

Strategic Action Plan

CITY OF DELAWARE

Introduction

A Focused Vision for the Future

The City of Delaware stands at a pivotal point in its continued growth and evolution.

In May 2025, members of City Council and senior leadership convened to review progress on prior goals, assess emerging challenges, and identify a bold but achievable vision for the next 12–24 months. With facilitation from the Management Advisory Group, this goal-setting retreat produced a clear set of priorities, now formalized into this Strategic Action Plan.

This plan reflects a shared commitment to balancing fiscal stability, infrastructure maintenance, community vibrancy, and economic competitiveness, while enhancing transparency and collaboration.

Central to this effort is the City's unwavering recognition that its workforce—comprised of dedicated public servants at every level—is the foundation upon which progress is built. The Strategic Action Plan not only charts a path forward for organizational success but also affirms the City's deep appreciation for the talent, resilience, and passion of its employees. By prioritizing their growth, well-being, and voice, we strengthen our capacity to serve the community

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Path Forward: Implementation and Oversight

with excellence and integrity. The plan is designed not only to guide internal decision-making but to serve as a living document, helping to track progress and communicate intent across departments and with the public.

Priority 1: Strengthen Fiscal Sustainability

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

With infrastructure demands mounting and long-term liabilities looming, the City will evaluate new and existing funding mechanisms to maintain its roadways, capital assets, and high-quality service delivery. This work includes a comprehensive review of transportation-related fees, development-based funding tools, and revenue policies, ensuring that Delaware can continue to grow responsibly without compromising financial stability.

Key Initiatives

A. Evaluate Transportation Impact Fees

1. The City will consider implementing a transportation impact fee. These one-time payments could be a critical new source of revenue for increasing the capacity and efficiency of the City's thoroughfare.

Resources & Barriers:

External consultants will be needed to draft transportation impact fee code. Coordination with other fee increases and decreases is essential to keep housing attainable.

B. Review and Expand New Community Authorities

1. New Community Authorities allow designated developments to self-fund infrastructure needs through special charges. The City can analyze and use NCAs in newly developing areas of the City to recover costs for maintenance of parks, services and roadways.

Resources & Barriers:

Standardized policies for NCA creation and oversight, authorized by City Council, will help ensure consistent revenue generation and expenditure prioritization.

C. Explore Special Assessment Districts

1. The City will examine the feasibility of implementing municipal Special Assessment Districts, where property owners voluntarily fund public improvements that benefit their area, such as streetscape enhancements and infrastructure upgrades.

Resources & Barriers:

Formation of a SAD requires majority property owner support. Staff will need to identify potential pilot areas and develop a public engagement strategy to build buy-ins.

D. Establish a Community Taxation Policy

1. The City will work with the Finance Committee to develop a comprehensive taxation policy. This policy will define guiding principles, targets, and decision-making tools to ensure fairness, transparency and efficiency. It will prioritize cost control, strategic spending, and efficient purchasing to maximize public value, while also considering the full range of revenue sources, such as local income tax credits, user fees, and other mechanisms.

Resources & Barriers:

Detailed modeling of future operating, maintenance, capital, and debt needs, as well as careful evaluation of expenditure efficiencies is required. Success will depend on sustained Council consensus, staff discipline in applying the policy, and community understanding that fiscal stewardship is about both wise spending and responsible revenue generation.

E. Address Pension Cost Pressures

Ohio's public pension systems are experiencing cost increases that may impact local contributions. The City will proactively monitor these trends and explore options to absorb or offset added liabilities without disrupting core services.

Priority Owners: Paul Brake, Alycia Ballone, Rob Alger, Jonathan Owen, Bill Ferrigno, Susie Dailey

Priority 2: Attract Game-Changing Employers

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

A targeted strategy to attract “game-changing” employers is central to Delaware’s long-term prosperity. The City is actively marketing available sites while addressing infrastructure, utility, and housing affordability barriers that influence site selection. Expanding the workforce will also require ensuring that housing remains attainable through policy support for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), employer-assisted housing, and the potential creation of a Community Land Trust to promote long-term affordability.

Key Initiatives

A. Attract Game-Changing Employers

Expand employment base through proactive marketing and infrastructure readiness.

Key Initiatives

1. Promote Delaware as a competitive site for major employers.
2. Foster state, regional, and utility partnerships. Infrastructure capacity, especially utilities like water, sewer, gas, and electricity must align with site selection needs, and in some cases, utility expansion will require adjacent landowner collaboration.
3. Use software resources of City’s IT Department to assist with business analysis.
4. Address workforce housing and site readiness barriers. The high cost of housing continues to pose challenges to talent recruitment.
5. Economic development reserves will support professional services and site readiness efforts.

B. Increase Housing Affordability

Provide a variety of housing options to support workforce and community growth.

Key Initiatives

1. Implement Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Zoning.
 - Zoning updates approved; now focus on public outreach and permitting.
2. Explore Employer-Assisted Housing.
 - Convene employer roundtables; identify willing housing finance partners. Such programs work best when employers contribute to down payment assistance in coordination with private mortgage products, necessitating coordination with lenders.

1. Develop Community Land Trust Policy.

- Identify a nonprofit partner capable of acquiring and stewarding land for long-term community benefit.
- Such efforts could benefit from collaboration with other local governments to ensure sustainability and scale.

