

DEKALB 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

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Governmental Studies



INTRODUCTION

The City of DeKalb undertook a strategic planning process to set direction for City policy, budgeting, and program development for the next 10 years. To help inform this process, an extensive community engagement effort was conducted from May through July of 2015 to capture the opinions and ideas about the future of DeKalb from people who live, work, and/or learn in the city. In total, information was received by 321 people who attended a conversation cafe (including those who attended multiple conversations), 91 who completed a survey, and two additional sets of emailed comments. Northern Illinois University's (NIU's) Center for Governmental Studies (CGS), provided facilitation for this planning process, organized and summarized this information, and shared it with City staff so they could provide additional input. A preliminary strategic planning framework was presented to the City Council and approved in late August.

From September to early November, senior City staff devoted significant time to translating the strategic planning framework into an operational document by adding strategies and actions. A number of these were drawn from specific suggestions made during the conversation cafes, some reflected a continuation of the work began in previous years, and others were identified by department heads to advance the vision and goals that emerged from this process. Given the 10-year time horizon, considerable efforts were made to ensure that the strategies and actions were comprehensive and forward-thinking.

This report is organized as follows:

- Process of Community Engagement
- Strategic Planning Framework
 - Mission Statement
 - Core Values
 - Vision Statements, Goals, Strategies, and Actions
- Next Steps
- Appendix A: Themes suggested by participants in the community conversations
- Appendix B: Assets identified by community conversation participants

PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The purpose of the broad-based community engagement process undertaken for this planning effort was to provide DeKalb's City Council with:

- an understanding of what people who live, work, and/or learn here think about DeKalb's future;
- issues and opportunities associated with that future;
- assets on which to build; and
- opportunities for residents to become more engaged with their community.

Five questions were identified to obtain that information:

1. What do you think makes a city a great place in which to live?
2. Which of these qualities does DeKalb have?
3. Looking at these qualities, what can the City of DeKalb do over the next 10 years to improve your community - to make (or keep) it a great place to live?
4. How can *you* be more connected and engaged with your community?
5. What are you most proud of when thinking about DeKalb?

Dialogue Model

These questions were posed by NIU CGS facilitators and two community volunteers who hosted small roundtable discussions around the city following a “community café” model. Community cafés offer hosted dialogues of 60-90 minutes that take place in small groups of 3-8 people. A host sets up the conversation and, for purposes of DeKalb’s discussions, worked from a short script that ensured a similar format was used across the 48 tabletop discussions.

Each host captured pertinent points from his/her discussion on flipchart sheets to keep the conversation focused. These points, along with additional notes taken by NIU CGS personnel, were transcribed and incorporated into this document. Only first names were requested and the hosts emphasized that names would not be used in sharing the results of the conversations.

DeKalb’s City Manager or Assistant City Manager welcomed participants to the nine larger community conversations and stayed for the length of the event. Their opening remarks included a brief overview of the responsibilities of DeKalb City government to help focus the conversation in those areas. Participants in all of the community conversations were assured that any ideas falling outside the purview of the City would be shared with the appropriate entity.

Marketing and Promotion

In an effort to engage people from throughout DeKalb, these community conversations were promoted in multiple ways:

- Flyers in English and Spanish were posted at 90 sites throughout the city, including public facilities (e.g., the library), grocery stores, laundromats, multi-unit residential buildings, rental offices, churches, community-based organizations, and other places with significant community traffic. Thirteen locations were identified for Spanish only posters.
- A press release was prepared and sent to local media. It was picked up by the local newspapers as well as NIU media.
- Radio advertisements were developed for three local stations after community feedback indicated that outreach would be more effective using that medium.
- The City created a web page on its website dedicated to strategic planning. All available information about the process was posted as well as links to an online survey in English and Spanish that contained the same five questions discussed in the community cafés.

- Community influencers were contacted by NIU staff regarding their willingness to “talk up” the event. The focus was primarily on communities with low income and minority residents.

CGS reached out to Latino, African-American, and Asian communities as well as high school and university students. The Mayor emailed approximately 60 leaders from the nonprofit, private, faith-based, and public sectors to participate.

Community Conversation Locations

Fourteen locations throughout DeKalb were used to host 15 community conversation sessions with one location used twice. These were selected in consultation with City staff and the Aldermen to ensure that each ward had at least one nearby location. Efforts were made to identify neutral settings in which people would feel comfortable sharing their candid perceptions and opinions. Each community conversation was held at a location that is ADA accessible, and free transportation was available to participants. All locations offered their space at no or minimal cost. These locations included:

Asian American Center of NIU	First Congregational United Church of Christ
Barsema Alumni and Visitors Center	Hopkins Park Community Center
City Hall	Northern Illinois University – Holmes Student Center
Conexión Comunidad	Police Department
DeKalb High School	River Heights Golf Course
DeKalb Wesleyan Church	St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
New Hope Baptist Church	
Faranda’s Banquet Hall	

Participants

In total, 48 small group discussions were held between May 1 and July 31, 2015. People were allowed to participate in as many of these discussions as they wished, so the total of 321 participants includes an unknown number of duplicates. CGS staff who attended these discussions estimate that between 10 and 20 people attended more than one.

Of the 321 participants, 260 (81%) provided demographic information about themselves. Of these 260 people, 85% self-identified as residents of the City of DeKalb. Non-residents identified 12 other communities throughout the Chicago region as their home town. Participants who identified their home wards in DeKalb were distributed as follows:

Ward 1	7.0%
Ward 2	14.5%
Ward 3	12.0%
Ward 4	9.5%
Ward 5	25.0%
Ward 6	< 1%
Ward 7	2.0%
n/a	28%

Approximately 69% of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, 6% as African American/Black, 5% as Hispanic/Latino, 4% Asian, and 2% as bi-racial. The remaining 14% did not provide race or ethnicity. With respect to age, of the 245 participants providing such information, 6% were 21 or younger, 25% were 22-43, 42% were 44-64, and the remaining 27% were 64 and older.

