

WHEATON PARK DISTRICT Strategic Plan







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Submitted by:

Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC
2211 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04102
207.541.2200

Lisa Paradis

Principal | Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC
lparadis@berrydunn.com

Nikki Ginger, Project Manager

Manager | Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC
nikki.ginger@berrydunn.com

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Board of Commissioners

- **John Vires**, President
- **William Barrett**, Vice President
- **Bob Frey**
- **John Kelly**
- **Terry Mee**
- **Linda Pecharich**
- **Angela Welker**

Leadership Team

- **Mike Benard**, Executive Director
- **Vicki Beyer**, Director of Recreation
- **Greg Bockheim**, Cosley Zoo Director
- **Matt Jay**, Human Resources Manager
- **Adam Lewandowski**, Director of Athletic Programs & Facilities
- **Daniel Novak**, Director of Arrowhead Operations
- **Donna Siciliano**, Executive Assistant
- **Sandra Simpson**, Director of Finance
- **Margie Wilhelmi**, Director of Marketing

Strategic Planning Team

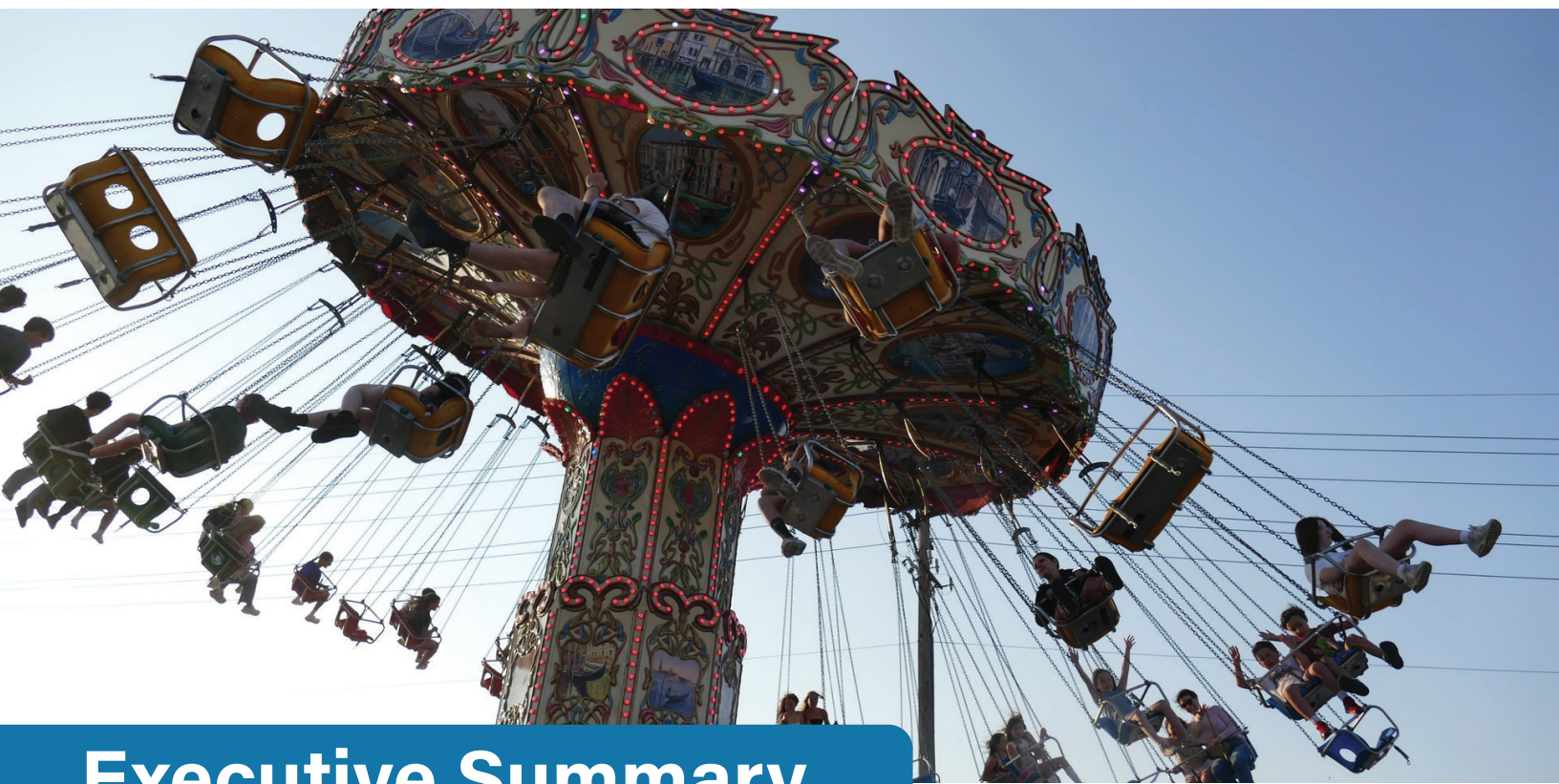
- **Lauren Cali**, Marketing and Social Media Manager
- **Jen Claassen**, Guest Services Manager
- **Alex Diserio**, Parks Plus Fitness Manager
- **Martha Hernandez**, Finance Manager
- **Steve Hinchee**, Superintendent of Planning
- **Joanna Koppang**, Staff Accountant
- **Jamie Martinson**, Superintendent of Recreation Programs
- **Bethany Meger**, Assistant Finance Director
- **Matthew Nations**, Director of Golf
- **Cody Nelson**, Superintendent of Athletic Programs & Facilities
- **Nic Novak**, Superintendent of Projects and Events
- **Samantha O'Malley**, Arrowhead Restaurant Manager
- **Megann Panek**, Mary Lubko Center Manager
- **Kim Prazak**, Assistant Director of Arrowhead Operations
- **Tami Romejko**, Education and Guest Experience Manager
- **Joe Themel**, Fleet Manager
- **Trish Whelan**, Creative Services Manager
- **Matthew Wrobel**, Athletics Fields Specialist

