



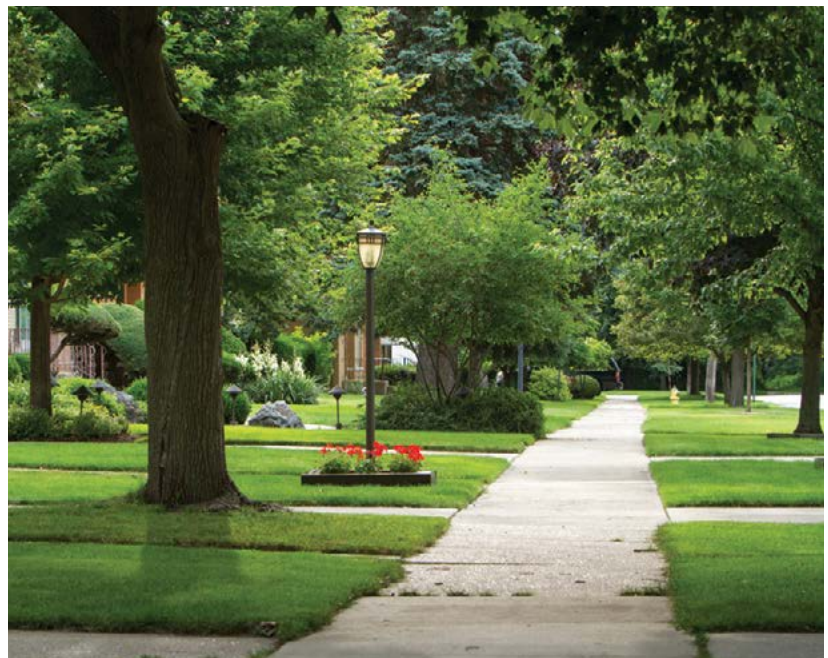
# Village of Niles

## Strategic Plan and Goal Development 2020

**Prepared by project facilitators:**

Mel Henriksen, MPP, Assistant Director, CGS

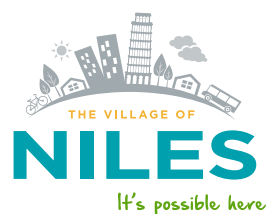
Jeanna Ballard, MPA, Senior Research Specialist



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for  
Governmental Studies**

*Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development*



# Table of Contents

<a href="#">Executive Summary</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Introduction</a> .....	4
<a href="#">Pre-Workshop: Taking Stock — Stakeholder Engagement Process</a> .....	5
<a href="#">Outline of Workshop: Leadership Exercises and Discussion</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Session I. Introduction Exercise — Visioning and Important Topics Discussion</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Session II. Environmental Scanning Part I: Surrender or Lead</a> .....	9
<a href="#">Session III. Environmental Scanning Part II: Large Group S.W.O.T. Analysis</a> .....	10
<a href="#">Session IV. Nominal Group Goal Identification</a> .....	11
<a href="#">Post-Workshop: Goal Prioritization and Board Ranking Exercise</a> .....	12
<a href="#">Strategic Priority Areas</a> .....	15
<a href="#">Conclusion</a> .....	17
<a href="#">Appendix A: Focus Group Sessions — Summary Themes and Responses</a> .....	18
<a href="#">Appendix B: Combined Short- and Long-Term Strategic Goals Prioritized</a> .....	22



# Executive Summary

Strategic planning is a preferred approach to guiding an organization’s future rather than making decisions issue by issue. The Village of Niles (“the Village”) engaged the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to facilitate a strategic planning workshop with Board and senior staff members in September of 2020. Prior to the two half-day workshops, two online surveys were sent to the Finance and Planning and Zoning committees and a Village front-line staff focus group was conducted to gather input on the Village’s future vision and goals. It is important to note that the Village refrained from undertaking a more extensive/broader community input effort as part of this strategic planning process because of recent and on-going community engagement efforts underway. These include a Citizen’s Survey conducted in 2019 and the current development of the Comprehensive Plan which will seek community input.

With surveys and focus groups as a starting point for discussions, the strategic planning workshops provided a positive atmosphere for the Board and senior staff members to collaboratively review and develop a vision for the Village’s future. Ultimately, workshop participants created strategic goals focusing on where the Village wants to go as an organization in both the short- and long-term. As discussed and reviewed during the workshops, executive-level strategic planning sessions are a staple of good governance and leadership for progressive organizations and is recommended to be done every other year.

## Strategic Priorities

Ultimately, five key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process highlighting activities and initiatives that the Village should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below [in no particular order] and a brief explanation of each priority area is also included.



**Diversified Economic Development**

Economic development is a vital tool in creating a thriving community and enhancing revenue streams. This is especially important for the Village of Niles which depends heavily on a diverse sales tax base and much less on property taxes as compared to surrounding municipalities. It is important for the Village to identify diversified development and redevelopment opportunities to support the Village's financial stability and add to the quality of life for all community members and visitors. No matter the size of the development, follow-through and completion of projects will be critical.

**Infrastructure Planning and Funding**

Physical infrastructure are the building blocks of any community. It is critical to plan for, and adequately fund, infrastructure improvement projects to ensure sustainability, high-quality delivery of core services, and improved quality of life. In an ever-changing world where technology allows people more options for where they work and live, meeting the needs and expectations of potential and current residents and businesses is even more important.

**Marketing and Communication**

It is important that the Village of Niles markets and communicates its unique character, variety of service offerings and community assets to attract and retain residents, businesses, and visitors. Through marketing and high-level engagement efforts, Niles can demonstrate its value of building a sense of community and belonging for all community members, which will help set it apart from other surrounding communities.

