Bessemer City

HEARTFELT LIVING

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STRATEGIC PLAN

PROJECT SUPPORTED BY CENTRALINA REGIONAL COUNCIL

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CENTRALINA
REGIONAL COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

The City of Bessemer City, located in western Gaston County, is a growing community of approximately 5,500 residents. With a strong history rooted in textiles and agriculture, Bessemer City is now home to a diverse range of industries. Its historic downtown remains a hub for small businesses and local events, reflecting the city's heritage and welcoming spirit.

With the region's population projected to double by 2050, communities like Bessemer City are preparing for this growth by thinking strategically about the future. To support growth and promote sustainable development, it is important for communities to have a plan in place that provides a roadmap for achieving a collective vision through thoughtful and effective investment of public resources.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In early 2025, Centralina Regional Council supported the City of Bessemer City Council, administration, and staff in developing a five-year strategic plan. Through this process, the City accomplished the following:

- Reviewed and affirmed its established strategic foundations: a vision, mission and set of core values
- Reviewed and assessed the existing five strategic goals
- Developed a set of strategies to advance the goals
- Introduced a plan monitoring and evaluation approach
- Explored opportunities for future public engagement

An internal Project Management Team collaborated with Centralina on designing and executing the strategic planning process. The Leadership Team (comprised of administration officials and department heads) and Council thoughtfully progressed through the process at a pace that felt comfortable, productive, and ensured participation from stakeholders. Figure 1. shows the timeline of activities in the strategic planning process. A full list of meetings and engagements is outlined in Appendix A.

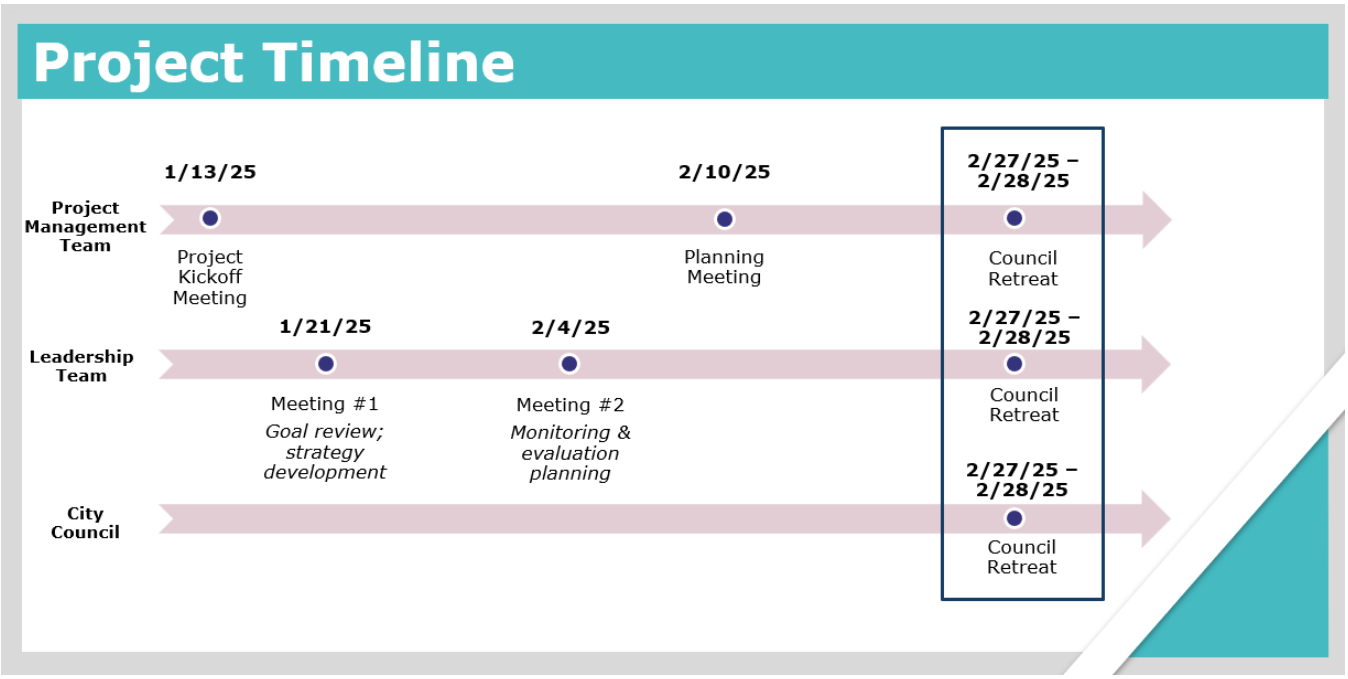
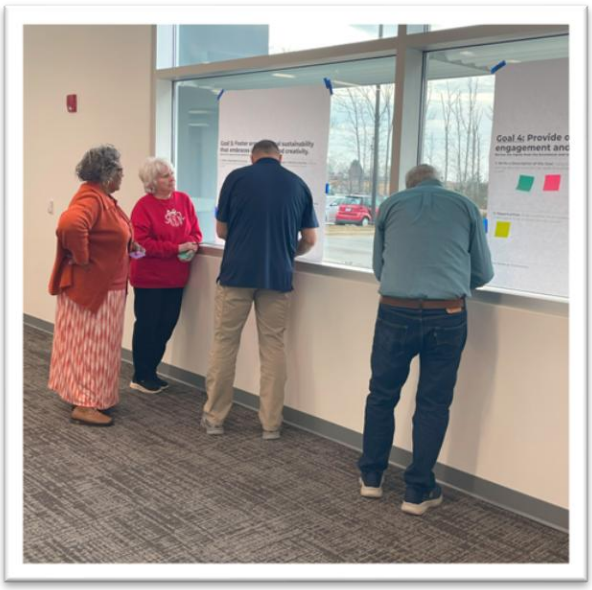
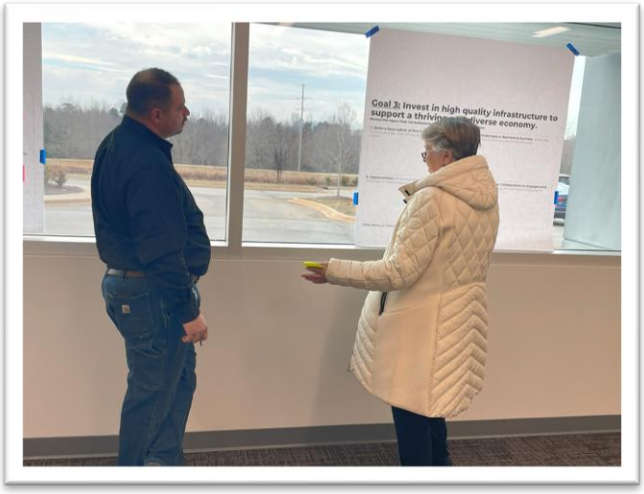