Promotional information included a website for people to access a short online survey in English and Spanish that asked the same five key questions as were posed in the conversation cafés. An additional 91 people completed an online survey. Finally, two sets of comments were provided directly to the City and were incorporated into the analysis.

In total, information was received by 321 people who attended a community conversation (including those who attended multiple conversations), 91 who completed a survey, and two additional sets of emailed comments.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The steps taken to develop DeKalb's 10-year strategic plan included the following:

1. Conducting a series of community conversations to collect information pertinent to the strategic plan from community members.
2. Using the information from the community conversations to draft a high-level draft strategic planning framework consisting of a preliminary mission, core values, vision, and strategic goals.
3. Presenting the draft strategic planning framework to City Council for discussion and action.
4. Engaging City departments in translating the strategic goals into strategies and actions.
5. Presenting the completed final strategic plan, including an operational component, to City Council for review and adoption.

MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement is a short description of the reason an organization or program exists. Mission statements help guide decisions about priorities, responsibilities, and actions, and as such are at the core of a strategic plan. Following is the mission of the City of DeKalb developed as part of this planning process:



MISSION STATEMENT

*Collaboratively deliver high quality municipal services
to those who live, work, learn in or visit our community
through fiscal responsibility, transparency, innovation, and leadership,
that continuously improve the quality of life.*

CORE VALUES

Core values are beliefs or convictions that guide and direct behavior and support purpose and vision. The City of DeKalb will utilize the following core values to guide employees' actions and shape the culture of city government.

- **Integrity** – The state of being honest, fair, and ethical in every situation, even if it's unpopular.
- **Professionalism** – Serving the City and its residents with the highest level of skill, judgment, and respect in each situation.
- **Excellence** – The expectation of engaging in outstanding levels of performance.
- **Service** – Providing City services at the highest level for the betterment of the community.
- **Collaboration** – Working together to benefit from the resources, knowledge, wisdom and understanding of others.

- **Accountability** – Taking responsibility for our decisions and actions while doing everything possible to achieve the desired results.

VISION STATEMENTS, GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS

Vision statements complement the mission by describing the future state of the community if the mission were fully realized. Vision statements typically have these characteristics:

- Understood and shared by members of the community
- Include a diverse variety of local perspectives
- Inspiring and uplifting to the audiences
- Easy to communicate (length and language)

Many topics or themes were identified by participants in the community conversations. These have been consolidated into the 30 themes presented in Appendix A, and have been further grouped into five proposed vision statements addressing sense of place, community vitality and a vibrant downtown, inclusiveness, accessibility, and quality, responsive services. The balance of this document presents each vision statement with a short commentary that highlights relevant themes and ideas raised in the community conversations or suggested by City staff.

Following each vision statement are the related goals, strategies, and actions. These four components, each reflecting a greater level of specificity, are defined as follows:

- **Vision statement:** the long-term desired change resulting from the City of DeKalb’s work.
- **Goal:** a broad aim toward which the City’s efforts are directed.
- **Strategy:** the approach taken to achieve a goal.
- **Action:** a step taken to deliver on a strategy.

For example, the components in the first vision statement below include:

A. Vision: “A Sense of Place. DeKalb is proudly known as a welcoming, safe, and vibrant city offering economic, educational, social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for everyone.”

1. Goal: “Develop a positive, asset-based identity and brand for DeKalb.”

a. Strategy: “Engage City government and community members in positive messaging.”

i. Action: “Implement a research-based branding initiative for DeKalb.”

Woven together, DeKalb’s vision statements read as follows:

DeKalb is proudly known as a welcoming, safe, and vibrant city offering economic, educational, social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for everyone. DeKalb’s neighborhoods, the downtown, and NIU’s campus are interconnected in a dynamic interplay of energy and creativity that retains and attracts

businesses with living-wage jobs. Diversity is valued and celebrated, with all people treated with dignity, equity, and respect. DeKalb's diverse and integrated transportation network provides a wide variety of local and regional transportation options in an efficient and user friendly manner. Through sound fiscal stewardship and collaboration with community stakeholders, City government identifies and coordinates the resources needed to sustain a vibrant DeKalb.

A. *Vision of a Sense of Place: DeKalb is proudly known as a welcoming, safe, and vibrant city offering economic, educational, social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for everyone.*

Commentary: Participants were proud of many aspects of DeKalb. These are summarized in Appendix B and include:

- Desirability as a community in which to live, work, and raise a family.
- Blend of a small town feel and a university presence; country living but near Chicago.
- Diverse, hard-working, friendly, and generous people.
- A shared community value of caring and extensive network of social services.
- Variety of cultural activities.
- Quality educational institutions.
- History and agricultural heritage.
- Varied faith community.
- Abundant green space, parks, and recreation.

Despite these many assets, participants also described the lack of a strong sense of identity as one of DeKalb's biggest challenges. Several factors contribute to this. One is the sense that DeKalb and NIU are separate communities, despite DeKalb's being described as a "university town." As one participant inquired, "Is DeKalb a university town or a community with a university in it?"

Another contributing factor is that DeKalb suffers from a perception problem related to public safety, the quality of its schools, and negative incidents occurring in the past few years that have garnered media attention. It was thought that if the data were closely examined, these perceptions would be disproved. Improving the image of DeKalb to both internal and external audiences was viewed as essential to the city's future.

