



M E M O

**County
Administrator**

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TO: County Commissioners
FROM: Robert W. Wilson
DATE: March 31, 2022
SUBJECT: Strategic Plan Review

At the meeting on March 21st there was a discussion about updating the County's 3-year Strategic Plan that was adopted in 2019. I have shared thoughts with the Commission and Department Heads about where we, as a County have done well, and areas where I think we can improve.

Department Heads discussed this topic at our meeting on March 30th and provided helpful feedback. There was a discussion of potentially adding metrics into the updated plan so that in the future it will be easier to quantify progress made against stated goals. That is also an opportunity when I had an initial discussion with the consultant who assisted in the development of the last plan.

There was also discussion that some departments have had challenges implementing portions of their plans because of the need to focus on continuing business operations during the pandemic. From a Department Head perspective, we are well positioned for a plan update.

I look forward to receiving any Commission feedback about the existing plan and expectations for the updated plan at the meeting on April 4th.

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STRATEGIC PLAN

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LETTER FROM THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

July 8, 2019

Dear Cass County,

This Strategic Plan is the product of a tremendous amount of work by many Cass County employees and elected officials. Dozens of you provided detailed survey responses and fully engaged in the process. We asked tough questions, considered alternative views, and in some cases received blunt feedback. That effort allowed us to organize broad ideas and concepts into actionable focus areas and goals.

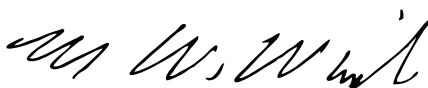
There have been questions – fair questions – about why all employees didn't receive the survey or participate in the planning meetings. Decisions about the plan's design were made collaboratively by our consultant, Jason Matthews and myself. In order to review all survey feedback thoughtfully, maximize the effectiveness of the meetings and finish the plan in a reasonable time, we had to make choices.

I am especially appreciative of the employees who didn't receive surveys or participate in meetings, but took it upon themselves to respond to the all-county email requesting input in this process. That feedback was received and incorporated into the development of the strategic plan.

Through this process we received great feedback about what Cass County does well and where we can improve. With that feedback we developed a plan to build on successes and address areas that need improvement through a series of goals. You have my commitment that the County Commission and I are committed to holding ourselves accountable to the goals of the strategic plan.

Our people are Cass County Government's greatest resource. I appreciate the hard work that went into this plan and I'm inspired every day by the exceptional public services we provide to our community every day.

Thank you,



Robert W. Wilson

Cass County Administrator

COUNTY OFFICIALS



CASS COUNTY COMMISSION - 2019

Mary Scherling – Commission Chair

Vern Bennett

Duane Breitling

Chad M. Peterson

Rick Steen

CASS COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Robert Wilson

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT TEAM

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Vern Bennett

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Cindy Stoick

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Stan Wolf



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INTRODUCTION

Cass County has long been the largest county in North Dakota. It has also consistently been the fastest growing county in the state and throughout the region. Its strategic location supports a richly diversified economy that positions Cass County as a regional and national hub. It also makes it a population magnet attracting residents from throughout the region and country. And as home to the region's largest research university and thriving technology and manufacturing sectors, Cass County is also attracting residents from around the world.

The county has experienced rapid growth over the last 30 years, growing from approximately 88,000 residents in 1980 to 180,000 in 2019. The 2010 census reported its population to be 90 percent urban and the county is home to the majority of the 245,000 residents in the Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo metro area, which also consists of Clay County, Minnesota. Population forecasts project a county population of 250,000 by 2045.

These factors present a set of challenges and opportunities unique to Cass County. Chief among these are issues related to population growth such as public safety, infrastructure, external pressures related to a tight labor market, and changing demographics. To effectively address these and other issues, Cass County government has developed this three-year Strategic Plan focused on four strategic priorities:

- 1 County Government Workforce:** Identifying challenges and implementing approaches to meet the demands of a tight labor market with attention to recruitment and retention.
- 2 Operational Excellence:** Adopting best practices and implementing approaches to ensure the effective delivery of county services and the efficient and fiscally responsible operation of government.
- 3 Outreach & Engagement:** Reaching out to county residents to highlight the work of county government, emphasize its impact, gather vital constituent/customer feedback, partner with external stakeholders, and bridge divides among the county's urban and rural populations.
- 4 Embracing Growth:** Taking a proactive rather than reactive posture to ensure county government is prepared to address impacts caused by changing demographic and economic forces, including the use of long-term planning to ensure government preparedness.