Figure 1. Strategic Planning Process Timeline

Council Retreat Overview

As part of the strategic planning process, the City Council, administration, and department heads participated in a two-day retreat held on February 27 and 28. The retreat's objectives included reviewing and refining the emerging strategic plan elements, discussing growth-related topics, and considering items related to Council-adopted goals. Centralina facilitated the first day of the retreat to encourage open dialogue and collective input.





Retreat Agenda

Thursday, February 27, 2025

- *7:30 – 8:00 am: Breakfast*
- 8:00 – 8:15 am: Welcome Remarks, Retreat Objectives & Icebreaker Exercise
- 8:15 – 9:20 am: Strategic Planning Overview, Progress to Date
- 9:20 – 9:50 am: Strategy Development – How to Achieve Our Goals?
- *9:50 – 10:05 am: Break*
- 10:05 – 10:50 am: Strategy Prioritization
- 10:50 am – 12:00 pm: Tactics & Communication
- *12:00 – 1:00 pm: Lunch*
- 1:00 – 2:15 pm: Measuring Our Progress
- 2:15 – 3:00 pm: Working Together to Implement the Plan
- *3:00 – 3:15 pm: Break*
- 3:15 – 3:45 pm: Wrap Up
- *4:00 pm: Adjourn*

Friday, February 28, 2025

- *7:30 – 8:00 am: Breakfast*
- 8:00 am: Welcome Remarks, Retreat Objectives & Icebreaker Exercise
- 8:00 – 9:00 am: City Manager's Report, Josh Ross
- 9:00 – 9:30 am: EDC Report, Donny Hicks
- 9:30 – 10:00 am: Branding Project Review, Chelsea Dickey
- *10:00 – 10:15 am: Break*
- 10:15 – 10:45 am: Land Use Discussion & Consistency Statement Review, Jamie Watkins/Karen Floyd
- 10:45 – 11:30 am: Advisory Boards Discussion, Hydeia Hayes
- 11:30 – 11:45 am: Closing Remarks
- *11:45 am: Adjourn*

The insights shared and direction established during the retreat were essential in shaping the final version of the strategic plan. The retreat also helped to ensure the plan reflects both the community's needs and the Council's priorities.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENTS

The City of Bessemer City strategic plan has the following components:

- Foundation:
  - *Vision: What we aspire to be in the future*. Communicates the long-term vision that the Council and administration are working towards.
  - *Mission: Why we exist*. Communicates what Council and administration do in support of the vision and why it matters.
  - *Core Values: How we will behave and act in executing the mission and in pursuit of the vision*. Defines organizational culture. Must be lived, practiced, and assessed.