Developing a city identity will help strengthen the sense of community in DeKalb. It will help bring together the city's diverse people, rich heritage, and distinctive neighborhoods, and help bridge the disconnect - physical, visual, and behavioral - between NIU and the balance of the city.

A strong city identity also will support effective placemaking (see www.placemaking.org). Placemaking leverages a community's assets and potential to create public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and wellbeing. DeKalb has many existing unique assets around which "place" may

be created, including its neighborhoods, NIU, the downtown, the newly expanded library, and the gateways to the east and west of the City, to name but a few. A sense of place helps foster a sense of community.

Providing a broad spectrum of enjoyable activities and entertaining events is central to attracting and retaining residents and drawing visitors to the city. This is particularly true for DeKalb's youth, who represent the future of the city. Important needs described by participants included creating gathering places that bring people together within neighborhoods and across the city and establishing destination events that keep students in DeKalb for the weekends and provide them with diversions over the summer.

DeKalb has much on which to build these activities and events, including historic places, countless artistic and cultural resources offered by NIU, a newly expanded library, a system of 44 parks, and underutilized features such as the Kishwaukee River. The bikeability and walkability of the city were described as good, but improvements in their safety and connectedness could elevate them to important assets. A single online communication hub for all activities occurring in the city, NIU, and the county should be a priority.

DeKalb has numerous natural features in addition to the Kishwaukee River that need to be protected and enjoyed. The city has many green spaces that provide beauty and respite, good and plentiful water, some of the richest agricultural land in the world, and a burgeoning local food movement. DeKalb also has organizations dedicated to good environmental practices, such as the DeKalb County Community Gardens, NIU's STEM and environmental programs, and the Citizen's Environmental Commission.

Participants connected environmental sustainability to a number of other opportunities, such as employment for youth in the summer to maintain parkways and greenways, encouraging green entrepreneurship, and using local food to build community and create a sense of place. Many other opportunities exist for the City to support the natural environment, including working with the County to conserve agricultural land and top soil, exploring alternative energy options, using more environmentally friendly approaches to maintaining green spaces, and promoting what we are currently doing.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions:

1. Develop a positive, asset-based identity and brand for DeKalb.
 - a. Engage City government and community members in positive messaging.
 - i. Implement a research-based branding initiative for DeKalb.
 - ii. Encourage community leaders to positively promote the City and speak at public, professional and civic meetings.
 - iii. In partnership with stakeholder groups, organize, encourage and participate in community events.
 - iv. Use the City's official channels for communication to share and disseminate positive stories.

- b. Facilitate ongoing community involvement.
 - i. Obtain regular community input from a broad spectrum of sources to shape operational priorities.
 - ii. Identify and connect consistently with underrepresented populations and facilitate their meaningful participation in governance.
 - c. Identify, research, and counteract misperceptions about DeKalb.
 - i. Compare DeKalb with other university communities on key characteristics (e.g. crime, academic achievement, and taxes) for benchmarking and continuous improvement purposes.
 - ii. Communicate City successes with community policing and related efforts to build positive relationships with residents.
 - iii. Aggressively promote campaigns to identify and respond to misperceptions, e.g., the current “DeKalb is safe” campaign.
2. Support place-making in DeKalb’s neighborhoods, downtown, at entrance gateways, and on campus.
- a. Promote initiatives that celebrate DeKalb’s heritage and legacy.
 - i. Encourage historic preservation initiatives.
 - ii. Celebrate DeKalb’s agricultural history and heritage.
 - iii. Establish a City history museum that recognizes various elements of community heritage, e.g., public safety.
 - b. Use art and culture to define and celebrate community.
 - i. Create an art district and promote art-related activities, i.e. murals and public art.
 - ii. Support DeKalb’s art scene, art galleries, and arts and crafts vendors.
 - iii. Promote events to encourage collaboration between the arts and business community.
 - iv. Collaborate with NIU and Kishwaukee College for cultural events throughout the community.
 - c. Create and support existing gathering places throughout the City.
 - i. Celebrate the opening of the expanded library as an important and centrally-located gathering place.
 - ii. Ensure that events and gathering places are accessible to all persons, including individuals with disabilities.
 - iii. Establish a central gathering park with open space in the downtown area.
 - iv. Implement innovative ways of supporting existing entertainment venues throughout the City and broadening their utilization and appeal.
 - v. Explore options for expansion and enhancement of local programs that utilize local gathering spaces, such as the Farmers’ Market.
 - vi. Seek opportunities for more outdoor restaurant seating.
 - d. Improve the safety and utilization of DeKalb’s recreational assets.
 - i. Establish a shared services agreement with other taxing districts to provide public safety services on multipurpose trails and in parks.