**Financial Stability and Transparency**

Maintaining fiscal strength and stability is key for any organization, public or private. Routinely undertaking financial assessments to understand the Village's current financial profile, recognize changing trends, and identify opportunities for revenue enhancements and/or cost-cutting measures is vital to give elected officials a high level of confidence to make tough decisions. This type of financial stewardship will allow the high level of service that Niles is known for to continue.

## Strategic Goals

After discussions regarding the participants' visions for the future, important Village issues, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Village, participants were asked to identify short- and long-term goals. Participants were asked to use agreed upon criteria to classify a goal as short-term (1-3 years) or long-term (3 -8 years).

After the workshops, the Board was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The top three highest-ranking short- and long-term goals are offered below as a process "snapshot" representing the most important strategic goals or priority areas for the Board and staff to address in the months and years ahead. The top three goals listed below are a result of the calculation of the goal prioritization survey, which consisted of "forced ranking" where the ranking of each identified goal is averaged by the rankings given by all participants.

For example, if a goal were given the scores of 2, 5, 6, 6, 1, 2 and 3, the average total would be 3.57. **The lower the score, the higher the priority.** In total, the group developed seventeen short-term goals and twelve long-term goals. For a description of the ranking process and a full review of all strategic goals and priority areas presented, discussed, and ranked please refer to the full report.

### Short-Term Goals - Top Three High Priority

1. Undertake a financial analysis to explore revenue enhancement options.
2. Complete the Golf Mill Shopping Center redevelopment agreement and phase 1 of construction.
3. Identify incentives and strategies to attract developers for development and redevelopment opportunities throughout the Village and specifically in the TIF Districts.

### Long-Term Goals - Top Three High Priority

1. Implement revenue enhancement strategies identified in the financial analysis.
2. Implement economic development strategies aimed at attracting new retail development, offering experiential entrepreneurial incubators to residents and businesses and enhancing development around the potential train stop.
3. Finalize Grainger re-development plans, select developers, and complete builds to improve Touhy Triangle redevelopment.

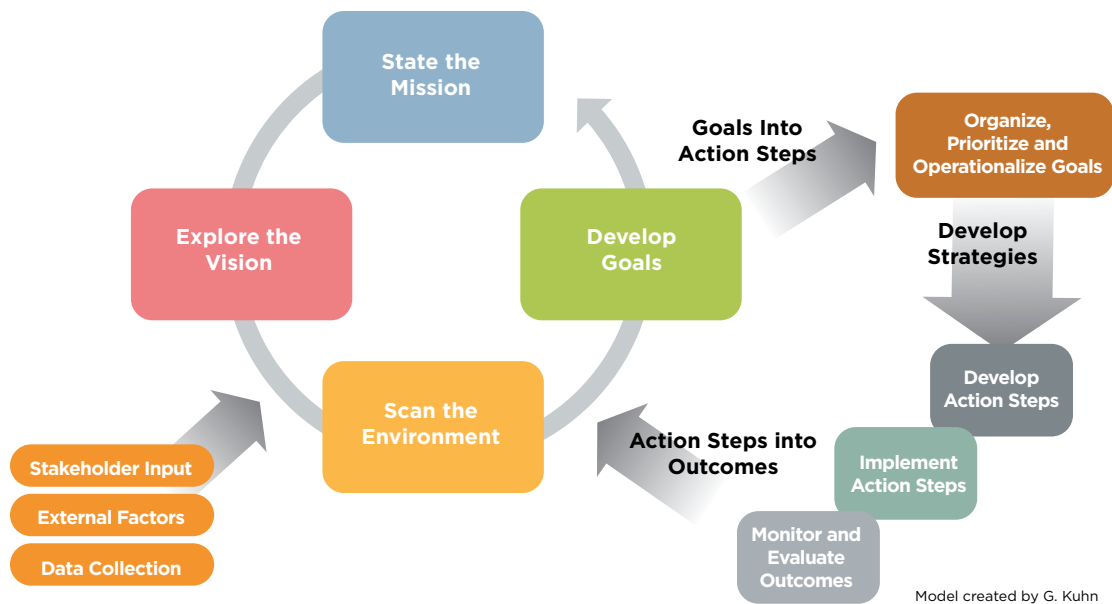
# Introduction

As an organization, the Village has placed itself among the special class of entities that have made a commitment to formalized strategic planning and goal setting exercises (Figure 1). As Village leaders are aware, strategic planning is not a new phenomenon for progressive communities and government agencies. Policymaking boards and staff in both private and public organizations recognize the value of such processes. This important work will serve the Village of Niles community well into the coming years.

The Board and senior staff members gathered in September 2020 to discuss the Village’s vision, important policies, issue areas, to develop goals and ultimately establish a future direction for the Village. The strategic planning workshops provided a positive atmosphere to set aside time to methodically, *strategically*, determine where it is the Village wants to go as an organization. As was shared with the Board and senior staff members at the conclusion of the workshops, the Village should resist the temptation to rearrange priorities as the fiscal year moves along. It is important to adhere to the results of the Board’s and senior staff members’ efforts throughout this process and the Village’s budgeting process.

Keep in mind that the judicious use of the Village’s limited resources (including financial resources and professional staff time) will be the key to good results. These high standards can place a strain on the organization, as excellence requires adequate staff time, expertise and resources. In the end, quality policies and quality implementation equate to tough choices in setting priorities and in allocating resources. Only a limited number of goals and objectives can be effectively managed and implemented at any given time. In a very realistic sense, clear and stable priorities must be maintained if the Village desires to stretch its resources as far as they can go.

**Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model\***



\*Model generally represents the steps that are taken for this type of initiative.

# Pre-Workshop:

## Taking Stock, Stakeholder Engagement Process

Stakeholder engagement is an important pre-workshop component designed to help ground the environmental scanning portion of the process. Listening is vital to planning and these steps help the organization “take stock” and understand current Village policies and operational perspectives, perceptions and preferences. In July 2020, a staff focus group was conducted virtually along with two online surveys administered to the Finance and Planning and Zoning Committees.

The focus group session and online surveys were designed to serve as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information presented next in summation was shared at the workshops and added *exploratory and thematic information* for the Board and Senior Leadership Team to consider. As a result of the focus group session and online survey responses and feedback, the facilitators identified seven (7) overarching themes [no particular order] (Figure 2). The themes represent important topic areas that the Village leadership and Board were asked to consider as they went through the workshop exercises and developed short- and long-term goals. Please see [Appendix A](#) for a full summary of all focus group and survey questions and aggregated responses for each theme.

**Figure 2. Environmental Scanning, Focus Group and Online Survey Overarching Themes**



# Outline of Workshop:

## Leadership Exercises and Discussion Sessions

The format for all of the discussion sessions used in the planning effort employed approaches that were highly participative and interactive. The process was informed by the environmental scanning components and the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Village. The workshop facilitators utilized a group discussion approach called ‘*Nominal Group Technique*’ where participants were assured equal opportunities to speak and share opinions by the facilitator. During the workshop sessions, individuals had the opportunity to generate and share their ideas, as well as participate in group activities allowing them to weigh alternatives and refine their thinking through dialogue. As ideas were shared and debated, the group worked steadily toward a consensus regarding organizational values, purpose, future directions and priorities.

### Session I. Introduction Exercise –Visioning and Important Topics Discussion

Each participant engaged in a visioning exercise by selecting two items from the virtual “garage sale” table, and using each item to answer two questions. The first item was used to answer the visioning question, “*In 10-15 years when I return to the Village, I hope to see, or think I will see...*,” regarding services, programs, staffing levels, capital needs and general concepts that should or would be present in the Village at these intervals?” The second item related to the question, “*What are some important topics the Village will need to address in the next 1-3 years?*” Participants were asked to think about their ideas ahead of time and then be ready to share them with the group during the first session of the workshop. This was a brainstorming exercise—all ideas about the Village’s future were encouraged and shared. No evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session. Below is a summary of those answers.



**Exploration of the Village of Niles’ Desired Future Condition: Visions of the Future**

Garage Sale Item	Visions of the Future
Fish tank/Aquarium	Redevelopment – Redevelop Golf Mill Mall and Touhy Triangle
Fish tank	Sustainable and green initiatives, leading edge and collaborative. The Village has a cultural center with arts and gathering places
Stroller	Prepare and nurture current employees
Baby stroller	The future is the youth
Baby stroller	Golf Mill path – become destination center for non-suburbs
Roller	Future of Niles – growth and enhance retail sales
Chair	Have a chair at the table – be inclusive
School	Move forward together
Bus	Family-friendly and vibrant community. Create an atmosphere for families
Baby crib	Attract young families and more housing stock options
Microwave	Fast as possible – get things done
Flower pot	Open and gathering spaces, build sense of community
Flower pot	Environmental and sustainable community. Beautify the Village – triangular area of green space
Flower pot	Planting seeds now to come to fruition in the future
Board game	Family – community – fresh “aging in place” young to old - all in between
Door	Keep doors opened – “It’s possible here.” Potential businesses, residents, tourism. Redevelopment and new TIF districts.
Piano	Entertainment district(s) – how to compete with neighboring communities - be a destination.
Unicorn	Looking beyond our comfort zone. What is Niles’ niche? Why us?
Clock	Redevelopment is timeless/artful
Cooking pot	Diverse Board to represent community – bring new ideas
Blender	Bringing ideas together – getting things done
Shoe	Building our brand, keep to our values and character – embrace the community’s uniqueness
Computer	Technology – stay ahead and be efficient to help stay with the times
Couch	Fellowship and comradery - retain businesses and residents by engaging with each other

**Exploration of the Village of Niles’ Desired Future Condition: Important Topics to Address**

<b>Garage Sale Item</b>	<b>Important Topic(s)</b>
<b>Broom</b>	Changes with refuse contract - environmental sustainability
<b>Broom</b>	A lot of work ahead to clean up/revitalize the community (e.g., aging homes)
<b>Broom</b>	Clean up/update older areas (e.g., Milwaukee Avenue) - beautify the Village
<b>Clock</b>	“Racing against the clock” - competing with e-commerce
<b>Puzzle</b>	Continue to improve teamwork across departments and levels to move the Village forward
<b>Shower</b>	Clean slate/clean up community
<b>Bookshelf</b>	Tell Niles’ story and sell it/attract others - undertake community marketing and branding
<b>Bookshelf</b>	Niles is a community for everyone - different ages, culture, race, religion, etc.
<b>Computer</b>	Stay up-to-date with technology
<b>Computer</b>	Maintain and stay current with technology and the IT infrastructure to meet future growth/capacity needs
<b>Dumbbell</b>	Need to stay strong and healthy - healthy residents are productive
<b>Bathtub</b>	Attract home improvement stores
<b>Library</b>	Always continue to learn and grow, and remain fiscally responsible and sustainable
<b>Building blocks</b>	Develop and have funding for a 5-year CIP and maintain the foundation of the Village through infrastructure
<b>Suitcase</b>	Give people a reason to stay - allow them to grow and expand their families here, think outside of the box - be bold
<b>Sofa</b>	Sit down and talk out the tough budget decisions
<b>Bread slices</b>	Lack of diverse reputation (e.g., appointed and elected leadership)
<b>Blender</b>	Need to enhance diversity and inclusion
<b>Shoe</b>	Make decisions on sales tax and retain and attract quality businesses - run with the idea
<b>Door</b>	Need better follow-through with projects - “foot in many doors, need to open them”
<b>Fireplace</b>	Balance socioeconomic differences and needs
<b>Telephone</b>	Improve internal and external communication (e.g., businesses outside Niles’ boundaries)
<b>Stroller</b>	Need to attract young demographics/younger families

