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GREATER BEMIDJI

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN UPDATE

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

February 2022



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This report presents the strategic action plan update for Greater Bemidji, Inc. This report has been developed by Future iQ as part of a five-year strategic plan update for Greater Bemidji, Inc. The results are based on input from a survey and a half-day planning workshop with the Greater Bemidji, Inc Board Members, held on January 25, 2022.

February 2022

Report Prepared by:



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FOREWORD

For the past decade, we at Greater Bemidji have had a very clear vision for our region and a strategic action plan to move us toward the future we all desire for our community. The action plan looks to capitalize on the opportunities we have to grow our region, as well as address the challenges and barriers to our growth.

However, no strategic action plan could have anticipated the past two years. The pandemic has created significant havoc on economies worldwide creating changes that will have a lasting impact. While our region responded quickly in support of our small businesses, the past two years have left a sense of uncertainty about the future. Will our regional and national economies return to “normal”?

When the water is rough, it is always best to look up at the horizon. That is exactly what we are doing here at Greater Bemidji. We are looking up and keeping our eyes focused on our vision for the region—a region that is the state’s emerging regional center having a vibrant downtown, signature quality of life amenities, a thriving entrepreneurial scene, and a growing economy that creates jobs and tax base to support our growth.

While our vision does not change as a result of the pandemic, our tactics (i.e., our strategic action plan) may need to. That is why the Greater Bemidji Board of Directors recently took time to examine current trends and identify any challenges and opportunities the emerge for the greater Bemidji region. In taking a fresh look at our strategic direction, we wanted to ensure that we were taking the best course moving forward.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we do so with a renewed commitment to drive development and promote prosperity throughout the region—to bring life to our vision for the region’s future. While the uncertainty may have required us to pause and assess how best to move forward, it has also given us the determination to keep marching ahead.

Greater Bemidji’s success at moving our region toward its shared vision is based not only in part on the boldness of our strategic action plan. Our recipe also includes a strong Board of Directors, community-minded investors, and committed community partners that share our vision for the future. Thank you to all who work as stewards of the greater Bemidji region.