- ii. Promote events and programming in the parks and encourage their utilization as fun and safe places to gather.
 - iii. Establish a multimodal trail plan that connects the City's recreational and cultural assets.
 - e. Enhance entryway corridors into the City.
 - i. Develop aesthetic and image-enhancing projects and programs.
 - ii. Implement improvements to landscaping, signage, facades, lighting.
 - iii. Develop standards for appearance and informational signage used by the City.
- 3. Bridge NIU and the City in all aspects.
 - a. Identify opportunities to visually and programmatically link NIU and the City.
 - i. Promote and encourage further collaboration between NIU and DeKalb.
 - ii. Jointly develop technology program improvement opportunities with NIU to serve constituents of both entities.
 - iii. Explore the feasibility of a jointly developed research park.
 - iv. Bridge the downtown and NIU via the Lincoln Highway corridor with specific infrastructure enhancements to increase utilization of the downtown.
 - v. Seek field learning programs and other ways to continue the City's 50+ years of offering internships to students and explore opportunities for City personnel to extend their education through University programs.
 - b. Integrate students into the fabric of DeKalb.
 - i. Promote cross-community events such as NIU and DeKalb High School homecoming.
 - ii. Create places in the downtown and throughout the City where students are welcome to study
 - iii. Co-sponsor events on campus that draw community residents.
 - iv. Collaborate with NIU to explore development opportunities for the open space immediately south of the extension of Lucinda in NIU's west campus.
- 4. Conserve, protect and enhance DeKalb's natural resources.
 - a. Leverage local environmental expertise.
 - i. Refresh, review, and analyze the implementation of the City's Sustainability Plan.
 - ii. Communicate regularly with the public and partners about environmental sustainability through workshops and public events.
 - b. Use municipal resources to encourage sustainable practices.
 - i. Reinvigorate and biodiversify the City's urban forest.
 - ii. Encourage sustainable practices, including LEED certification, in building and site design.
 - iii. Highlight the City's existing commitment to environmental sustainability by taking a leadership role in infrastructure, facility improvements, and operational practices.
- 5. Develop and promote cultural, social, educational, and recreational activities that appeal to a wide range of interests and age groups.
 - a. Develop more dining and entertainment options in DeKalb.
 - i. Support activities targeted to bring youth downtown with their parents.
 - ii. Host more destination events in the City, such as parades, festivals, fairs and music events.

- iii. Pursue development of a sports complex or outdoor sports facility (batting cages, go karts, miniature golf, rock climbing, skating rink, etc.).
- b. Create destination events and gathering places that draw people from DeKalb and throughout the region.
 - i. Promote and expand innovative activities hosted in civic spaces.
 - ii. Support the establishment of a regional technology, art, and cultural children’s learning space.
 - iii. Partner with the business community to offer a greater diversity of events.
 - iv. Expand quality and destination lodging opportunities.
 - v. Leverage local talents and diversity to create engaging events.
 - vi. Provide comprehensive and timely communication about all events of interest to people who live, go to school, or work in DeKalb.

B. *Vision of Community Vitality and a Vibrant Downtown: DeKalb’s neighborhoods, the downtown, and NIU’s campus are interconnected in a dynamic interplay of energy and creativity that retains and attracts businesses with living-wage jobs.*

Commentary: Participants described community vitality as stemming from a strong business community, a thriving downtown, a rich array of cultural and recreational activities for people of all ages, and a flourishing natural environment.

A strong business sector provides needed goods and services to city residents, wages to its employees, and tax revenues to the City. The employment opportunities they offer are key to retaining college graduates and young families, as well as providing low income residents with pathways out of poverty. Participants described the need for an expanded employment base that includes more middle-skill and high tech opportunities and for connecting under-skilled workers with training programs.

Many suggestions focused on providing a friendlier and more attractive business climate, particularly for local businesses and start-ups. Attention to the mix of retailers in downtown DeKalb is needed as part of a downtown revitalization effort. Leveraging the innovation and entrepreneurship resources of NIU was identified by a number of participants as an opportunity that has yet to be realized.

People who wish to live in DeKalb and enjoy and contribute to its community vitality need appealing housing choices from which to choose. Attracting and retaining a mix of people and families require a range of housing options. Participants observed that there was considerable affordable housing in DeKalb, but much of it was not quality housing. A lack of housing for middle and upper-middle class individuals and families also was described.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions

- 1. Position downtown DeKalb for long-term success.
 - a. Develop resources to assist business start-up and growth.

- i. Support the work by interested stakeholders to develop a virtual business incubator.
 - ii. Facilitate communication between interested parties to discuss status, goals, and available resources for a physical business incubator.
 - iii. Establish a physical space to provide business co-working opportunities.
 - iv. Research the feasibility of a federal Small Business Administration “small business development center” (SBDC) in DeKalb.
 - b. Align downtown parking to community needs.
 - i. Evaluate existing and proposed parking supply and demand.
 - ii. Assess the recommendations of the comprehensive parking study, relevant trends, and historical data and incorporate findings into downtown plans.
 - iii. Evaluate potential supply-side solutions, including vertical structures and traditional parking options.
 - c. Improve the pedestrian and aesthetic environment of downtown.
 - i. Implement a Complete Streets policy in future City planning to improve safety, accessibility, and aesthetics.
 - ii. Extend the streetscape amenities to additional areas of the downtown.
 - iii. Explore partnerships with business owners to make additional downtown enhancements.
 - iv. Target specific areas to address existing deficiencies in parking, lighting, streetscape, signage, building facades and other urban design elements.
 - d. Evaluate emerging public space technology trends and construct the infrastructure necessary to support them.
 - i. Ensure the downtown has state-of-the-art transportation and telecommunications infrastructure (i.e. Wi-Fi, electric car charging stations).
 - ii. Explore technology solutions to enhance public safety and quality of life.
 - e. Support enterprises that enhance the vitality of the downtown
 - i. Support strategic investment in and development of the Egyptian Theatre to maximize its impact as a driving force of downtown commerce.
 - ii. Investigate the potential for a downtown area hotel and conference center to meet community and regional needs.
 - iii. Expand available downtown housing options to help create a nighttime population and support a thriving downtown.
2. Facilitate a business-friendly environment that supports existing merchants while attracting new investment to areas in need of commercial development.
- a. Promote and encourage local business collaboration.
 - i. Support initiatives developed by business owners, i.e. restaurant week, shop local, summer shopping hours, coordinated shopping promotions.
 - ii. Help connect students with local businesses to develop the students’ skills and add value to the business in such areas as marketing, web development, and social media.
 - b. Foster local entrepreneurship and business development and sustainability.