## Session II. Environmental Scanning Part I

### Surrender or Lead

Participants were introduced to a leadership exercise entitled “Surrender or Lead.” Participants were asked, in small groups, to respond to a series of structured questions designed to initiate discussion and reveal hopes, perspectives, challenges, opportunities and possible barriers based on the collective view of each participant’s group. The group’s responses were recorded and are reported below. The **bolded** and underlined sections are key phrases that the group provided in response to the exercise’s open questions and prompts.

#### Group #1

1. We want to **make change**, but **have to make hard decisions and deal with the consequence**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **the 2040 plan** and **its implementation** because **of its community collaboration**.
3. If it weren’t for **complacency**, we would **move forward**.
4. We need to finally **prioritize projects with the inclusion of end dates**.
5. **The economy** will have the biggest impact on the Village.

#### Group #2

1. We want to **be a destination**, but **are limited by our geographic layout**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **funding** and **infrastructure** because **they’re the building blocks**.
3. If it weren’t for **e-commerce**, we would **be able to maintain/improve the sales tax base**.
4. We need to finally **diversify by offering experiential destinations**.
5. **A well-executed strategic plan** will have the biggest impact on the Village.

#### Group #3

1. We want to **redevelop the mall**, but **we don’t own it**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **economic development** and **sales tax** because **of deficits**.
3. If it weren’t for **cannabis**, we would **have higher deficits**.
4. We need to finally **redevelop Milwaukee Avenue**.
5. **COVID-19** will have the biggest impact on the Village and prevent some projects from moving forward.

#### Group #4

1. We want to **keep people here**, but **there is nothing for them to do**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **our identity** and **our gathering spaces**.
3. If it weren’t for **lack of parking**, we would **be able to develop Touhy/Harlem/Touhy Triangle**.
4. We need to finally **believe we can be more than we are**.
5. **Collaboration** will have the biggest impact on the Village.

## Session III. Environmental Scanning Part II

### Large Group S.W.O.T. Analysis

The next step of the strategic planning workshop involved reviewing and accounting for the internal and external factors present in the environment that can potentially influence the success of the Village, both negatively and positively. Given the exploratory statements and challenges raised in the Surrender or Lead exercise, participants were then asked to identify what constraints and practical difficulties are likely to be encountered that will make it challenging to achieve the desired future state. These elements included both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, resources, etc. Furthermore, participants were asked to identify the organization’s **strengths (S)** and **weaknesses (W)**. In what areas does the Village regularly excel, and in what areas are there difficulties or shortcomings in terms of expertise, resources, training, etc.? What **opportunities (O)** are on the horizon that can be used to the Village’s advantage? Conversely, what trends or **threats (T)** lie ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? Those answers are captured next.

#### S.W.O.T. EXERCISE (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

##### Internal

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action on projects                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is effort and commitment to the vision</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Community brand (new logo, tagline)</li> <li>• Local small businesses</li> <li>• Low(ish) taxes</li> <li>• Industrial and retail base</li> <li>• Mid-Century modern architecture</li> <li>• Strong governmental agencies (e.g., library &amp; parks)</li> <li>• Services (e.g., government, food pantry, etc.)</li> <li>• Deep-rooted residents</li> <li>• Technological infrastructure</li> <li>• Leadership and commitment at all levels</li> <li>• Employee benefits</li> <li>• Courage – try new ways of doing things</li> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Diverse community demographics</li> <li>• Retail services</li> <li>• Leaning tower</li> <li>• Free Village bus</li> <li>• New water system</li> <li>• Employees – dedicated to serve</li> <li>• Pride/committed employees</li> <li>• Forest preserves</li> <li>• Community organizations</li> <li>• Community engagement</li> <li>• Community events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-through on projects and plans</li> <li>• Reactive vs. proactive</li> <li>• Lack of prioritization</li> <li>• Community brand                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Physical identity</li> <li>- Partnerships/engagement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resident involvement</li> <li>• Physical appeal</li> <li>• Overall debt level</li> <li>• Interdepartmental coordination and collaboration</li> <li>• Succession planning</li> <li>• Lack of open space</li> <li>• Neighborhood development</li> <li>• Entertainment options</li> <li>• Demographics – limited to the older population, lack of growth, lack of younger families</li> <li>• Lack of downtown</li> <li>• Language barriers</li> <li>• Aged/mature development, lack of room for new development</li> <li>• Communication with stakeholders</li> <li>• Walkability</li> <li>• Town split between four school districts</li> <li>• Golf Mill development</li> <li>• Internal bickering</li> <li>• Divided Board</li> <li>• Housing stock (lacks diverse options)</li> <li>• Infrastructure funding</li> <li>• Small vision thinking</li> </ul>