The majority of this plan looks at the internal operations of county government. This is by design. The plan's focus is on capitalizing on opportunities and maximizing efficiencies to ensure county government is operating in an optimal fashion to effectively serve the public and meet the needs of a vibrant and thriving county.



DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The Cass County Commission, upon the recommendation of the County Administrator, determined at the end of 2018 to develop a three-year Strategic Plan.

The County hired JM Strategies LLC in January 2019 to facilitate and consult on the development of a strategic plan. The Consultant and County Administrator developed a project roadmap, which consisted of three phases:

Quantitative Research, Planning Sessions, and Plan Development.

• **Phase 1: Quantitative Research** February through March 2019

A benchmark survey was developed and administered to 70 county officials and employees representing each department of county government. Participants were selected through a process developed by the County Administrator and department/agency heads. The objective was to cast as wide a net as possible to gather information from a representative sample of the county government's workforce.

The survey focused on identification of Cass County government's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, and other relevant issues. The purpose of the survey was to glean information, which would serve as the foundation for the planning process moving forward.

Upon the conclusion of the survey, the Consultant and County Administrator reviewed the data and qualitative research and identified five areas of strategic focus:

- **Budget & Facilities:** Conduct a general overview of the county's finances and its needs related to county government's facilities and physical plant.
- **Culture:** Examine issues related to greater collaboration and improving communications among county departments with the goal of improving internal operations and maximizing efficiencies.
- **Technology:** Due to the ever-changing nature of technology and its centrality to county government's work, review Cass County's IT infrastructure and determine its needs.
- **Workforce:** Review county government's ongoing workforce challenges, including developing new approaches to deal with the Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo area's tight labor market along with generational changes and new expectations within the workplace.
- **Serving the Public:** Examine county government's core mission to serve the residents of Cass County and review its delivery of services to its constituents.

These five strategic areas formed the framework for the second phase of the strategic planning process.

• Phase 2: Planning Sessions Mid-May through Early June 2019

Two planning sessions were held with county elected officials, department leaders, and frontline employees.

The first session was a large group session held on May 16, which was comprised of more than 50 participants consisting of the five county commissioners, the 14 department heads, and employees representing each department within county government. Individuals were organized into five (5) working groups in order to foster greater internal and cross-departmental collaboration.

The intent of this first session was to identify goals, objectives, and ideas on the areas in four strategic areas of focus: Culture, Technology, Workforce, and Serving the Public. The County Administrator presented a general overview on the Budget and Facilities.

A second, final session was held on June 5 which involved all five county commissioners, the 14 department heads, and five employees who participated in the May 16 session as chosen by their peers. This session formally identified and prioritized goals and objectives. Workgroups were established to formally identify and prioritize goals as well as finalize a new mission statement and core values. Each workgroup met independently later in June to identify objectives and discuss tactics and approaches to implementing the Strategic Plan.

• Phase 3: Drafting the Plan Mid-June through July 2019

Upon receipt of the recommendations from the workgroups, the Consultant drafted and submitted a preliminary plan for consideration and revision by the County Commission. Modifications requested by the commissioners were added to a final draft, which was submitted for final review and approval.

The Cass County Commission approved the 2019-'22 Strategic Plan on August 5, 2019.

IMPLEMENTING THIS PLAN

For the Strategic Plan to be effective, Cass County must also provide a process to assess plan implementation.

When the County Commission considers adopting the Strategic Plan the Board will be asked to also consider appointing an Accountability Team. The Accountability Team will include one Commissioner, one Department Head, the County Administrator and the employee representatives selected at the first planning session who participated in the second, smaller planning meeting.

The Accountability Team will meet quarterly and review progress made on Strategic Planning goals. A discussion will also be scheduled once a quarter at Department Head meetings to review progress on Strategic Planning goals. The Accountability Team and Department Heads will both receive feedback from the other group's discussions. Twice a year representatives of both groups will brief the County Commission on their findings.

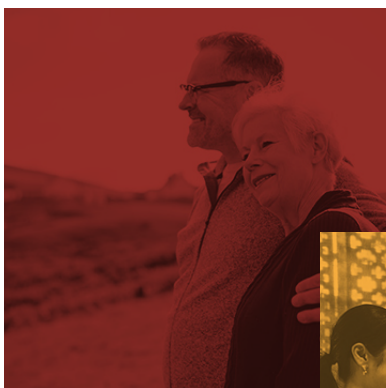
OUR MISSION & CORE VALUES

Mission:

Cass County Government is dedicated to providing quality public service in a respectful, professional, efficient, and fiscally responsible manner.