- i. Collaborate with providers of business education, mentoring, and support for existing business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.
 - ii. Encourage logical co-tenancies for existing and start-up businesses.
 - c. Develop retention and recruitment strategies to complement the existing commercial mix and leverage existing resources throughout the City.
 - i. Identify retail, commercial and service needs and foster development of businesses to meet those needs, i.e. human services, food desert areas.
 - ii. Explore the feasibility of attracting businesses identified as desirable by community members: e.g., a bookstore, new ethnic restaurants, entertainment venues, and boutique shops for downtown DeKalb.
 - iii. Work to attract national chain retailers with location criteria appropriate for DeKalb.
 - iv. Revitalize existing commercial corridors such as South Fourth Street and East Lincoln Highway.
 - v. Identify and develop DeKalb’s future retail corridor.
- 3. Create an attractive climate for commercial and industrial investment.
 - a. Ensure DeKalb’s business regulatory infrastructure reflects best practice.
 - i. Implement smart regulations to streamline local business start-up and encourage responsible business ownership and management.
 - ii. Review the structure and range of City fees on an annual basis to ensure reasonableness, fairness, and consistency over time.
 - iii. Coordinate existing and future business registration and licensing and permitting processes to improve emergency response, enhance City efficiency, and streamline business owner interactions with the City.
 - b. Upgrade DeKalb’s building stock and structural profile.
 - i. Market City-owned vacant parcels for uses that complement the mix and growing vitality of the community.
 - ii. Improve or remove substandard or unsafe structures throughout the City and ensure others are consistent with applicable regulations.
 - iii. Continue brownfields assessments and remediation programs.
 - c. Leverage DeKalb’s workforce, educational, and locational assets (highways, rail, broadband, available commercial and industrial space, educated and skilled workforce).
 - i. Collaborate with regional partners to meet economic development needs.
 - ii. Develop industry and jobs that foster a favorable standard of living throughout the community.
 - iii. Position, recognize, and utilize university, college, and vocational programs as a pipeline for a range of skilled employees, i.e. NIU and Kishwaukee College internship programs, Kishwaukee Educational Consortium, and DeKalb-Ogle Workforce Development Consortium.
 - iv. Maximize the utilization of existing broadband resources and explore expansion of future technology networks.

4. Enhance the value, appearance, and vitality of the City’s neighborhoods.
 - a. Improve neighborhood infrastructure.
 - i. Expand neighborhood planning and housing rehabilitation programs.
 - ii. Collaborate with the Park District to expand open space areas.
 - iii. Implement and fund alley, sidewalk, and tree-planting programs.
 - iv. Mitigate stormwater and flooding issues citywide.
 - b. Expand the range of housing options.
 - i. Develop off-campus housing options for young professionals and graduate students who want to stay in DeKalb.
 - ii. Institute a rooming house conversion pilot program to encourage reversion to single-family homes.
 - iii. Maintain and update the housing database to enable informed policy decisions addressing future developments and ordinances.
 - iv. Encourage the development of housing accessible to individuals with disabilities.
 - v. Encourage the development of senior housing to meet all levels of independence.
 - c. Engage homeowners, property owners, tenants, and others to help beautify and maintain DeKalb’s neighborhoods.
 - i. Encourage residents to partner with the City in planting flowers and trees.
 - ii. Target unsafe and problem properties for blight removal and remediation.
 - iii. Approach public and private sector partners to invest in neighborhood beautification.
 - iv. Identify available resources, how/when they are being deployed, and how residents/property owners can partner with the City, civic groups, and other community organizations to maintain and improve their neighborhoods.
 - d. Continue and expand the trusted and friendly presence of City Police, Fire, and other personnel in the neighborhoods.
 - i. Engage citizens in active partnerships to enhance public safety and quality of life.
 - ii. Encourage community-based public safety engagement strategies and practices.
 - iii. Supplement the physical presence of public safety personnel through the strategic deployment of new technologies.

C. Vision of Inclusiveness: Diversity is valued and celebrated, with all people treated with dignity, equity, and respect.

Commentary: Diversity was described in many ways: ethnic, racial, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, disability and sexual orientation. Prejudicial attitudes are a problem encountered by students and residents who have experienced discriminatory behavior first-hand. The social and economic isolation of residents in University Village and other low-income neighborhoods was identified as another form of discrimination.

This gap between rhetoric and behavior led some participants to differentiate between diversity and inclusion. One individual observed “There’s an appreciation for cultural diversity, but not a lot of embracing.” Others described prejudice by long-term residents and polar views among segments of the community, some of which was linked to income disparity. These opposing attitudes are a major challenge to forging a single, strong DeKalb identity.