**External**

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More community events - more volunteers and involvement</li> <li>• Environmental sustainability initiatives</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Interdepartmental communication coordination</li> <li>• Neighboring municipalities - leverage resources, explore partnerships</li> <li>• TIF funds</li> <li>• Demographics                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attract young families</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaborate with other agencies</li> <li>• Redevelopment including Golf Mill Mall</li> <li>• New property acquisitions</li> <li>• Housing stock</li> <li>• Branding consistency throughout community</li> <li>• Resident involvement</li> <li>• Mid-Century modern architecture promote</li> <li>• Technological infrastructure</li> <li>• Community with residents</li> <li>• Employee benefits - flexible, creative</li> <li>• Arts/cultural opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online shopping</li> <li>• Pensions and salaries</li> <li>• Economy - unemployment, state of IL</li> <li>• Cook County</li> <li>• External communication with partners</li> <li>• Families who leave</li> <li>• Infrastructure conditions</li> <li>• Global warming/climate change</li> <li>• Low(ish) taxes</li> <li>• Deep-rooted residents - leaving less room for young families to move into the community</li> <li>• Technological infrastructure</li> <li>• Politics at all levels</li> <li>• Racial unrest at the national level trickling down to the local level</li> <li>• Lawsuits</li> <li>• Municipal neighbors competing</li> <li>• Lack of entertainment and restaurant opportunities</li> </ul>

## Session IV. Nominal Group Goal Identification

With the preceding workshop sessions as a sound foundation for goal setting, the final workshop session was a healthy group discussion of goals and/or action items needed to achieve the future visions as expressed by the group. Agreed upon criteria were used to classify a goal as short- or long-term. The purpose of the exercise is to group goals of roughly the same type together so when prioritization occurs, the participants can avoid the problem of comparing “apples to oranges.”

The agreed upon criteria used for classifying goals as either short- or long-term involved the following: **Short-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway in the next one to three years. **Long-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway within a three to eight-year timeframe.

### **Open Group Discussion and Consolidation of Goals**

This final phase of the discussion served as the forum for Board and staff members to discuss, evaluate and debate the ideas and goals offered by each participant in the previous sessions. Participants were asked to give their opinions, evaluations and judgments of the worthiness and value of different policy objectives. Participants were also asked to confirm each goal as short- or long-term, especially where similar goals were developed.

# Post-Workshop:

## Goal Prioritization and Board Ranking Exercise

After the workshop, each Board member was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The Board was provided an online ranking tool where point values were assigned to each short- and long-term goal by individuals. The calculation of goal prioritization consisted of “forced ranking” where the ranking of each identified goal is averaged by the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal was given the scores of 2, 5, 6, 6, 1, 2 and 3, the average total would be 3.57. **The lower the score, the higher the priority.** Again, the average totals were based on the collective Board ratings provided.

The following illustration presents the dashboard of high, medium, and low priority levels for the short- and long-term strategic goals based on the consensus ranking exercise conducted by the Board (Figure 3). The goal priority dashboard demonstrates the most important strategic goals, tasks, and objectives for the Board and staff to address in the months and years ahead. In total, the group developed seventeen short-term goals and twelve long-term goals. For a review of the full list of the short- and long-term strategic goals combined and presented by priority level categories (high, medium, and low) please see [Appendix B](#).

**Figure 3. Strategic Goals — Priority Dashboard**

Short-term Strategic Goals	Priority Level
Undertake a financial analysis to explore revenue enhancement options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify strategies to mitigate impacts of e-commerce through economic development within TIF Districts, expand opportunities for cannabis sales and revenue for enhanced pension funding, manage labor costs through rightsizing and/or outsourcing, fund road program, and prioritize pension funding through property taxes</li> <li>Continue to provide high-quality services at low tax rates</li> </ul>	high
Complete the Golf Mill Shopping Center redevelopment agreement and phase 1 of construction	high
Identify incentives and strategies to attract developers for development and redevelopment opportunities throughout the Village and specifically in the TIF Districts	high
Develop and implement marketing strategies to promote the assets of Niles to visitors, residents, and businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate mission and vision statements and affirm/modify as needed</li> <li>Explore the “identity” of Niles and what makes it unique</li> </ul>	high
Undertake an inventory of pedestrian safety concerns and opportunities in the Village	high
Develop a Village-wide facilities improvement plan which may include, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued implementation of the 2016 entrance and roadway signage program</li> <li>New fire station including an identified new location</li> <li>Salt dome</li> <li>HVAC screening at Village Hall</li> <li>New location for Teen Center</li> <li>Redevelop and maintain the historical society building to include quality meeting room options and gathering spaces for the community, look into establishing a public/private fundraising program to leverage costs and explore revenue generating possibilities (e.g., fee-for-use cost structure)</li> </ul>	high

