all infrastructure improvement needs to integrate water/sanitary sewer and paving/drainage projects;
- Complete project cost estimates; and
- Set budget and timeframe for prioritized project list.

Enhance/Market Amenities within the Community

Atkinson has many amenities to offer its residents and visitors; however, residents and community stakeholders realize the value additional amenities can add to the quality of life in the community. Amenity enhancements for Atkinson focus on quality of life, community services, and recreational opportunities. Atkinson has several goals and objectives to accomplish in the short-term and long-term, as outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. With everything Atkinson has to offer its residents, from amenities to local retail businesses, the community truly is a destination place and does attract visitors. The City needs to capitalize on its ability to grow by developing a marketing campaign to promote existing businesses and amenities. Amenities and community services will enhance the overall quality of life. Long-term priorities will change; however, the City has outlined a few key areas in Mill Race Park and the Community Center that will require attention in the short-term. The City will complete the following steps in the next few years to enhance many of the amenities in the community:

- Complete Mill Race Park Master Plan;
- Complete (current need) updates at the Community Center (lighting, projector, screens, doors, etc.);
- Create sinking fund for swimming pool maintenance and upgrades;
- Develop budget and timeframe for Mill Race Park improvements;
- Establish person(s) responsible for marketing community amenities/services;
- Designate key areas for marketing (i.e. at Mill Race Park, on social media, at restaurants in town, etc.);
- Outline marketing plan for all sources (brochures, flyers, posters, website, social media, etc.);
- Analyze other community amenity needs and determine level of support;
- Ensure updates are made to all marketing materials, as needed; and
- Continue to prioritize needs to ensure a high quality of life in Atkinson.

Continue

Economic Development Programs & Efforts

Economic growth is a challenging task, but is fundamental for maintaining the vitality of Atkinson. Atkinson is taking the right steps forward, but there is always room for improvement. Additional important economic development efforts for the community that need to be addressed in Atkinson include business retention and expansion, workforce training and development, succession planning for many of the existing businesses, and youth retention. These subjects must be discussed for the successful sustainability of Atkinson's economic base. The following steps will help the City continue economic development programs and efforts.

- Continue building partnerships with regional and state agencies;
- Develop annual economic development goals;
- Assure longevity and success over local LB840 program by providing on-going guidance and oversight;
- Assess existing and potential Redevelopment Areas;
- Market local resources for economic development (LB840, TIF, etc.);
- Work with businesses to outline employee recruitment methods; and
- Maintain effective Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program.