Sincerely,



Dave Hengel
Executive Director



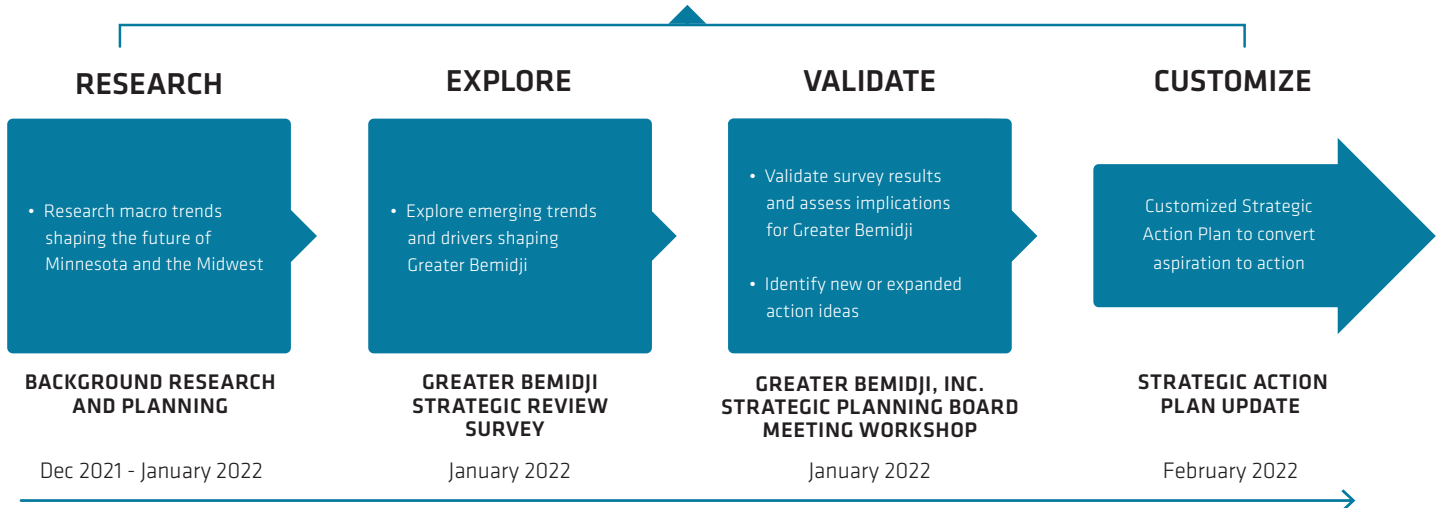


1.0 INTRODUCTION

Greater Bemidji's strategic planning process took place from December 2021 to February 2022. The overall strategic planning process developed for Greater Bemidji considered the potential elastic and inelastic impacts of the ongoing covid pandemic. Before the Board Meeting, members were asked to take a Strategic Review Survey that aimed to explore future perceptions and status of the Greater Bemidji area and organization. Their responses formed the basis for discussion at the January 25 Board Meeting which took place both in-person and virtual format.

Greater Bemidji's strategic planning process enabled Board Members to take a 'deep dive' into aspirations for the future of the organization.

GREATER BEMIDJI STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN UPDATE



"I am most proud that our region has a great staff and dedicated Board Members that truly want to make a difference and are dedicated to growth and innovation. I believe that is a difference maker and is not duplicated in surrounding communities."

- Strategic Review Survey Respondent



2.0 SETTING THE STAGE – CURRENT BEMIDJI ACTION PLAN

There is strong consensus among Greater Bemidji Board Members that the current Greater Bemidji Action Plan has served the organization well. The current plan is structured in five main strategic areas.

Current Greater Bemidji Action Plan Active Projects - August 2021

The success of this strategic planning initiative is dependent on continued strong Greater Bemidji Board Member leadership and its implementation of the plan.

ENCOURAGE	GROW	SUPPORT	PROMOTE	PURSUE
Encourage Entrepreneurs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• LaunchPad• Launch Minnesota Regional Hub• MakerSpace• Community Navigator Program (Female and BIPOC-focused support)• Emerging Entrepreneur Loan Program (Female and BIPOC-focused funding)	Grow, Attract, Retain Talent <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minnesota Innovation Initiative (MI2)• 218 Relocate• Bemidji Works• Community Concierge• Bemidji Area Workforce Development Institute	Support Business Growth and Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grow Bemidji Business Expansion and Retention Initiative• Provide Gap Financing• Access Federal, State and Regional Incentives• Continued COVID-19 Support	Promote the Region/Corporate Recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NorthStar Pellets• Site Selectors Visits• 218 Relocate (Corporate)• Bemidji Alliance Co-Promotion	Pursue Bold Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rail Corridor Redevelopment• Sports/Wellness Complex• Wolfe Day Center• Childcare Expansion

This strategic plan update is intended to enhance the current plan by adding action areas that align with current and new emerging needs in the community. The pandemic has accelerated macro trends that were already occurring across the country. The Greater Bemidji Board has carefully considered the pandemic impacts and puts forth this update to help the Greater Bemidji community recover and thrive.

“Bemidji recently experienced rapid growth from an economic and population perspective. The trajectory has since stabilized, some of which could be attributed to the pandemic. Feature amenities are needed to continue to attract businesses and saturate the labor market. The community has the ability to execute upon said initiative, but alignment is needed amongst various interest groups throughout the region.”

- Strategic Review Survey Respondent



3.0 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

3.1 STRATEGIC REVIEW SURVEY – IDENTIFYING KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

To analyze the perceived impact of key drivers and influences on the Greater Bemidji area, Board Members were asked a series of questions pertaining to the following key drivers with accompanying descriptions:

- **Evolution of resource economy:** New technology; changes in land ownership; new plant-based products (e.g. bio-plastics).
- **Changing macro-economic landscape:** Larger corporations; new businesses and models (shift to online); trade tensions; macro-economic disparities.
- **Challenging local business environment:** Competition with other regions; variable innovation and entrepreneurship levels; skills and supply chain issues.
- **Technology and automation:** High-tech driven; impacts of AI and process automation; displacement of traditional technologies.
- **Quality of regional infrastructure:** Aging roads and bridges, power, capacity issues, broadband access.
- **Transformation of energy systems:** Rapid shift to renewables, and displacement of traditional energy systems.
- **Quality of natural resources:** impacts of climate change: Changes to water and environmental quality; soil health and quality; mitigating nutrient run-off.
- **Impacts of changing weather patterns:** Impacts of changing weather patterns; extreme events; implications for land-use and transportation.
- **Suitability of housing supply:** Availability, affordability, and suitability of existing housing; regional proximity to employment bases and concentrations.
- **Surge in funding sources:** Sort to medium-term boost in government funding; (includes all forms of Government stimulus and payments, such as trade support).
- **Impacts of pandemic:** Medium to long term impacts of disruption; acceleration of trends such as automation; shift to remote and flexible work models.
- **Changing consumer demands:** Longer-term changes in consumer demands and sensitivities; increased environmental awareness and sensitivity.
- **Collaborative regional decision-making:** Challenges with political divisions and tensions; ability to collaborate on major regional decisions; inclusivity of decision-making process.
- **Skills and talent gaps:** Challenges with skills and talent gaps; ability for region to attract workers; adapting to new workplace models and systems.
- **Ability to access childcare:** Changing patterns of childcare availability and affordability; and uneven distribution across the region.
- **Changing regional demographics:** Aging rural populations; diversifying urban populations; concentration of population into regional centers.
- **Suitability of educational offerings:** Overall quality, availability, and affordability of education. Distribution and concentration of educational offerings within the region.
- **Overall health and wellness:** Increasing importance and focus on mental health; potential service shortage and provider burnout.
- **Shifts in rural vitality:** Rural population trajectory – static or declining; challenge to retain viability of local economies.
- **Challenge to address equity:** Challenge from government and society to address systemic inequity, especially with minority groups.
- **Increasing importance in place:** Emerging focus on social amenities; importance of placemaking and public spaces; shifts in recreation desires and opportunities.

Macro trends and drivers converge to impact communities over time. Drivers are trends, events, or changes that shape the future.



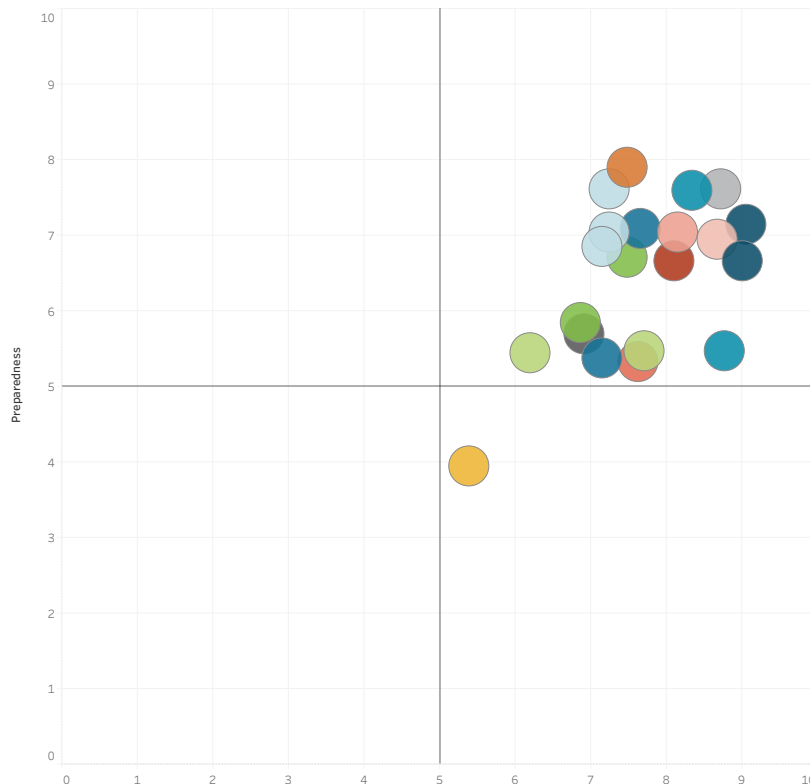
3.1.1 KEY DRIVER ANALYSIS - IMPORTANCE AND REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Survey respondents were asked about the importance of 21 key drivers of change as they relate to the Greater Bemidji area. Specifically, survey participants were asked about the importance of the drivers and how well-prepared the Greater Bemidji area is to deal with future challenges and opportunities associated with each of these drivers. The graph below shows how respondents rated the drivers in importance and preparedness.

The impacts of Covid have emphasized the need for leadership to plan and be prepared for the unexpected. The ability to be flexible and agile in times of duress adds to the resiliency of organizations and communities.