Develop and implement an internal and external communications plan for the Village <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify communication gaps throughout Village departments and identify strategies to improve interdepartmental communication, cooperation, and engagement</li> <li>Establish a digital gathering place - an opportunity that promotes everything for the Village of Niles</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Implement the request for proposal (RFP) process for Touhy Triangle development	<b>medium</b>
Explore strategies to expand, and increase utilization of, the home incentive program (e.g., waive permit fees, offer guidance and assistance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an incentive plan to specifically draw families to the community (e.g., first-time buyer assistance)</li> </ul>	<b>medium</b>
Explore strategies to improve employee morale and enhance the workplace environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a classification and compensation study on a regular basis, every 2-3 years</li> </ul>	<b>medium</b>
Expand the Arts and Culture Master Plan study to include incentives for businesses to embrace and promote arts and culture	<b>medium</b>
Develop and implement a capital improvement plan including prioritizing infrastructure projects, and developing funding strategies	<b>medium</b>
Identify opportunities to partner more with residents and businesses including incentive programs for improving aging infrastructure, providing guidance on programs available, and continuously seeking feedback from current/potential businesses	<b>low</b>
Redevelop Marathon Gas station	<b>low</b>
Create a 22nd Century technology infrastructure including a renewed commitment to sustainability (e.g., year-round electrical recycling)	<b>low</b>
Evaluate flexible staffing models to enhance responsive Village interaction and explore adding a “virtual” Village model	<b>low</b>
Evaluate the residential refuse fee structure and explore other potential models	<b>low</b>

<b>Long-term Strategic Goals</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>
Implement revenue enhancement strategies identified in the financial analysis including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategies to mitigate impacts of e-commerce through economic development within TIF Districts, expand opportunities for cannabis sales and revenue for enhanced pension funding, manage labor costs through rightsizing and/or outsourcing, fund road program, and prioritize pension funding through property taxes</li> <li>Continue to provide high-quality services at low tax rates</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Implement economic development strategies aimed at attracting new retail development, offering experiential entrepreneurial incubators to residents and businesses and enhancing development around the potential train stop	<b>high</b>
Finalize Grainger plans, select developers, and complete builds to improve Touhy Triangle redevelopment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include a development plan for a town center/gathering space</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Complete corridor and aesthetic improvements including bridges, tree canopies, and streetscaping	<b>medium</b>
Implement pedestrian safety improvements identified in the inventory to enhance walkability for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the Village (e.g., Waukegan and Caldwell)	<b>medium</b>
Enhance community pride by maintaining and building on the “human element” of the Village	<b>medium</b>

Identify strategies to unify the community and enhance neighborhoods throughout the Village	<b>medium</b>
<p>Implement the Village facilities improvement plan which may include, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued implementation of the 2016 entrance and roadway signage program</li> <li>• New fire station</li> <li>• Salt dome</li> <li>• New location for Teen Center</li> <li>• Redevelop and maintain the historical society building to include quality meeting room options and gathering spaces for the community, look into establishing a public/private fundraising program to leverage costs and explore revenue generating possibilities (e.g., fee-for-use cost structure)</li> </ul>	<b>medium</b>
Continue to evaluate and implement the stormwater master plan	<b>low</b>
Add at least one new communications platform to enhance community engagement (e.g., “meet people where they are”)	<b>low</b>
Incorporate environmentally-friendly initiatives into government practices and community initiatives (e.g., increase green space, green fleet, green infrastructure, and tree canopy)	<b>low</b>
Implement the strategies developed around the Arts and Culture Master Plan to ensure that the arts are incorporated into various aspects of the Village	<b>low</b>



# Strategic Priority Areas

Ultimately, five key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process highlighting activities and initiatives that the Village should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below [in no particular order] and a brief explanation of each is also included.



## **Diversified Economic Development**

Economic development is a vital tool in creating a thriving community and enhancing revenue streams. This is especially important for the Village of Niles which depends heavily on a diverse sales tax base and much less on property taxes as compared to surrounding municipalities. It is important for the Village to identify diversified development and redevelopment opportunities to support the Village's financial stability and add to the quality of life for all community members and visitors. No matter the size of the development, follow-through and completion of projects will be critical.

## **Infrastructure Planning and Funding**

Physical infrastructure are the building blocks of any community. It is critical to plan for, and adequately fund, infrastructure improvement projects to ensure sustainability, high-quality delivery of core services, and improved quality of life. In an ever-changing world where technology allows people more options for where they work and live, meeting the needs and expectations of potential and current residents and businesses is even more important.

**Marketing and Communication**

It is important that the Village of Niles markets and communicates its unique character, variety of service offerings and community assets to attract and retain residents, businesses, and visitors. Through marketing and high-level engagement efforts, Niles can demonstrate its value of building a sense of community and belonging for all community members, which will help set it apart from other surrounding communities.

**Foster Community Identity**

The Village of Niles prides itself on being a place where a diverse population of residents and businesses call home. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential elements in creating a community where everyone feels welcomed. Adding to the quality of life, the Village strives towards promoting and supporting arts and culture as well as creating personal and digital gathering spaces to break down barriers and develop a sense of a connected and engaged community.

**Financial Stability and Transparency**

Maintaining fiscal strength and stability is key for any organization, public or private. Routinely undertaking financial assessments to understand the Village's current financial profile, recognize changing trends, and identify opportunities for revenue enhancements and/or cost-cutting measures is vital to give elected officials a high level of confidence to make tough decisions. This type of financial stewardship will allow the high level of service that Niles is known for to continue.

# Conclusion

The value of the strategic planning process will only be realized if it is used as an active working guide to both the Village Board of Trustees and staff leadership as the issues explored during the strategic planning process are pursued. It is designed to capture the content of the discussions and to assist the Village in developing implementation plans for their high priority goals.

In the Village's ever evolving operating environment, adapting to the changes in demographics, community trends, technology advancements, best practices and development opportunities among others will be paramount. The strategic plan is meant to be a road map for the Village with the flexibility to adapt to those changes. Therefore, it is recommended that the Village undertake a regular review (monthly, quarterly or semi-annually) of the strategic plan, its goals and implementation schedule to identify the need for updates or modifications to ensure the Village consistently recognizes and meets the changes in community needs and expectations. In addition, many communities engage in regular strategic planning process updates/renewals annually or every 2-3 years.