Focus Group Participants

- Board of Commissioners
- Community Members
- District Staff
- Community Partners
- Coaches
- Wheaton Sanitary District
- Cosley Zoo Foundation
- Milton Township
- Wheaton Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission
- WPD Baseball Board
- Dr. Tim Buividas

BerryDunn Consulting Team

- **Nikki Ginger**, Project Manager
- **Barbara Heller**, Subject Matter Expert
- **Dannie Wilson**, Engagement Manager
- **Elsa Fischer**, Subject Matter Expert



Executive Summary

The Wheaton Park District (District) Strategic Plan sets a three-year vision for the District's future, aiming to enhance community life through vibrant, inclusive, and innovative recreational opportunities. Developed with extensive input from community members, partners, and District leadership and staff, this plan reflects a comprehensive and collaborative approach that was informed by various engagements, including the following:

- A total of 405 participants in the community needs survey
- More than 730 visitors to the online engagement portal
- Hundreds of touchpoints at multiple pop-up events
- Focus groups with community members, partners, board of commissioners, and District staff and leadership

Findings from engagement efforts culminated in a new mission, vision, and values for the District:

- **New Mission:** To create vibrant, welcoming spaces and activities that inspire fun, foster connection, strengthen the community, and enrich well-being for all.
- **New Vision:** To be the community leader in offering fun and inclusive experiences inspired by nature, powered by creativity, built on collaboration, and guided by integrity.
- **Core Values:** Community, Respect, Excellence, Adventure, Teamwork, Equity.

Strategic Framework

The strategic plan is structured around the Balanced Scorecard framework—a planning and management tool used by organizations around the world to align business activities with vision and strategy, improve internal and external service, and monitor organizational performance against strategic goals. The Balanced Scorecard focuses on four perspectives and respective themes developed by the District:



Customer:
Service That Shines



Financial:
Financial Synergy



Internal:
Internal Effectiveness



Learning and Growth:
Employee
Empowerment

Each theme is supported by specific objectives and initiatives that are designed to be actionable and measurable:

Service That Shines: Exceed expectations, expand opportunities, and foster loyalty and retention.