Key Drivers - Importance x Preparedness

X Axis is Importance
Y Axis is Preparedness



Board Survey Results

Drivers

- Ability to access childcare
- Challenge to address equity
- Challenging local business environment
- Changing consumer demands
- Changing macro-economic landscape
- Changing regional demographics
- Collaborative regional decision making
- Evolution of resource economy
- Impacts of changing weather patterns
- Impacts of pandemic
- Increasing importance in place
- Overall health and wellness
- Quality of natural resources: Impacts of climate change
- Quality of regional Infrastructure
- Shifts in rural vitality
- Skills and talent gaps
- Suitability of educational offerings
- Suitability of housing supply
- Surge in funding sources
- Technology and automation
- Transformation of energy systems



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- Almost all the drivers were considered as important for the future of the region. In addition, it was viewed that the region was well prepared for future changes associated with these drivers.
- Survey respondents indicated that changing weather patterns was the outlier – not being as important, and the region not being as prepared.

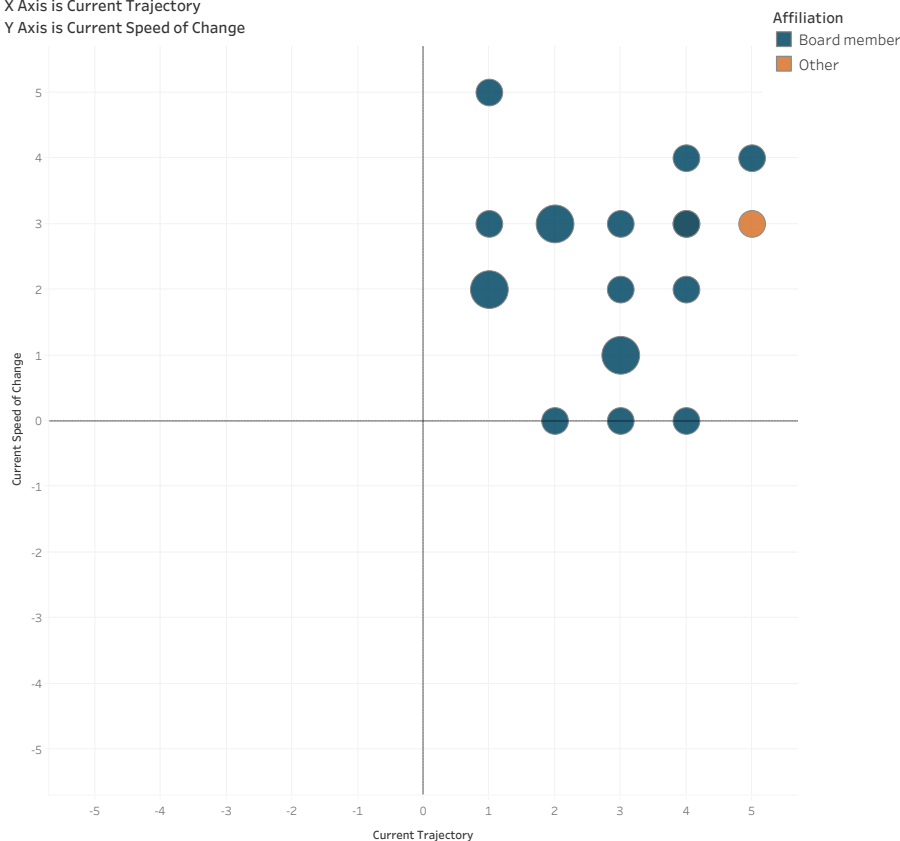


3.1.2 KEY DRIVER ANALYSIS - CURRENT TRAJECTORY AND SPEED OF CHANGE

Many macro trends are reshaping the world that have impacts on communities and how they stay relevant and protect their character. Board Members were asked two questions that measured how satisfied they are about the trajectory of the Greater Bemidji area as well as whether they thought the area should speed up or slow down in its efforts to change. The graph below shows their responses.

Greater Bemidji Trajectory x Speed of Change

X Axis is Current Trajectory
Y Axis is Current Speed of Change



Overall, Board Members are happy about the current trajectory and are excited about the forward momentum of change for the Greater Bemidji area.

Board Survey Results

"I see huge opportunity from the surge of people moving from metro area to rural due to the pandemic and effects, like work from home. We can choose to support it and be part of crafting how it looks for community or we can let it ride and see where we end up. Our community has amazing potential. The downtown health and wellness center is a game changer to retain and attract the talent we want in our region."