Core Values: C.A.S.S.

- **Commitment:** To honor our commitments to those we serve and each other.
- **Accountability:** To work in a responsible and transparent manner.
- **Service:** To put service to the public first.
- **Shared Purpose:** To work collaboratively to fulfill our mission and meet our organizational goals.





STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

COUNTY WORKFORCE

Guiding Principles:

Cass County Government is dedicated to...

- Providing a highly-skilled workforce to meet the needs of our growing county;
- To implementing approaches that recruit and retain the best employees; and
- To fostering a culture that supports continual professional improvement.

Strategic Goals

1.1: Develop and attract a highly skilled Cass County Government workforce able to meet the needs of our residents.

1.2: Create an environment where county government can sustain a well-trained, engaged, and productive workforce.

Strategic Goal 1.1: Develop and attract a highly skilled Cass County Government workforce able to meet the needs of our residents.

Strategic Objectives and Action Steps:

1.1.A: Pursue and apply innovative approaches to recruit applicants for county positions.

- County departments should have a presence at regional job fairs
- Larger link on homepage of website for job postings
- County website should link to outside agency websites where applicable
- Reach out to a larger market via larger newspaper/magazine ads at least twice a year to promote what Cass County has to offer
- Human Resources will conduct a six-month review with new employees to gather input regarding areas for growth and understanding of benefits

1.1.B: Ensure equipment and technology are in place so employees can effectively deliver high quality services.

- Explore the feasibility of assigning IT personnel to new employees during their first month to assist with equipment

1.1.C: Deepen existing relationships with regional universities and elected officials to create a potential pipeline for future county employees.

- County government should have a presence at college/university job fairs
- Offer internship, volunteer, and job shadowing opportunities
- Communicate frequently with college/university faculty to bridge gaps in the county workplace
- Interact with college/university classes throughout the region



Strategic Goal 1.2: Create an environment where county government can sustain a well-trained, engaged, and productive workforce.

Strategic Objectives and Action Steps:

1.2.A: Develop a retention strategy to address causes of potential turnover and addresses external and internal factors affecting the county workforce.

- Review turnover rates and exit interviews
- Develop and implement an employee wellness strategy
- Explore the feasibility and establish a framework for conducting workload assessments
- Examine the feasibility of flexible work schedules
- Conduct a comprehensive review of county government's benefits package with an eye towards identifying opportunities to improve county government's competitive position

1.2.B: Ensure employees are provided opportunities for training and professional development so employees can achieve higher quality public service.

- Develop and implement a strategy and protocol for employee trainings
- Provide opportunities for ALL employees to attend training
- Offer networking opportunities within county government

1.2.C: Recognize employees for their dedication and superior work they do on behalf of Cass County's residents.

- Create opportunities for personal acknowledgement
- Acknowledge long-term employment
- Conduct a customer satisfaction survey via the county website
- Conduct annual all-employee survey





STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Guiding Principles:

Cass County Government believes an informed workforce is essential to the efficient delivery of services.

Therefore, we are dedicated to...

- Encouraging greater collaboration and coordination of resources among county departments;
- Streamlining and making the budgeting process more efficient; and
- Promoting long-term planning throughout county government

Strategic Goals:

2.1: Pursue and implement best practices and approaches for the fiscally responsible, effective, and transparent administration of Cass County government

2.2: Streamline internal communications

Strategic Goal 2.1: Pursue and implement best practices and approaches for the fiscally responsible, effective, and transparent administration of Cass County government.

Strategic Objectives and Action Steps:

2.1.A: Evaluate service areas of Cass County for efficiency gains.

- Departments will review their operations to identify efficiencies in each department and provide reports within six months on the initiation of the review

2.1.B: Address county government's physical plant and facilities needs through long-term planning.

- Develop a five-year annually updated master facilities plan
- Develop a formalized process for identifying and approving small internal projects

2.1.C: Apply widely accepted and useful best practices to improve the budgeting process.

- Engage the Finance Committee from start to finish throughout the budgeting process
- Place tax estimates online for the public to view and download
- Place all tax statements in PDF and make available for download through the county government's website
- Generate a receipt when payment is made online

Strategic Goal 2.2: Streamline internal communications.