Financial Synergy: Increase efficiencies, and reduce waste, generate creative revenue opportunities, and maintain fiscal responsibility.

Internal Effectiveness: Optimize staffing, increase consistencies and streamline processes, and make technology accessible.

Employee Empowerment: Create a positive work environment, encourage development, and communicate effectively.

The District prioritized initiatives by short-term needs and then by longer-term goals (over the next three years). The District will integrate these initiatives into its daily operations, onboarding, and performance evaluation processes, with champions and charter teams leading these efforts to help ensure ongoing alignment with District goals.

This strategic plan demonstrates the District's dedication to continuous improvement, effective community engagement, and operational excellence. By embedding the plan into its culture and processes, the District will deliver meaningful results and uphold its mission, vision, and values for years to come.



Introduction

An award-winning and community-supported district based in the western suburbs of Chicago, the Wheaton Park District manages a diverse range of offerings, including a 27-hole golf course, 54 parks, nature area, museum, zoo, two aquatic facilities, a water park, mini-golf, skate park, safety city, fitness center, and over 800 acres of open space. The District also offers more than 2,500 early childhood, teen, adult, and senior programs and hosts more than 85,000 people at annual special events.

Recognizing the importance of continuing to plan for the future and supporting the growing needs of its community members, in September of 2024, the District set out to update its previous Strategic Plan. Listening to the community, partners, and staff was paramount to planning the three-year vision of the District. Therefore, the process began with launching an extensive community engagement effort that included a community needs survey, multiple pop-up events, focus group interviews, and an online engagement tool. Findings from these efforts—which revealed a great appreciation for the District and its staff—helped to inform the foundation of the strategic planning process: a new mission statement, vision statement, and values.

The process was comprehensive and collaborative, directed by both leadership and the strategic planning team. It featured several workshops and an organization-wide employee survey to gather feedback on the mission, vision, and values. Additionally, leadership and the strategic planning team established key themes and objectives. The process culminated in an implementation workshop and the development of an action plan, during which senior leadership discussed short- and long-term initiatives and began formulating supporting tactics.



District Mission

Previous Mission

To enhance the quality of community life through a diversity of healthy leisure pursuits and heightened appreciation for our natural world.

New Mission

To create vibrant, welcoming spaces and activities that inspire fun, foster connection, strengthen the community and enrich the well-being for all.

District Vision

Previous Vision

We, the Wheaton Park District team, commit to service excellence, financial stability and an enriched quality of life for our stakeholders. We accomplish this through continuous improvement of people and systems while living our values.

New Vision

To be the community leader in offering fun and inclusive experiences inspired by nature, powered by creativity, built on collaboration and guided by integrity.