- Strategic Review Survey Respondent



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- Overall, Board Members were very happy about the current trajectory of the Greater Bemidji area.
- Board Members thought the region should increase its speed of change to avoid getting left behind.



3.2 MACRO TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE

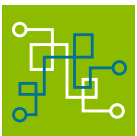
At the January 25, 2022, Strategic Planning Workshop, Board Members explored four areas of emerging macro trends and the forces of change shaping the future of the Greater Bemidji region. Perceptions around the nature of impact of these trends, both in terms of size and timing of impact, were explored to gauge how important participants consider the trends. Participants discussed the emerging trends on global, regional and local scales, and related them directly to Greater Bemidji in terms of how well prepared they considered themselves.

Specifically, the trend areas were:

- Demographics, population and mass urbanization
- Changing macro-economics and societal values
- Energy, food, water and changing climate
- Technology driving change

Of particular relevance to the discussion on trends is the speed and scale of change occurring. Newly developed innovations are being implemented globally and locally at all scales, thereby changing the face of industries and society in a rapid and profound way. Manufacturing is at the forefront of this transformation, but other industries are also quickly developing such as agriculture, health care, biomedical research, infrastructure, energy, transportation and mobility, shipping and logistics, food services, retail, financial services, and tourism.

The emerging macro trends impacting regional areas represent significant 'headwinds' and 'tailwinds' for Greater Bemidji.



Future**Insight**

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Given global trends, there may be 'winners' and 'losers' based on geographic location. Regional collaboration will provide opportunities to leverage assets such as energy, food and water for economic development.
- In the face of the accelerating speed of change, the key to community leadership and resiliency is the ability to anticipate change and remain agile.





3.3 MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES AND INVESTMENT AREAS FOR GREATER BEMIDJI

Increasingly, communities are balancing important societal challenges as they plan their local economic development strategies. Emerging from the pandemic, several macro trends have been accelerated. The long-term impacts of work from home on businesses and workers, for example, is one of those trends. In order to gauge whether Greater Bemidji is addressing the most pressing issues impacting the community, Board members were asked what they saw as the most important issues facing Greater Bemidji over the next 3-5 years. According to survey responses, the following top five issues were identified as:

What are the most important issues facing Greater Bemidji over the next 3-5 years?

- Growing, attracting and retaining a talented workforce
- Growing businesses and tax base in the community
- Combatting the impression that we are a high-crime city and marketing the benefits of our region
- Execution upon the health and wellness center
- Increasing childcare access

Board members were also asked what they thought were the most critical investment areas for the organization over the next 3-5 years. Their responses align with the most important issues outlined above:

- Attract industry large and small
- Growing, attracting and retaining a talented workforce (esp. by improving community amenities and increasing childcare options)
- Promoting the region, pursuing bold initiatives and innovation
- Continue to be an 'out city' that drives change and re-invents tomorrow
- Complete the wellness and rail corridor project

Solving the workforce challenge will be a key focus for Greater Bemidji over the coming years. This offers the opportunity for innovative new thinking about how workplaces are designed and function, and how workforce can be found and supported.

Board Survey Results



"We still have a very large divide between our advantaged and less advantaged population. I would like to see programs, or funding to provide education and assistance to our less advantaged."