What is apparent from the exchange of ideas and dialogue during the environmental scanning and strategic planning workshop is that the Village is fortunate to have progressive leadership and a management team that is looking ahead and committed to strategic thinking and planning. One noted observer summarized the challenges of organizational progress this way:

*“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change,  
and change amid order...”*

— A.N. Whitehead

We wish you well with the ambitious years that lie ahead.



Melissa Henriksen and Jeanna Ballard, Project Coordinators and Session Facilitators

# Appendix A:

## Focus Group Session And Online Surveys — Summary Themes & Responses

### Focus Group & Online Survey Feedback Summary

One of the key analytical techniques used for focus group notes is an analyst's search for key phrases, words, or terms that emerged during the focus group session and the online surveys. Coding is done by analysts' individual readings of the data, followed by key term searches with the aid of document software. The words and phrases listed below are the results of the study team's analysis of the collected focus group notes. At a glance, the reader can discover what terms were used or referred to most frequently in the feedback notes. Using individual analyst's coding, the researcher identifies terms that recur across groups and across questions. The results are revealing in that, they highlight key topics or issues that should be weighed and considered when proceeding with strategic planning discussions.

The information that follows is a summary of key themes and topics that emerged during the exploratory focus group/outreach sessions. The focus group and online surveys served as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information that is presented in this summation was designed to add *exploratory and thematic information* for the Board and Senior Leadership Teams to consider during the strategic planning workshop sessions.

The same exploratory focus group discussion questions were asked to each focus group and are listed below:

1. How would you describe the Village of Niles to a stranger or someone who doesn't live or work here?
2. If you left Niles tomorrow, and didn't return for 10-15 years, what do you think you'll see, or what do you hope you'll see, when you return?
3. What do you like best about Niles? Related to that, what are the strengths/greatest assets of the Village? Opportunities?
4. Can you identify areas or topics in need of attention or improvement? Related to that, what are the weaknesses/greatest needs in Niles? Threats?
5. What are/should be the top priorities for the Village over the next 3-5 years?
6. If you could change or initiate one key item or thing about the Village, what would it be?

## Overall Themes

The data below were derived from the analysis of the bundled focus group data. Using qualitative analysis techniques such as reviews of phrases, developing sorting categories, and conducting word counts, the following comment themes, topics, and phrases surfaced.

### Environmental Scanning – Overarching Themes



#### Strong Government and Quality Resources

- Strong Village resources/departments to support residents, superior to neighboring towns
- Outstanding security services – Police, Fire & I.T.
- Free bus offers a valuable asset to residents
- Senior center – variety of resources, enrichment opportunities, family services
- Effective/efficient permit process (didn't skip a beat, steady/low turnaround rate)
- Responsive, accessible Village government
- Business-friendly

#### Economic Development

- Develop a downtown destination or uptown area - more restaurants, smaller shops (Milwaukee Ave.), entertainment space, etc., to attract visitors, new residents, help unify the town and build a sense of community
- Complete the Golf Mill project
- Follow-through with Village projects (e.g., plans for the residential and entertainment district on Touhy manifested)
- Continue to grow as a community
- Increase employment opportunities and maintain workforce development
- Maintain the industrial and shopping development to help balance the tax base
- Keep small businesses a part of this community

**Beautification/Open Space**

- More greenery throughout the Village – open space, walking paths
- More connectivity (walking-friendly) – walk to shops, home, downtown, destination places, etc.
- Better support/resources/assistance for multi-housing properties regarding property maintenance (e.g., associations, social programs, etc.)
- Expand on code enforcement parameters (include more staff/departments – police, CSO, etc.)
- Upgrade and maintain residential and commercial properties
- Improve the beautification of Niles as a whole to be aesthetically pleasing to all of those that travel throughout Niles
- Integrate the arts into the community (e.g., Skokie)

**Safety**

- Better physical connection between East and West side of town (Niles Township and Niles West High school) to improve safety
- Continue to be a safe community, enhance connection between the community and police
- Maintain a Village presence
- Better safety trails and measures put in place for pedestrians and cyclists
- Provide more education to increase awareness of safety measures especially for youth including school visits from police/fire, etc., encouraging safety practices
- Enhance safety measures within Village departments

**Infrastructure Improvements**

- Invest in community improvements through updating and maintaining infrastructure
- Undertake facility improvements – fitness center, fire station, senior center, etc.
- Lack of cohesion between Village facilities (lack of consistent style)
- Need for a new fire station
- Plans for the Metra stop reach fruition

**Communication/Collaboration**

- Enhance community outreach to help improve engagement with community and business members
- Improve internal communication
- Stronger intergovernmental collaboration (e.g., schools, code issues with landlords, library district, etc.)
- Build better working relationships, engagement, collaboration across departments (e.g., gatherings)
  - Visit different departments to learn more about the department’s functions and the people within the department
- Continue to operate the Village on behalf of the residents and the businesses

## **Organizational Development**

- Enhance recruitment and retention efforts/incentives (e.g., compensation, benefits) to attract and retain talent for front-line staff
- Address understaffed departments – increase staffing levels to appropriate levels allowing for evenly dispersed workloads, and have less reliance on part-time employees
- Need for consistency based on a department basis (e.g., pay, benefits, expectations, structure, PTEs in certain departments, etc.)
- Look further into flexible schedules – may help with efficiency, COVID-19 related issues (child care, sick leave)
- Ensure financial sustainability for both the Village and residents in response to COVID-19
- Invest in I.T. infrastructure to enhance connectivity and improve workload, future changes, staff needs, etc.