Participants called for efforts to increase the participation of diverse groups in the community. Encouraging local business to welcome and cater to different groups, continuing and expanding DeKalb’s “Beloved Community” dinners, pairing different cultural events, and offering cultural competency training were among the suggestions for making DeKalb a more inclusive city.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions:

1. Support and model diversity and inclusiveness in all City government activities.
 - a. Ensure all City policies, practices, and programs are inclusive.
 - i. Review and adjust City policies, practices, and programs to serve this core vision.
 - ii. Review recruitment practices to ensure the City is reaching all demographic groups.
 - iii. Provide City information in Spanish and other languages as needed to serve the community.
 - iv. Encourage people who live, work, and learn in DeKalb to become engaged in local activities (governance, volunteerism, lifelong learning, etc.).
 - b. Equip City employees with the knowledge and skills to serve a diverse population.
 - i. Institute cultural competency training for all City employees.
 - ii. Participate in multi-cultural events such as Beloved Community dinners, local food celebrations, parades, etc.
2. Promote inclusiveness throughout the community.
 - a. Support activities and events that respect DeKalb’s diverse population and cultures.
 - i. Promote community conversations around diversity and inclusion.
 - ii. Coordinate cultural competency training with other public sector agencies and the nonprofit and private sectors.
 - iii. Partner with local business to support inclusive activities.
 - iv. Showcase DeKalb’s neighborhoods and establishments that celebrate diversity.
 - v. Identify and mentor a diverse cadre of community-based leadership.
 - b. Coordinate with other providers of essential support services.
 - i. Work with DeKalb’s human service agencies to identify appropriate support roles for the City.
 - ii. Convene a discussion among healthcare providers regarding the provision of mental health services and resources in DeKalb.
 - iii. Help to distribute information that will orient and assist people from other countries and cultures who live or work in or visit DeKalb.

D. Vision of Accessibility: DeKalb’s diverse and integrated transportation network provides a wide variety of local and regional transportation options in an efficient and user friendly manner.

Commentary: Three aspects of accessibility were described by participants: public transportation within DeKalb, the city’s bikeability and walkability, and travel from DeKalb to Chicago and neighboring communities. The transportation network includes DeKalb Taylor Municipal Airport.

Public transportation emerged as an important issue that the City may be best positioned to address. While public transportation within DeKalb is offered through NIU’s Huskie Bus and TransVAC, it can take a long time to travel across the city and hours of service are limited. TransVAC was described as “stretched thin” and taxi service in DeKalb as “sparse”.

Transportation to Chicago, O’Hare Airport, and neighboring communities from DeKalb is challenging and is likely to require a regional solution. Without a car, getting to and from the Elburn Metra station can be difficult. There are no affordable and timely public transportation options for traveling between O’Hare Airport and DeKalb, an issue of particular concern for international students. Travel to neighboring communities within the region is also challenging.

Access to important services, such as grocery stores and health care, provided by the private sector also is key to quality of life. Identifying and assisting in the development of essential and diverse retail establishments and other services typically provided by the private sector are needed to help connect residents throughout DeKalb and the NIU community with necessary resources.

The bikeability of DeKalb was described by many as good but needing improvements. These included increasing safety for children, connecting the various segments of bike trail (although only if cost-effective), and creating dedicated bike lanes. Clogged drains were described as a hazard as they force bicyclists into traffic. The walkability of DeKalb also was described as good except in certain areas. Sycamore Road has inadequate sidewalks and no buffer from high speed traffic, and certain streets are perceived to be unsafe at night. Additional lighting was recommended.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions:

1. Expand the availability of safe, affordable, accessible, and timely transportation options within DeKalb.
 - a. Connect and enhance the various transportation modes in DeKalb for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists.
 - i. Encourage collaboration between local transportation systems to evaluate routes and hours of service.
 - ii. Bring alternative transportation services, such as Uber, to DeKalb.
 - iii. Explore ways to enhance the City’s role with Voluntary Action Center governance.

- iv. Make DeKalb safer for non-vehicular transportation.
 - v. Explore the possibility of a bicycle-friendly community distinction.
 - b. Enhance existing transportation planning resources.
 - i. Embrace the “Complete Streets” philosophy in future transportation and planning initiatives, i.e. Long-Range Transportation Plan.
 - ii. Identify opportunities to enhance access to transportation for individuals with disabilities.
 - iii. Implement effective access management strategies along corridors.
 - iv. Measure truck traffic volume and patterns and respond accordingly.
 - c. Partner with federal, local and state agencies to improve the connectivity of the transportation network throughout the region.
 - i. Support infrastructure enhancements for Voluntary Action Center operations, including the proposed transportation facility.
 - d. Ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
 - i. Conduct a study to assess ADA compliance in regard to public spaces and infrastructure.
 - ii. Collaborate with current and future businesses to encourage comprehensive adoption of ADA.
 - iii. Analyze the sidewalk and path network throughout the city to identify opportunities for optimization and integration of Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accessibility improvements.
- 2. Strengthen the transportation connections between DeKalb and regional destinations, including Chicago and Elburn.
 - a. Consider the feasibility of commuter passenger rail service.
 - i. Partner with other agencies to explore the regional benefits of Metra in DeKalb.
 - ii. Preserve space for future train station infrastructure and facilities.
 - b. Explore increased frequency of bus service between DeKalb and Elburn.
 - i. Explore options for future park-and-ride infrastructure and facilities.
 - ii. Analyze collaborative options for shared provision of transportation.
 - c. Establish cost-effective, regular transportation options between DeKalb and Chicago.
 - i. Analyze regular transportation options to area airports and downtown Chicago.
- 3. Position DeKalb Taylor Municipal Airport to serve as a regional hub for air travel and commerce.
 - a. Publicize the airport’s benefits to the City and region.
 - i. Establish Part 139 or other enhanced status for the airport to enable commercial passenger transportation flights.
 - ii. Partner with Kishwaukee College to leverage pilot licensing opportunities.
 - b. Implement a marketing/business plan for the airport.
 - i. Promote use of the hangars and airport by general aviation pilots.
 - ii. Partner with local businesses to expand commercial and freight service to and from the airport.
 - c. Develop and fund necessary infrastructure improvements at the airport.
 - i. Develop attractive visitor amenities for recreational and commercial pilots.