- Strategy Review Survey Respondent



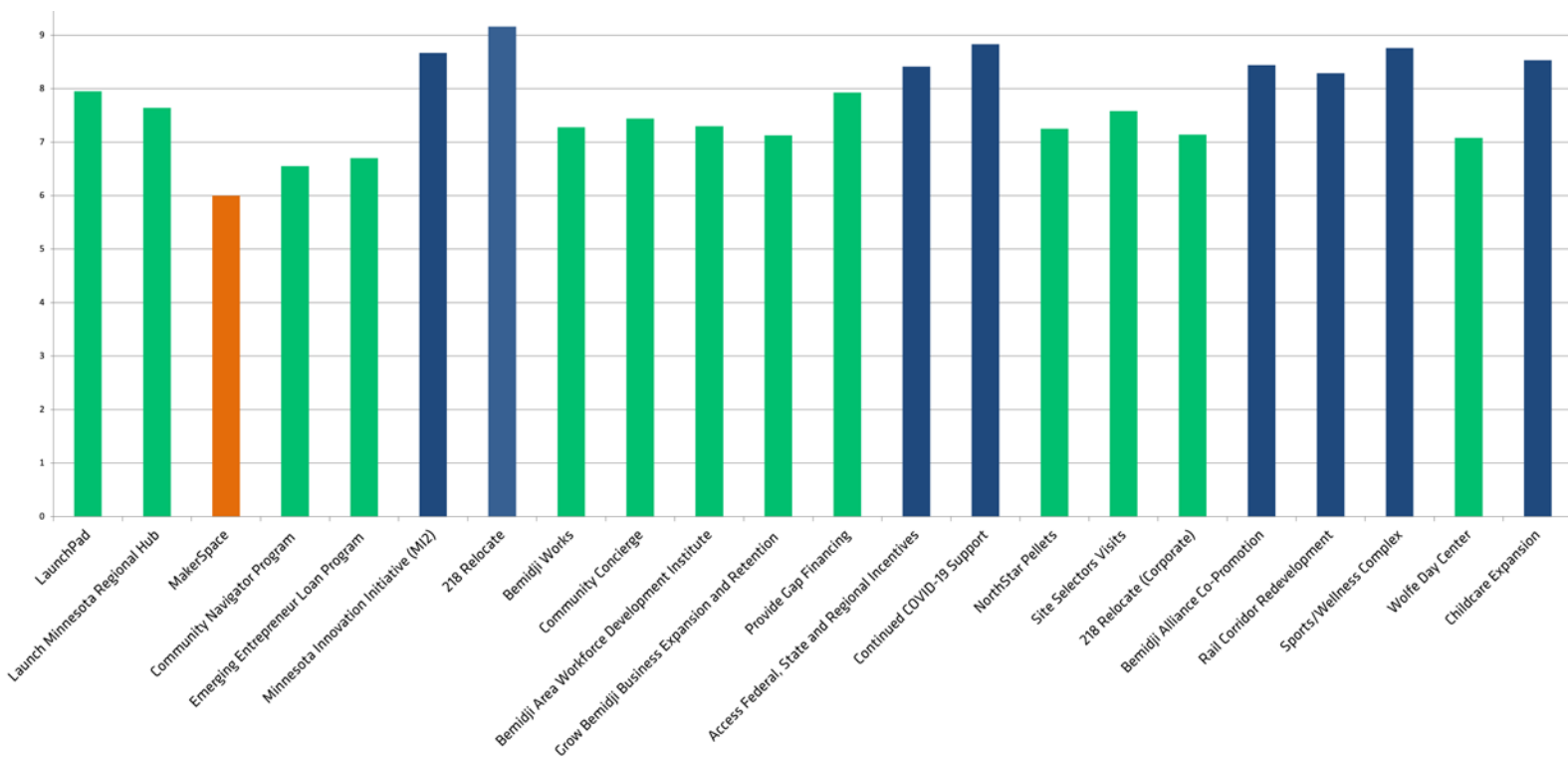
Greater Bemidji, Inc. is a non-profit, charitable organization serving the greater Bemidji region of north-central Minnesota. Its mission is simple: drive development and promote prosperity in the region.

3.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT ACTIVE PROJECTS

To gauge how effective Greater Bemidji's active projects are in advancing the mission of the organization, Board Members were asked to rate the 22 active projects in terms of their effectiveness. Where all of Greater Bemidji's active projects were considered effective in advancing the organization's mission, Makerspace was considered the least effective and 218 Relocate was considered the most effective.