# Appendix B:

## Combined Short- and Long-Term Strategic Goals Prioritized

### Combined Short- and Long-Term Prioritized Strategic Goals

Strategic Goals	Priority Level
Undertake a financial analysis to explore revenue enhancement options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify strategies to mitigate impacts of e-commerce through economic development within TIF Districts, expand opportunities for cannabis sales and revenue for enhanced pension funding, manage labor costs through rightsizing and/or outsourcing, fund road program, and prioritize pension funding through property taxes</li> <li>• Continue to provide high-quality services at low tax rates</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Complete the Golf Mill Shopping Center redevelopment agreement and phase 1 of construction	<b>high</b>
Identify incentives and strategies to attract developers for development and redevelopment opportunities throughout the Village and specifically in the TIF Districts	<b>high</b>
Develop and implement marketing strategies to promote the assets of Niles to visitors, residents, and businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate mission and vision statements and affirm/modify as needed</li> <li>• Explore the “identity” of Niles and what makes it unique</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Implement strategies to restore operational and capital reserves	<b>high</b>
Undertake an inventory of pedestrian safety concerns and opportunities in the Village	<b>high</b>
Develop a Village-wide facilities improvement plan which may include, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued implementation of the 2016 entrance and roadway signage program</li> <li>• New fire station including an identified new location</li> <li>• Salt dome</li> <li>• HVAC screening at Village Hall</li> <li>• New location for Teen Center</li> <li>• Redevelop and maintain the historical society building to include quality meeting room options and gathering spaces for the community, look into establishing a public/private fundraising program to leverage costs and explore revenue generating possibilities (e.g., fee-for-use cost structure)</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Develop and implement an internal and external communications plan for the Village <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify communication gaps throughout Village departments and identify strategies to improve interdepartmental communication, cooperation, and engagement</li> <li>• Establish a digital gathering place - an opportunity that promotes everything for the Village of Niles</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Implement revenue enhancement strategies identified in the financial analysis including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies to mitigate impacts of e-commerce through economic development within TIF Districts, expand opportunities for cannabis sales and revenue for enhanced pension funding, manage labor costs through rightsizing and/or outsourcing, fund road program, and prioritize pension funding through property taxes</li> <li>• Continue to provide high-quality services at low tax rates</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>



Implement economic development strategies aimed at attracting new retail development, offering experiential entrepreneurial incubators to residents and businesses and enhancing development around the potential train stop	<b>high</b>
Finalize Grainger plans, select developers, and complete builds to improve Touhy Triangle redevelopment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include a development plan for a town center/gathering space</li> </ul>	<b>high</b>
Implement the request for proposal (RFP) process for Touhy Triangle development	<b>medium</b>
Explore strategies to expand, and increase utilization of, the home incentive program (e.g., waive permit fees, offer guidance and assistance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an incentive plan to specifically draw families to the community (e.g., first-time buyer assistance)</li> </ul>	<b>medium</b>
Explore strategies to improve employee morale and enhance the workplace environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a classification and compensation study on a regular basis, every 2-3 years</li> </ul>	<b>medium</b>
Expand the Arts and Culture Master Plan study to include incentives for businesses to embrace and promote arts and culture	<b>medium</b>
Develop and implement a capital improvement plan including prioritizing infrastructure projects, and developing funding strategies	<b>medium</b>
Complete corridor and aesthetic improvements including bridges, tree canopies, and streetscaping	<b>medium</b>
Implement pedestrian safety improvements identified in the inventory to enhance walkability for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the Village (e.g., Waukegan and Caldwell)	<b>medium</b>
Enhance community pride by maintaining and building on the “human element” of the Village	<b>medium</b>
Identify strategies to unify the community and enhance neighborhoods throughout the Village	<b>medium</b>
Implement the Village facilities improvement plan which may include, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued implementation of the 2016 entrance and roadway signage program</li> <li>• New fire station</li> <li>• Salt dome</li> <li>• New location for Teen Center</li> <li>• Redevelop and maintain the historical society building to include quality meeting room options and gathering spaces for the community, look into establishing a public/private fundraising program to leverage costs and explore revenue generating possibilities (e.g., fee-for-use cost structure)</li> </ul>	<b>medium</b>
Identify opportunities to partner more with residents and businesses including incentive programs for improving aging infrastructure, providing guidance on programs available, and continuously seeking feedback from current/potential businesses	<b>low</b>
Redevelop Marathon Gas station	<b>low</b>
Create a 22nd Century technology infrastructure including a renewed commitment to sustainability (e.g., year-round electrical recycling)	<b>low</b>
Evaluate flexible staffing models to enhance responsive Village interaction and explore adding a “virtual” Village model	<b>low</b>
Evaluate the residential refuse fee structure and explore other potential models	<b>low</b>
Continue to evaluate and implement the stormwater master plan	<b>low</b>

Add at least one new communications platform to enhance community engagement (e.g., “meet people where they are”)	<b>low</b>
Incorporate environmentally-friendly initiatives into government practices and community initiatives (e.g., increase green space, green fleet, green infrastructure, and tree canopy)	<b>low</b>
Implement the strategies developed around the Arts and Culture Master Plan to ensure that the arts are incorporated into various aspects of the Village	<b>low</b>