District Values

INTEGRITY

ADAPTABILITY & GROWTH

COMMITMENT

KINDNESS

SERVICE

FUN

COMMUNITY

RESPECT

EXCELLENCE

ADVENTURE

TEAMWORK

EQUITY

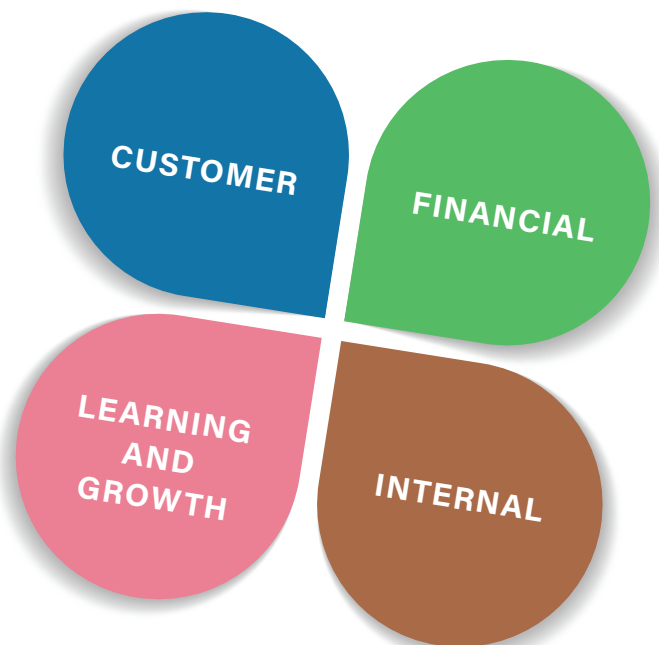


The Balanced Scorecard

The District's Strategic Plan is structured around the Balanced Scorecard framework, which highlights the interconnected cause-and-effect relationships among key perspectives: customers, financial performance, internal support processes, and organizational learning and growth. This scorecard approach targets primary success factors that underpin progress toward fulfilling the District's mission and vision.

The Balanced Scorecard framework includes four themes:

- **Customer:** To achieve our mission and vision, how should we seek to meet our customers' needs?
- **Financial:** To succeed financially, how do we show evidence of our financial stewardship to our customers?
- **Internal Perspective:** To satisfy our customers, which business practices must we do extremely well?
- **Learning and Growth:** To achieve our mission and vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve, as well as develop leaders among the staff?



Theme elements are outlined more specifically below:

Customer Experience

- Customer value
- Customer recruitment and retention
- Quality of services
- Service delivery (access mechanisms, customer requirements, and image)
- Partnerships
- Brand and image

Financial Perspective

- Cost reduction
- Efficiency
- Revenue growth and mix
- Percentage of tax support
- Productivity

Internal Perspective

- Business operations
- Customer management processes (support systems and use of technology)
- Innovation processes
- Regulatory and social processes (safety, environmental)

Learning and Growth Perspective

- Employee capabilities
- Information capital (management of organizational knowledge)
- Organization capital (motivation, empowerment, alignment)



Strategic Plan Hierarchy

The District's Strategic Plan is organized according to a structured hierarchy that begins with broad, high-level strategies and advances toward more detailed, tactical components. The process encompasses:

- Reviewing the mission, vision, and values
- Establishing strategic themes and objectives
- Formulating strategic initiatives

Each subsequent layer further defines the framework supporting the four overarching themes, as demonstrated in the accompanying graphic.

Strategic Themes: This area represents the most macro level of strategic direction, following the four perspectives of customer, financial, internal business support, and learning and growth. They are very broad-based approaches to strategic direction.

Strategic Objectives: This level contains objectives for each theme to create a framework for the parameters of strategic direction. Objectives support the themes. They answer the question, "What do we need to do to reach the strategic themes?" Objectives form the basis of key performance indicators.

Strategic Initiatives: Initiatives support the objectives and provide more detail about how the objectives will be achieved. They have an associated timeline and are categorized according to a short-, medium-, or long-term time frame.

Strategic Themes

In using the Balanced Scorecard, the District developed strategic themes that are broad-brushed organizational descriptions that provide direction. These include:

- **Customer:** Service that Shines
- **Financial:** Financial Synergy
- **Internal:** Internal Effectiveness
- **Learning and Growth:** Employee Empowerment





The District's Strategy Map

Service That Shines			
Customer Perspective	Exceed Expectations	Expand Opportunities	Foster Loyalty & Retention
Financial Synergy			
Financial Perspective	Increase Efficiencies & Reduce Waste	Generate Creative Revenue Opportunities	Maintain Fiscal Responsibility
Internal Effectiveness			
Internal Perspective	Optimize Staffing	Increase Consistencies & Streamline Processes	Make Technology Accessible
Employee Empowerment			
Learning & Growth Perspective	Create a Positive Environment	Encourage Development	Effectively Communicate

Themes, Objectives, and Initiatives

The following section describes the main themes, objectives, and initiatives that will guide the District's activities for the next three years. These initiatives are organized according to the identified themes and objectives to provide a framework for implementation. Each year, they will be reviewed, and staff will develop tactics to assist with execution. The Strategic Plan does not include tactics, as they will be created at the beginning of related work.