- ii. Expand available fiber optic network to meet future demand for commercial airport users.
- iii. Leverage state and federal funds to continue expansion of airport hangars and other infrastructure.
- iv. Maintain and expand state-of-the-art navigation systems at the airport.

E. *Vision of Quality, Responsive Services:* Through sound fiscal stewardship and collaboration with community stakeholders, City government identifies and coordinates the resources needed to sustain a vibrant DeKalb.

Commentary: A range of services is required to address the varied needs of residents, business people, students, and visitors. These include:

- basic health, life, and safety services provided directly by the City, such as public safety and public works, as well as essential services that the City helps plan and coordinate;
- quality professional services through a combination of appropriate staffing, equipment, technology, facilities, partnerships, outsourcing, and shared services;
- social services provided by the City and non-profit organizations; and
- services provided by the private sector, such as healthcare and grocery stores.

Improvement opportunities to strengthen services in each of these areas were identified by participants.

With respect to city services, while it was thought that DeKalb was overall a safe and well-maintained community, pockets of the city were perceived as unsafe. Similarly, DeKalb does well overall in cleanliness and beautification, but more is required to improve the “curb appeal” in certain neighborhoods. DeKalb’s infrastructure - roads, sewers, sidewalks, the electrical grid, and water mains - is in need of extensive repair.

Participants recognized that DeKalb’s needs exceed available funding and are concerned that the City’s needs are growing while the resources are shrinking. Declining student enrollments at NIU were linked to a likely decrease in sales tax revenue, and participants were worried that property taxes may increase further. In light of this challenging fiscal environment, supporting sustainable operations is paramount.

The challenging environment also emphasizes the need for a strong strategic planning framework. The need for City government to operate with the highest levels of transparency and accountability was described, as was the need for improved customer service in the public interactions of City employees.

Social services are key to the quality of life for many DeKalb residents. Although DeKalb has an extensive nonprofit network offering these services, funding is a perennial issue and tightened eligibility requirements for federal and state programs are becoming an added barrier. City government may be able to help connect residents with needed services through its planning and public information resources.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions:

1. Balance cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and quality in delivering City services.
 - a. Examine alternative service delivery systems to effectively utilize existing resources.
 - i. Create an alternative revenue source with proceeds dedicated to a capital equipment and fleet replacement plan.
 - ii. Reduce reliance on Motor Fuel Tax funds to pay for operational activities such as the purchase of deicing materials, street lighting, and energy.
 - iii. Identify a list of unmet needs and their costs and collaborate with potential public and private sector sponsors to meet those needs.
 - iv. Explore more efficient and effective long-term recycling options.
 - b. Enhance the safety of the community.
 - i. Establish and construct a permanent Emergency Operations Center.
 - ii. Evaluate staffing levels and determine action for meeting community needs.
 - iii. Determine optimal location for and construct additional Fire Station facilities.
 - iv. Address additional facility and infrastructure needs of the Police Department, i.e. firearms training range, consolidated and contractual dispatching.
 - v. Replace aging and unsafe fleet and equipment to mitigate liability, enhance resident safety, and reduce downtime.
 - vi. Establish the Incident Management Team as the inter-operational platform for agency information sharing.
 - vii. Explore public safety interoperability options.
 - viii. Implement up-to-date safety regulations, e.g., fire sprinklers in sorority and fraternity houses.
 - c. Establish DeKalb as a “smart city” to leverage technology, enhance quality and performance of City services, reduce costs and resource consumption, and engage the community.
 - i. Hire appropriate Information Technology staff to lead, evaluate, implement, and maintain an assessment of the City’s technology to enhance efficiency of City services.
 - ii. Acquire and maintain a City-wide enterprise software system that establishes the City as a leader in the implementation of technology in governance.
 - iii. Acquire and maintain a contemporary hardware infrastructure component that meets growing technological, data storage, and communication needs and replace a nearly 30-year-old Fire Department radio communication system.
 - iv. Develop a responsible approach to implementing a Police body camera system that addresses policy, technology, and storage implications.
 - v. Meet the City’s legal obligations and needs by implementing an electronic document management and storage system.
 - vi. Leverage DeKalb’s existing broadband assets to improve communication and interoperability.
 - vii. Deploy mobile technology to facilitate optimum efficient fieldwork.
 - d. Align City-owned buildings and facilities with the City’s core mission.

- i. Inventory existing City properties and identify those that support the City’s mission.
 - ii. Provide the community with a City Hall facility that will address public access, technological, security, safety, shelter and environmental needs in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other statutory regulations.
 - iii. Sell or transfer underutilized properties and those that fall outside the City’s core service areas to parties that can optimize their use.
 - iv. Renovate, reconstruct, or replace remaining facilities to meet current and future needs.
2. Foster a results-driven culture that captures and utilizes data and best practices to serve short- and long-term community needs.
 - a. Measure, analyze, and improve performance.
 - i. Evaluate current service delivery programs to identify underserved community needs.
 - ii. Align City operations and individual performance expectations to strategic goals.
 - iii. Develop and implement methodologies to measure community satisfaction and allocate resources to improve quality of life.
 - iv. Report to the community annually on the progress of the strategic plan.
 - b. Engage in thoughtful planning to address long-term City needs.
 - i. Develop strategies that effectively address long-term land use within the City.
 - ii. Update and expand the Comprehensive Plan to meaningfully address development and housing, transportation, environment, stormwater, and other elements of a thriving and productive community.
 - iii. Develop a City-wide, long-term capital improvement plan to address the range of facility, utility, technology, fleet, and equipment needs in DeKalb that is funded through the annual budget process.
3. Maintain the highest possible standards of fiscal stewardship.
 - a. Provide transparent and accessible information about the City’s financial health.
 - i. Provide budget documentation that clearly delineates the demand for services, the available resources, and allocation of resources.
 - ii. Demonstrate the direct correlation between resource allocation and service delivery.
 - iii. Communicate plans for funding infrastructure improvements to the community.
 - b. Improve the City’s fiscal health.
 - i. Take steps to preserve and improve the City’s strong Aa2 bond rating.
 - ii. Monitor economic trends and set fiscal improvement goals for the City based on these trends.
 - iii. Fund the long-term liability of post-retirement health care and pensions with sustainable revenue sources.
 - iv. Leverage resources to obtain federal and state grant funding to maximize City dollars for items such as airport capital projects.
 - v. Identify cost-sharing and cost-reduction opportunities through intergovernmental cooperation.
 - vi. Identify a dedicated revenue stream for infrastructure, fleet and other capital improvements.

