



Welcome to Our Town 56345

a next generation community

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SHAPING OUR FUTURE

*Why do people love where they live, and why does it matter?
What draws people to 56345 and keeps them here?*

Our zip code 56345 community loves its Mississippi River and beautiful natural environment, parks, trails and outdoors opportunities. Residents are proud of Little Falls' central location as a crossroads, the depth of its heritage and history, and its small-town feel. The local community celebrates its creativity, culture and arts opportunities. These assets, defining pride of place, are common ground to guide us along our development path ahead over the coming decade.

These were the conclusions of the Our Town 56345 community listening process conducted fall-winter 2019-2020 to explore what's important to our shared future. This extensive assessment process was based on the belief that when residents are informed, connected to their community, and feel represented in city deliberations they are empowered to influence decisions that impact their lives. "Of, for and by the people," is a phrase that describes this initiative.

In addition to assets and pride of place, the process explored the question "What should guide our decision making?" Every community has underlying principles that either implicitly or explicitly shape decision making. Guiding principles set boundaries, enabling a community to center on the strategic direction it has set. These principles become a "compass north" to keep the community focused on its vision and strategic priorities. Through the Our Town 56345 listening process six guiding principles were consistently named, mutually held views, to shape civic decision making:

1. ***We value our children***, being a community that is a good place to raise a family.
2. ***We value and respect our environment***, maintaining our natural resources.
3. ***We value economic opportunities***, creating paths to foster economic growth.
4. ***We value being a welcoming, hospitable community***, where everyone has a sense of belonging.
5. ***We value our creative assets—creativity, culture and the art*** as vital to establishing a commitment to place.
6. ***We value health and wellness***, further strengthening Little Falls as a health community.

The result of the community listening process is this strategic framework, outlining priorities around which there is broadly held common ground: a roadmap into our collective future. This summary document serves as a brief snapshot into the conclusions. We hope you will join us, investing your support, your time, your resources toward fulfilling the hopes and dreams articulated in this plan. We're always stronger, better, together. Please join us.

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

There was an exceptionally high level of participation in the community listening process. Scores of ideas were advanced by community members, now clustered around essential themes around which there was common ground. These are offered here as a structure guiding the development of future projects while honoring key priorities broadly held by the community. This is intended as offering guide for the path ahead. We refer the reader to the full plan for greater detail within each strategic priority. The full document will be available through the City, and on the Our Town 56345 Facebook page.



SUPPORT THE NEXT GENERATION. Be intentional as a community in developing projects and programs that support our next generation: initiatives that nurture our children and youth. The community emphasized the importance of strong schools, facilities that provide healthy choices for youth, and supports key to families with young children.



PROTECT OUR NATURAL RESOURCES. Strive to preserve and protect our natural resources, especially our most important resource, the Mississippi River. Residents are interested in becoming known as a River City with a waterfront destination, as well as work with County, DNR, and Camp Ripley in advancing plans to protect all regional natural resources and trails.



PRACTICE HOSPITALITY and WELCOME. Work assertively to overcome divisions in the community, becoming known as a welcoming, hospitable, inclusive community where everyone has a sense of belonging. Practice hospitality and welcome. The community is hungry for paths to strengthening bonds and build bridges, to overcome the barriers and silos that divide.



BUILD ON OUR CREATIVE ASSETS. Use creativity, culture and the arts as important assets vital in the appeal for establishing a commitment to place. Creativity, cultural expression, and arts were emphasized as important positive and nonthreatening vehicles through which the community can find and celebrate common ground, optimism and excitement for a shared future.



BOLSTER HEALTH AND WELLNESS. Further strengthen Little Falls as a healthy community, through rural community wellness and vitality initiatives. This recommendation included a desire to further support to development of local foods, local agriculture, and the farmers' market and the importance of bikes and trails, as well as other recreational amenities.



REINFORCE THE LOCAL ECONOMY. Develop a more vibrant downtown and greater support to locally owned businesses. Foster more economic opportunities. Attend to the needs of entrepreneurs and small businesses. Develop downtown as a riverfront gateway for bikes and trails tourism. Develop light manufacturing, trucking, and other trades that offer a livable wage to local residents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the residents of 56345

The response rate and thoughtful desire to be a part of making a difference was impressive.

Thank you to the
Our Town 56345 Steering Committee

A Steering Committee, comprised of 26 leaders carefully chosen to be broadly representative of all sectors of the community was charged with advising and shaping the process. This dedicated team has met in 3 retreats, considering all aspects of this process, and as well have been instrumental in the community interview and focus group process gathering the many diverse perspectives of the community and ensuring that the product reflects the overall voice of the community. For a complete list, we refer you to the full plan.



Thank you to our generous funders whose generous funding made this important community effort possible.