Service that Shines

Exceed Expectations	Expand Opportunities	Foster Loyalty and Retention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a cross-departmental service quality team to focus on elevating the customer experience and determining barriers to participation Utilize technology to enhance the customer service experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a process to address needs identified through the Community Needs Survey and community engagement efforts as part of the Strategic Plan Develop partnership criteria and areas of opportunity to supplement District offerings Create an internal strategy to enhance offerings to underserved community members, including those on the sensory disorder spectrum, adults, and those without children Design a strategic framework to identify, evaluate, and prioritize emerging industry trends for potential application within the District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen District brand to increase awareness and recognition

Financial Synergy

Increase Efficiencies & Reduce Waste	Generate Creative Revenue Opportunities	Maintain Fiscal Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a financial education program for staff and public Develop a mechanism to measure resource management, cut waste, and boost community benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow alternative revenue sources Establish standard operating procedures to identify program and service improvements that increase revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance budget development process tools and districtwide transparency Assess the sustainability of operational and capital practices across all funding sources Develop processes to identify priorities, and create a communication and outreach plan to educate the public on a possible referendum that answers the needs identified in the community survey

Internal Effectiveness

Optimize Staffing	Increase Consistencies and Streamline Processes	Make Technology Accessible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify staffing challenges and allocation of labor resources to help ensure a balanced workload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop cross functional team to review internal processes and technologies to help ensure consistencies across the District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build District skills and workforce focused on GIS, mapping, asset management, work order, and facility management tools Develop methods to embrace innovation

Empowered Employees

Create a Positive Environment	Encourage Development	Effectively Communicate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assess the current employee experience and identify areas of improvementEstablish a comprehensive strategy to evaluate and enhance the District's total compensation package, ensuring alignment with organizational goals, market trends, and long-term workforce retention objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Invest in and foster opportunities for consistent staff professional development and advancement throughout the District	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop communication standards and processes that weave effective communication throughout daily operating procedures



Initiatives

To help develop an achievable plan, District leadership divided the initiatives into two phases:

- Short-Term: Over the next year
- Mid- to Long-Term: Within three years

Short-term initiatives are outlined below. Mid- to long-term initiatives will be identified by the strategic planning committee.



Service That Shines

Exceed Expectations

Develop a cross-departmental service quality team to focus on elevating the customer experience and determine barriers to participation

Expand Opportunities

Implement a process to answer needs identified through the Community Needs Survey and engagement efforts as part of the Strategic Plan

Create an internal strategy to enhance offerings to underserved community members, including those on the sensory disorder spectrum, adults, and those without children



Financial Synergy

Maintain Fiscal Responsibility

Assess the sustainability of operational and capital practices across all funding sources

Develop processes to identify priorities, and create a communication and outreach plan to educate the public on a possible referendum that answers needs identified in the community survey



Internal Effectiveness

Optimize Staffing

Identify staffing challenges and allocation of labor resources to help ensure a balanced workload