- c. Identify strategies for the utilization and phase-out of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts.
 - i. Implement alternative funding sources to replace reliance on Tax Increment Finance districts.
 - ii. Reassess TIF priorities and optimize use of this revenue for the remaining years of the districts.
 - iii. Realize the benefit of Tax Increment Financing by capturing enhanced Equalized Assessed Value at the conclusion of these districts through an increased property tax levy.
- 4. Achieve the highest possible standards of public administration through sound human resource practices.
 - a. Evaluate and implement modern human resources practices to attract, retain, and mentor a talented and engaged workforce.
 - i. Hire a Human Resources Director to support the City's staff and enable operating departments to focus on the delivery of core services.
 - ii. Overhaul the City's existing human resources policies and procedures (i.e., personnel manual, benefits handbook, performance management system, comprehensive succession planning, and effective training programs) to lead and manage City employees in a productive and safe work environment.
 - iii. Align performance expectations to the City's core values.
 - iv. Maintain competitive compensation plans based on comparable market data.
 - v. Ensure compliance with federal and state laws.
 - vi. Conduct regular customer service training for all employees.
- 5. Communicate relevant and timely information to the community in regard to quality of life concerns, public safety issues, and the City's response to them.
 - a. Regularly inform the public about topics of interest identified by the community.
 - i. Communicate updates on current infrastructure projects to residents in a timely manner.
 - ii. Inform the public how Tax Increment Financing, Special Service Areas, and other municipal finance tools can be used to fund infrastructure improvements.
 - iii. Analyze the impact of new development and redevelopment in regards to potential revenue streams as well as impact on the delivery of public services.
 - iv. Demonstrate how deterioration and blight threaten quality of life and public safety in order to encourage reinvestment into the community.
 - b. Establish effective two-way public communication.
 - i. Determine the community's preferred forms of communication from the City and utilize those media effectively to engage and inform the community.
 - ii. Educate the public on the capabilities and resources available through the City's communication outlets and continue to update and support utilization, i.e. City website, social media.

NEXT STEPS

After City Council has reviewed, modified as necessary, and adopted the final strategic plan, this document will guide the City's investments, program and policy priorities, and performance reporting for the foreseeable future. Although considerable effort was made to engage people to live, work, or attend school in DeKalb, the city is experiencing important changes in its population, economy, built environment, and social supports, all of which will require regular updates to ensure the strategic plan remains fresh and relevant.

Appendix A

Themes Suggested by Participants in the Community Conversations

1. Safety and security
2. Good schools
3. Healthcare
4. Diversity/inclusion
5. Economic opportunities/business friendly
6. Government accessibility and transparency
7. Environmental protection
8. Affordability
9. Ease of getting around/public transportation/accessibility
10. Religious foundation
11. Culture and recreation/communication about events
12. Neighborliness/small town feeling/friendly people
13. Gathering places and events
14. Positive energy/pride
15. Clean/well-maintained/curb appeal
16. Shopping
17. Restaurants
18. Parks
19. Historic buildings/heritage/unique features
20. Public services/human services
21. Sense of community/community involvement/local social activism
22. Philanthropy/volunteering
23. Integration of town and university/presence of higher education
24. Vision/thoughtful planning
25. Viable financial base
26. Attractive to all ages
27. Vibrant downtown
28. Proximity to large city
29. Amenities
30. Airport

Appendix B

Assets Identified by Community Conversation Participants

1. It's a desirable community in which to live, work, and raise a family. The best of both worlds: small town feel but a university presence, country living but near Chicago
2. The people: diverse, hard-working, friendly, generous, educated; they will rally behind the right cause
3. Cultural activities: Egyptian, Stage Coach Players, Elwood House, new library
4. Proximity to Chicago, Rockford, Aurora
5. Airport
6. Quality education:
 - NIU (music and accounting programs, band, Davis Hall Observatory, MLK Commons)
 - New high school (music and athletic programs)
 - Kishwaukee College's growth and expansion
7. History: farming heritage, barbed wire, the underground railroad, architecture, historic neighborhoods
8. A caring community:
 - a. Programs that engage residents like Beloved Community, Camp Power, the Penguin Project, Community Gardens, Hope Haven
 - b. Strong human service network
 - c. Local philanthropy – the DeKalb County Community Foundation
 - d. Volunteer opportunities (e.g. VAC)
9. Faith community and network
10. Environment: Green space and recreation (44 parks for 44,000 people), the bike trail system, the Citizen's Environmental Commission, water quality and availability, recycling program
11. Agriculture: DeKalb Hybrid Seed Corn, the rich soil, Farmer's Market
12. Fiber optics opportunities
13. Cindy Crawford's hometown
14. The east lagoon
15. Services: healthcare, City services (Police, Fire, Public Works, new emergency alert system)