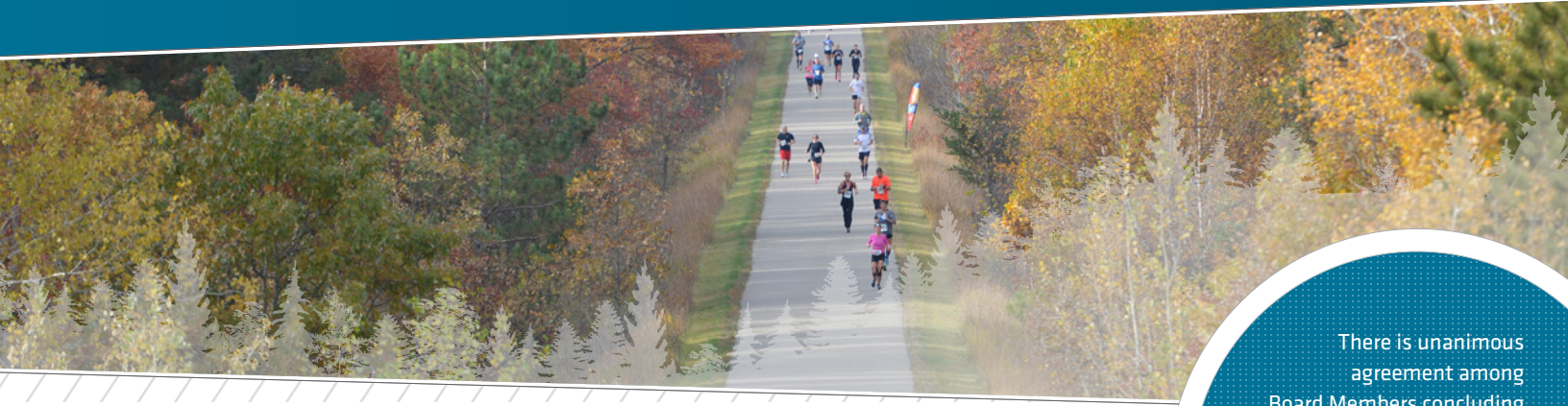
ACTIVE PROJECTS - Effectiveness in advancing the mission of Greater Bemidji

Board Survey Results



"We must address the racial tensions that exist within our community. For people of color moving into our community...we are not welcoming. Our businesses will thrive only if we can attract and retain a diverse workforce. The negative experiences that our employees have in our community is a serious factor that must be addressed community-wide. This has been a problem for decades and can no longer be ignored."

- Strategic Review Survey Respondent



There is unanimous agreement among Board Members concluding that the five core strategic action areas of the Greater Bemidji strategic action plan are serving the organization well and should continue to guide the organization over the next 3-5 years.

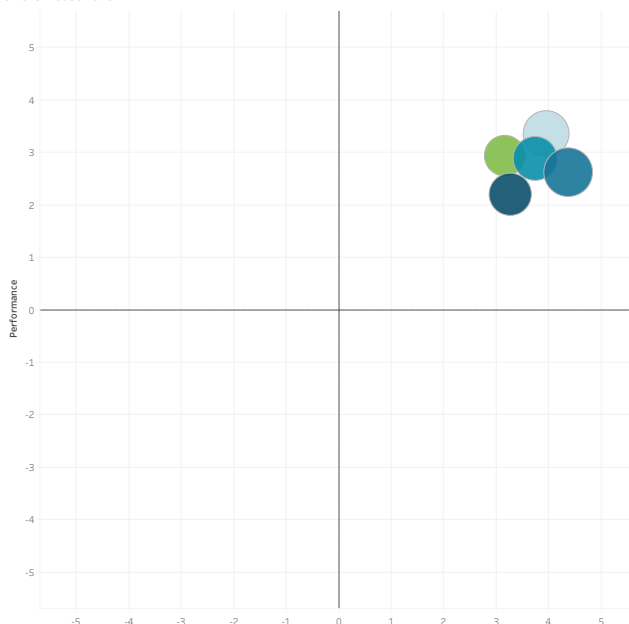
4.0 STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

The current Greater Bemidji Action Plan has five strategic action areas, each guiding 4 or 5 active projects that advance the organization's mission. Board Members were asked to rate the strategic action areas on a scale measuring importance, performance and level of investment over the next 3-5 years. The graph below shows the aggregated responses to the following questions:

- Over the next 3-5 years, do you think these major strategic action areas will become more or less important to shaping the future of the Greater Bemidji Area?
- For these strategic investment areas, how well do you think Greater Bemidji has been performing compared to other areas and regions?
- For these strategic investment areas, over the next 3-5 years, do you think the relative investment of effort and resources should increase or decrease?

Future Importance x Performance x Investment

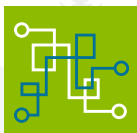
X Axis is Future Importance
Y Axis is Performance
Size is Investment



Drivers

- Growing our economic development toolbox
- Growing, attracting and retaining a talented workforce
- Promoting the region as a great place
- Pursuing bold initiatives
- Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation

Board Survey Results



FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The aggregated results from the survey indicate that Board Members consider all strategic action areas to be performing well, are important and should receive increased investment over the next 3-5 years.
- The location of all the strategic action area bubbles in the upper right quadrant of the graph reinforces that all the strategic areas should be reinforced over the next 3-5 years.