- Goals and Strategies Framework:
  - *Goals:* Broad, multi-year outcomes to help achieve the vision. Goals are multi-departmental and can be achieved in many different ways.
  - *Strategies:* Specific mechanisms or components that help to achieve a goal. They may be multi-year and relate to clearly defined actions conducted by a department or group of departments.
  - *Tactics:* Annual services, projects, programs, or investments that implement the strategies. Tactics are specific to departments and can change from year to year.



STRATEGIC PLAN FOUNDATION

Vision

Bessemer City strives to be a unique and welcoming community that connects people to economic opportunities and a higher quality of life.

Mission

Bessemer City provides high quality public services in a responsible manner that creates success.

Core Values

Accountability

Ethics

Respect

Commitment/Dependability

Open-Mindedness

Honesty

GOALS, STRATEGIES & TACTICS

GOAL 1: Promote a desirable place to live and work that provides a healthy quality of life.

Strategies

1.1. Continuously update and review City code.

Tactics

- *Review the land development code and implement changes.*
- *Streamline code enforcement operations and enhance citizen education of regulations.*

1.2. Improve and promote walkability throughout the city.

Tactic

- *Provide funding to implement a walkability plan.*

1.3. Create an arts and cultural plan.

Tactic

- *Develop partnerships to secure outside resources to fund public art projects.*

GOAL 2: Ensure a safe and secure community for residents and visitors.

Strategies

2.1. Conduct a public safety study.

Tactics

- *Conduct a needs assessment.*
- *Identify funding resources.*
- *Develop strategy for addressing pay and classification.*

2.2. Fund public safety needs not covered by grants or sale of property.

Tactic

- *Identify revenue sources for Police and Fire public safety projects.*

GOAL 3: Invest in high quality infrastructure to support a thriving and diverse economy.

Strategies

3.1. Develop and implement a long-range plan for CIP, utility maintenance, and infrastructure improvements.

Tactics

- *Allocate resources for an enterprise fund study in the annual budget.*
- *Assess capital needs to address in CIP.*

3.2. Explore ways to continuously clarify, streamline, and improve Land Development Code and unified development ordinances so that developers are improving the city.

Tactic

- *Review and update Land Development Code.*

3.3. Align building, infrastructure, and service improvements with growth plans.

Tactic

- *Continue engagement with NCDOT, Gaston County, school system and other stakeholders to discuss growth-related needs and opportunities to meet those needs.*

GOAL 4: Provide opportunities for citizen engagement and promote volunteerism.

Strategies

4.1. Educate appointed and advisory boards to carry out City goals.

Tactics

- *Adopt an advisory board appointment and implementation strategy.*
- *Continue educational sessions for advisory board members.*

4.2. Create programs and resources that better advise the community.

Tactics

- *Gather insights from other local governments and input from community members.*
- *Draft programming plan that identifies engagement topics and formats.*
- *Develop a citizens academy test pilot program with small group of engaged citizens.*
- *Create Bessemer City University in-person and online resources.*

4.3. Develop a communication plan that gains buy-in from Council and the public.

Tactics

- *Disseminate information through communication channels.*
- *Redevelop City website.*
- *Assemble citizen focus group to test redeveloped City website.*

GOAL 5: Foster organizational sustainability that embraces innovation and creativity.

Strategies

5.1. Ensure the City continues to attract and retain high-quality professionals.

Tactics

- *Implement pay and classification plan.*
- *Implement personnel policy review.*

5.2. Continue staff engagement programs and offer more professional development opportunities and training incentives.

Tactics

- *Continue staff engagement programs.*
- *Strengthen communication efforts to all staff.*
- *Identify and allocate resources for professional development in the annual budget.*

5.3. Continue identifying ways to increase service delivery effectiveness.

Tactics

- *Maintain a high level of customer service.*
- *Identify opportunities to adapt, accept change, and adjust to new situations.*

MONITORING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Recommended Monitoring Approach

To provide oversight on Strategic Plan implementation, it is recommended that the City use the following approach to monitoring over the five-year period. Monitoring is a tool for management and will be used by the City administration to continually assess department progress towards the plan strategies and ultimately goal completion. The main question assessed in monitoring is: did we do what we said we would do?

Monitoring Responsibilities: Ongoing throughout the year

- Leadership Team: track and report progress on strategies; share successes with management
- City Manager: manage performance of goal and strategy implementation; share updates with Council and Public
- Council: provide guidance to City Manager; share implementation progress with Public

Monitoring Steps

1. Departments track and collect data on the following:
    a. Implementation Progress of FY Tactics: #Completed; #In Progress; #Not Started
    b. Impact Measures: collect data on established impact measures assigned to them.
2. Department reports to City Manager on a monthly basis. The following are included in monthly departmental reports:
    a. Number of FY Tactics Completed; In Progress; Not Started.
    b. “Success story” or “challenge”- short narrative to describe tactic progress.
    c. Quantitative report on impact measures metrics for reporting month and compared to prior month.
3. City Manager and Leadership Team use monthly progress reports for staff engagement and performance management.
4. City Manager provides quarterly report to Council including:
    a. Number of FY Tactics Completed; In Progress; Not Started by reporting quarter.

b. “Success story”- short narrative to describe tactic progress or completion Recommend one per goal.
c. Quantitative report on performance metrics for reporting quarter and compared to prior quarter.
d. As needed, narrative on any guidance sought, decision points or challenges related to FY tactics implementation.