Empowered Employees

Create a Positive Environment

Assess the current employee experience and identify areas of improvement

Putting the Plan Into Action

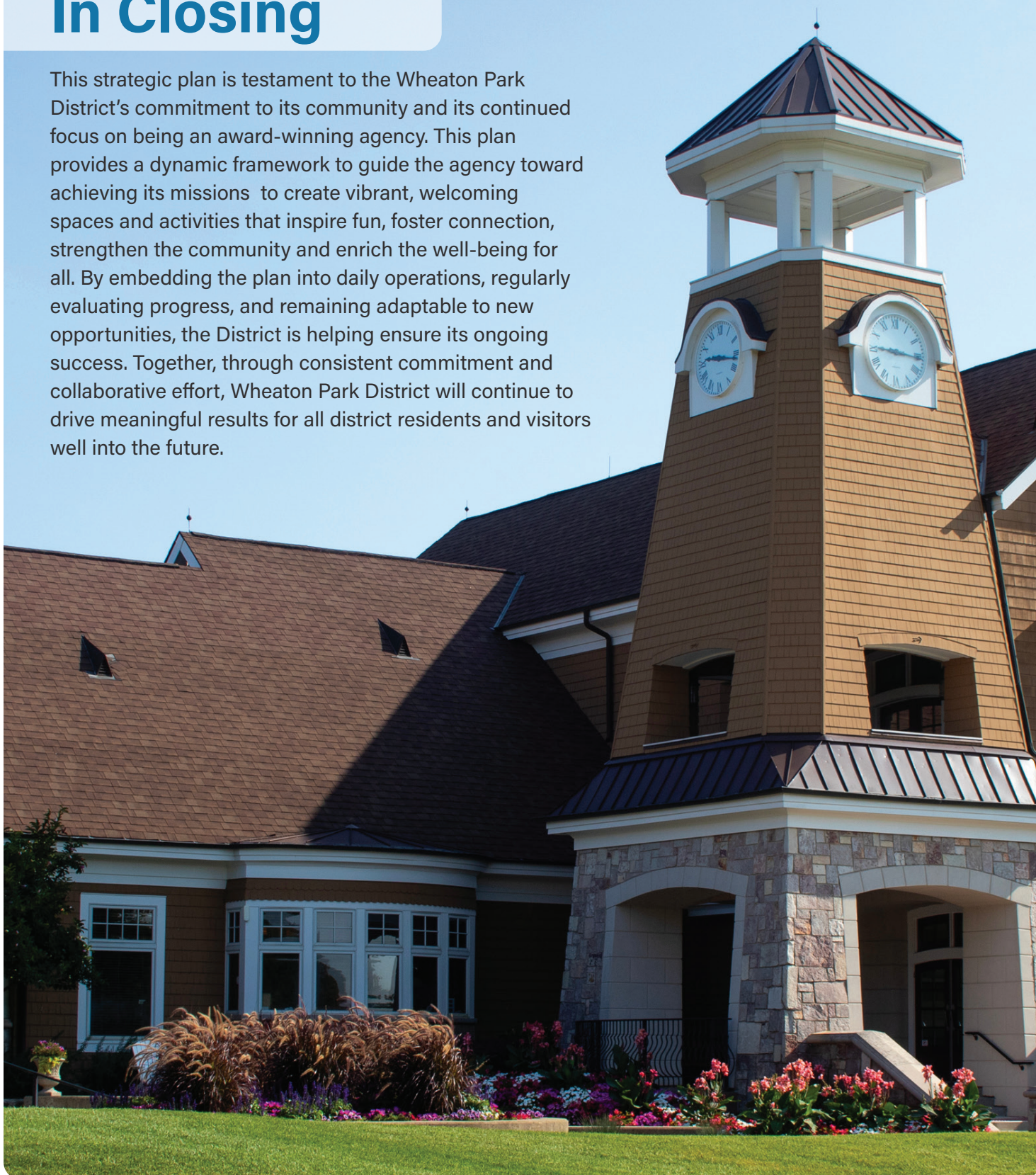
The District realizes that for the Strategic Plan to succeed, it must be part of daily operations. To help ensure that this plan guides the District, the agency is committed to:

- Using the plan as a decision-making reference to prioritize actions.
- Introducing the plan during employee onboarding to reinforce its importance and accountability.
- Making the plan and results visible on project tools and the website.
- Developing charter teams and assigning champions to monitor progress of each initiative.
- Evaluating progress quarterly and adjusting measures as needed for relevance.
- Reporting annually on implementation, with staff developing and tracking supporting tactics.
- Reviewing the plan yearly, updating as necessary, and discussing at annual meetings tied to budget planning.
- Reporting updates to the Board on a semi-annual basis.
- Incorporating strategic achievements into performance evaluations.
- Recording and periodically reviewing new ideas to determine if they should replace current initiatives.



In Closing

This strategic plan is testament to the Wheaton Park District's commitment to its community and its continued focus on being an award-winning agency. This plan provides a dynamic framework to guide the agency toward achieving its missions to create vibrant, welcoming spaces and activities that inspire fun, foster connection, strengthen the community and enrich the well-being for all. By embedding the plan into daily operations, regularly evaluating progress, and remaining adaptable to new opportunities, the District is helping ensure its ongoing success. Together, through consistent commitment and collaborative effort, Wheaton Park District will continue to drive meaningful results for all district residents and visitors well into the future.



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