Strategic Objectives and Action Steps:

2.2.A: Improve internal communication, collaboration, and coordination.

- Develop and implement an internal communications plan to ensure the orderly distribution of information and foster greater cross-departmental collaboration.
- Administration, with approval from the Commissioners, will develop a plan to hire and utilize a Communications Coordinator.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Guiding Principles:

Cass County Government is dedicated to...

- Promoting greater awareness of the services we provide and the positive impacts we make;
- Deepening the connections with those we serve; and
- Bridging differences between our urban and rural communities.

Strategic Goals:

- 3.1:** Improve communications with Cass County residents and strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders.
- 3.2:** Develop strong connections with residents through outreach initiatives and by providing ongoing information on the work of Cass County government.

Strategic Goal 3.1: Improve communications with the Cass County residents and strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders.

Strategic Objectives and Action Steps:

3.1.A: Explore the possibility of creating a communications department (or position) to manage and coordinate communications with the general public and key stakeholders.

- Determine the scope of services and duties for a new Communications Coordinator
- County Administrator and Human Resources will develop PAQ and position description
- Add a budget line item for new position (or department)

3.1.B: Develop and implement an external communications plan.

- Communications Coordinator (or Department) will report to the County Administrator and department heads on communication and public outreach needs
- Develop a comprehensive “all of the above” plan incorporating effective communications strategies and approaches

3.1.C: Enhance and improve the County’s website ensuring it is informative, frequently updated, and user-friendly.

- Conduct an audit of the existing county website to identify areas for improvement
- Make the County website more mobile-friendly



3.1.D: Fully utilize social media to communicate county government news, announcements, notices, and other matters of interest.

- Create communications internship opportunities within county government
- Communications Coordinator (or Department representative) to attend all appropriate meetings to develop website and social media content
- Explore recording Commission meetings for posting to social media

Goal 3.2: Develop strong connections with residents through outreach initiatives and by providing ongoing information on the work of Cass County government.

3.2.A: Develop and implement a strategy to engage rural communities through county government-to-local government interactions, department site visits, and special outreach initiatives.

- County representatives attend township and city council meetings
- Departments hold site visits in communities throughout the County
- County officials hold forums/meetings outside of Fargo at least once every year





STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

EMBRACING GROWTH

Guiding Principles:

Cass County Government is determined to be proactive rather than reactive to demographic and economic changes.

Accordingly, Cass County Government is dedicated to...

- Being prepared, to the greatest extent possible, for eventualities;
- Developing rolling five-year plan for all departments in order to meet changing needs;
- Collaborating with regional agencies in assessing annual growth in Cass County; and
- Identify new approaches and apply best practices to manage employee growth and addressing workforce issues.

Strategic Goal:

Manage the challenges and, where possible, capitalize on the opportunities afforded by Cass County's population growth.

Strategic Goal: Manage the challenges and, where possible, capitalize on the opportunities afforded by Cass County's population growth.

Strategic Objectives and Action Steps:

4.A: Leverage partnerships with key county, state, and regional stakeholders to secure state and federal funding.

- Arrange scheduled meetings with State, Federal and local leaders on a routine basis to discuss growth patterns and economic development issues (skill training, employment trends, etc.) and project for future opportunities and potential funding opportunities
- Scheduled continued meetings with City Leadership and key community partners for continued discussion on potential patterns of needs and/or limitations for citizen opportunities (work force issues such as shift work, transportation, child care during alternative work schedules, etc.)
- Collaborations with multiple groups in seeking funding

4.B: Identify and prioritize approaches to issues related to quality of life, infrastructure, and economic development.

- Define skill needs that support the job market now and projections for meeting demand for future needs
- Discussion with Job Service, schools, colleges for job market and potential future infrastructure needs that support projections
- Access and awareness of County Services to outlying communities
- Establish a community presence through satellite offices or weekly stations in outlying communities
- Provide early intervention and services throughout county
- Support services in transition of people in jail back into community
- Promote programs and services currently provided



4.C: Prepare for shifts in demographic and economic growth that may impact services to the public.

- Identify methods to measure and recognize evolving trends
- Conduct an annual 'growth meeting' among all departments
- Consult with regional and metro agencies and assess outside data and resources on population trends
- Make sure each department develops a rolling five-year plan focused on: Staffing needs; infrastructure (space) needs; revenue and expenditure changes based upon county needs; and identify alternatives to employee growth through possible contracting and collaboration

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