Recommended Evaluation Plan

A strategic plan evaluation can be conducted on an annual basis to assess the cumulative impact of the plan on the City and identify what, if any, changes need to be made to respond to changing conditions. Evaluation is a tool for the Council and is a key component to establishing transparency and trust with the Public. An evaluation can also identify success stories and challenges to overcome during implementation. The main questions to be assessed in plan evaluation are: what was the impact of the plan? What has changed in the City because of it?

Evaluation Responsibilities: Annually

- Leadership Team: assess progress, impacts; identify challenges
- City Manager: prepare & submit annual strategic plan evaluation for Council; recommend changes as needed
- Council: evaluate plan progress; recommend & approve changes

It is recommended that in the first implementation year of the Strategic Plan, the City collect data on a set of initial impact measures (shown below) to be used for the evaluation. As noted above, the Leadership Team can regularly collect data on these indicators and submit this information to the City Manager on a monthly basis as part of the monitoring approach (pending frequency of data availability).

GOAL 1: Promote a desirable place to live and work that provides a healthy quality of life.	• Feet of sidewalk completed in new areas • Progress on arts and cultural plan
GOAL 2: Ensure a safe and secure community for residents and visitors.	• # of Police Department calls • # of Fire Department calls • Police response times • Fire response times

GOAL 3: Invest in high quality infrastructure to support a thriving and diverse economy.	• Progress on water treatment plant plan completion – improvements, replacements
GOAL 4: Provide opportunities for citizen engagement and promote volunteerism.	• # of participants at outreach events • # of engagement points with citizens • # of website hits
GOAL 5: Foster organizational sustainability that embraces innovation and creativity.	• Pay and class benchmarking comparison

After the initial round of data collection in year one, the City may augment these impact measures with additional qualitative and/or quantitative data points.

Evaluation process includes the following steps:

1. Mid-Year Assessment
    a. Leadership Team meets prior to the budget development process (typically December-January) to review monitoring reports and assess conditions that may trigger a change to the plan. Determines if any changes to the Strategic Plan Goals or Strategies should be recommended to the City Manager. They would also recommend guidance to the City Manager on forthcoming fiscal year implementation plan development (tactics).
    b. City Manager reviews Leadership Team's recommendations and submits report to Council with recommendations on any changes to the Strategic Plan goals or strategies; as well as, recommended approach for FY implementation plan development (tactics).
    c. Council reviews the City Manager's recommendations and makes a determination prior to the start of the budget process.
2. End of Fiscal Year Assessment
    a. The Leadership Team meets at the end of the fiscal year to produce an evaluation of FY Implementation Plan success and accomplishments for Council and external communication.

b. City Manager reviews Leadership Team's findings and submits an Evaluation Report to Council.
c. Council reviews the Evaluation Report and determines if any changes to the Strategic Plan should be made since the mid-year progress report.
d. City shares the Evaluation Report with the public.

CONCLUSION

The strategic plan provides a clear roadmap for guiding the City of Bessemer City's work. Following the plan's launch, successful implementation will require continued engagement and collaboration at all levels of the organization.

Public involvement will also play a vital role in effective plan implementation. During the Council retreat, Council Members brainstormed opportunities to inform and involve residents during the strategic plan roll out. Suggestions included:

- City website
- Social media – e.g., Facebook, X
- Text messaging
- Phone calls
- LED message board
- Coffee talks with the Mayor or City Manager
- Success stories in City Manager's weekly updates

Ongoing public engagement will help keep the plan responsive and grounded in the needs of the community it was developed to serve.

APPENDIX A: PROCESS TIMELINE

The table below outlines the meetings and activities that City leaders and staff participated in over the last several months to develop the strategic plan.

January 13, 2025	Project Management Team Kick-Off Meeting
January 21, 2025	Leadership Team Meeting #1 – Goal Review & Strategy Development
February 4, 2025	Leadership Team Meeting #2 – Strategy Refinement
February 10, 2025	Project Management Team Planning Meeting
February 27, 2025	Council Retreat – Goal Review, Strategy Review & Refinement, Tactics Development and Monitoring & Evaluation Forecast
March 27, 2025	Project Management Team Planning Meeting
June 20, 2025	Project Management Team Planning Meeting
August 26, 2025	Council Meeting – Strategic Plan Briefing
September 8, 2025	Council Meeting – Strategic Plan Adoption