Priority Owners: Paul Brake, Sandra Pereira, Nic Langford, Andy Beare, Jonathan Owen, Bill Ferrigno, Alycia Ballone, Susie Dailey

Priority 3: Collaborate for Regional Impact

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The City will deepen its coordination with Delaware County, townships, and regional entities to leverage infrastructure investment, advance shared GIS mapping tools, and co-invest in priorities like Delaware Municipal Airport. With the feasibility study for a regional airport authority complete, the next steps include formalizing financial roles and legal structures.

In addition, Delaware is committed to strengthening its “town-gown” relationship with Ohio Wesleyan University. Upcoming opportunities for shared economic development, including the redevelopment of City-owned sites near the OWU campus, represent once-in-a-generation possibilities for catalytic reinvestment in the downtown and campus-edge areas.

Key Initiatives

A. Strengthen Intergovernmental Relations

Maximize resources and service delivery through partnerships.

Key Initiatives

1. Execute MOUs with Delaware County Engineer for shared infrastructure maintenance.
2. Expand shared GIS data mapping with Delaware County.

B. Advance Regional Airport Collaboration

Create a sustainable operational model for Delaware Municipal Airport.

Key Initiatives

1. Determine City/County financial commitments.
2. Seek FAA approval for regional port authority formation.
3. Retain legal counsel for authority structuring.
4. FAA approval must be secured before transferring operations to a new entity, each stage affecting future governance and funding.

C. Advocate at the State Level

Proactively engage legislators to protect municipal funding.

Key Initiatives

1. Monitor legislation on property tax reforms.
2. Elevate City needs in state budget and policy discussions.

D. Strengthen Ohio Wesleyan University Partnership

Leverage university proximity for catalytic redevelopment.

Key Initiatives:

1. Issue RFQ for city-owned sites near campus.
2. Consider transferring parcels to the Delaware County Community Improvement Corporation for developer-led infill aligned with shared goals of historic preservation, economic vitality, public benefit, and seamless integration with surround cultural and educational assets.

Priority Owners: Paul Brake, Sandra Pereira, Nic Langford, Andy Beare, Jonathan Owen, Bill Ferrigno, Alycia Ballone

Priority 4: Foster Connectivity and Vibrancy

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Efforts to enhance neighborhood vibrancy and public mobility are well underway. The City will initiate a focus area plan for the South Sandusky corridor to guide revitalization. Expanding the city's trail network—connecting neighborhoods, parks, and waterways—is a top-tier quality of life priority. These initiatives are bolstered by collaboration with groups like the Rapid 5 Project.

Public transit remains a challenge and an opportunity. Working with Delaware County Transit, the City will seek ways to enhance service reliability, expand coverage, and explore long-term funding solutions.

Key Initiatives

A. South Sandusky Focus Area Plan

Revitalize corridor as a mixed-use neighborhood node.

Key Initiatives

1. Complete small-area plan using in-house Planning & Community Development staff resources.

B. Expand Trail Network and Riverfront Access

Build a connected network of trails and greenways linking neighborhoods, parks, schools, and downtown that promotes safe travel, supports local growth and enhances our identity as a healthy, walkable community.

Key Initiatives

1. Olentangy River Greenway trail that establishes a vibrant north-south spine through the city, activating the downtown and Mingo Park while opening public access to the river for recreation, nature exploration and community events.
2. Delaware Run Greenway east-west corridor that links the community and preserves the Delaware Run's natural character.
3. Strengthen regional connectivity by aligning with broader initiatives such as RAPID 5, and county and state park networks.

C. Expand Public Transportation

Improve transit access, reliability, and frequency.

1. Collaborate with Delaware County Transit (DCT) to explore service expansion.
2. Public education on need for local transit funding. It is likely that funding sources approved by voters and dedicated to transit systems will be likely a conversation in the future.

Priority Owner: Paul Brake, Sandra Pereira, Nic Langford, Andy Beare, Ted Miller

Priority 5: Solve Parking and Mobility Challenges

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The City already is implementing short-term strategies. We also will pursue longer-term goals including possible public-private partnerships to finance a future parking garage. Co-location with a proposed hotel and potential OWU partnership creates an opportunity for shared benefit and smart urban design.

Key Initiatives

A. Develop Downtown Parking Strategy

Support downtown vibrancy and future growth.

Key Initiatives:

1. **Short-Term** – Implement Kimley-Horn study recommendations (signage, policy).
2. **Long-Term** – Explore feasibility of public-private partnership for parking garage.
 - Conduct RFQ process; evaluate OWU partnership and hotel opportunity.

Barriers:

1. Estimated garage cost exceeds \$10M.
2. Requires creative financing and strong development partners.
3. Operational upgrades in the parking study have been identified, but a perception persists that a parking garage is the only solution. This perception risks overshadowing other, more cost-effective strategies and will require targeted public education to broaden understanding of available options.

Priority Owners: Adam Moore, Alycia Ballone, Andy Beare, Nic Langford

Path Forward: Implementation and Oversight

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Next Steps

1. Final Action Plan to be reviewed and endorsed by City Council.
2. Assign lead staff and departments for each initiative.
3. Establish progress tracking and quarterly reporting to Council.

Communication

1. Public version of plan to be posted on City website.
2. Staff and Council to incorporate plan goals into budget and operational planning.

Conclusion

This Strategic Action Plan sets a clear, ambitious path for the City of Delaware's continued growth and quality of life. Through financial stewardship, economic development, regional cooperation, and infrastructure investment, Delaware is positioning itself for success well into the future.