5.0 CREATING THE FUTURE PATHWAY – NEW AND EXPANDED ACTION IDEAS

Board Meeting Workshop

As part of the January Board Meeting, participants broke into small group discussion to brainstorm ways to enhance or further strengthen the existing strategic action areas. Below are the ideas related to each strategic action area.

Strategic Action Area	New and Expanded Action Ideas
Encourage Entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on “Makers and Highly Skilled” people to bring your businesses here or build a business here. • Launchpad: “Step on the gas” Associate building the economy with your idea.
Grow, Attract, Retain Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to leverage ‘summer residents’ as a reservoir or businesses or talent which could move here (We have residents from Illinois, Iowa, Colorado, Grand Forks/North Dakota). • Harness labor availability; reach the indigenous populations of the area. Improve alignment with tribal leadership and EDSs to improve each area.
Support Business Growth and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources to local businesses to help them expand (may need to facilitate planning to help them envision expansion/stability/succession planning for individuals and businesses) Target resources (professionals). • Increase the tax base.
Promote the Region/ Corporate Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be the leadership for our community in positively spreading the word of Bemidji (what is our 30 second speech showing opportunity?) • Redefine ‘great place’ and promote the differentiation. Leverage area benefits/natural resources/water/recreation and connect to economic development. Message more succinctly and build on our natural advantages. • Market to social responsibility – recycling, renewable energy, etc.
Pursue Bold Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand ideas/bold initiatives (game changers) that support economic development. Think outside the box (example: Biomass in the Midwest – what does that mean for opportunities?) Let this be the catalyst for an ‘Idea Group’. • Create a bold initiative for medical and healthcare. • Potential to shift to an outdoor recreation economy; create ‘curated packages’ for visitors; managed experiences



6.0 STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Board Meeting Workshop

When asked, Board Members did not think any strategy areas were missing from the current plan. The update discussions centered around expanding and/or strengthening the current strategic action areas of the plan as the world emerges from the pandemic. It was acknowledged that some of the impacts of the pandemic were elastic (conditions would return to as they were before) and others inelastic (change was permanent), and that these conditions should be taken into account when updating the plan.

During the discussions, a series of overarching themes and comments emerged, including:

- A niche could be the region's cultural diversity
- Add protection of the environment as an element for promoting the region
- Appeal to younger generations by changing 'recreation' to 'way of life'
- Address economic development more as a social issue, esp. in the areas of childcare (need innovative solutions), housing, and healthcare – while at the same time being conscious of our mission (are we steering or rowing?)
- Collaborate with the Envision Bemidji 2030 project to incorporate the values of the region
- In growing, attracting and retaining workforce, we need to be more creative in ways to include the tribal members to grow our workforce
- Understand what our role is in the community for keeping the community safe (Better understand connection of crime statistics, childcare, transportation and housing)
- Recognize and explore the potential to shift to an outdoor recreation economy; curated packaging/managed experiences
- Focus on future opportunities bases on the bio-economy



“I believe as a community, in partnership with multiple entities, we are more than ever aligned with forward looking opportunities. Not to say that we do not still have challenges, but I believe our future is heading in the right direction, especially compared to our peer regions.”

- Strategy Review Survey Respondent



7.0 KEY METRICS TO MEASURE PROGRESS

Board Meeting Workshop

Understanding and measuring progress will be an important part of implementing the updated Strategic Action Plan. The measures should address the plan's action areas and provide for periodic review of progress. Used correctly, such metrics can provide a powerful feedback loop to understanding the effectiveness of investment in programs and identify emerging gaps. Board Members discussed various ways to measure success that could be applied to the five key strategic action areas of the plan:

- Degree to which the goals of individual programs are being met
- Have the projects moved the needle on our organizational success?
- Conduct surveys to gain a local perspective on the success of a program or service
- Increase of new initiatives around emerging opportunities
- To what degree do our programs contribute to shared prosperity within the community?
- Population growth

It was noted that the notion of fulfillment is different to many people. While tangible measures such as money or number of permits may be important to some, happiness and time spent with family or friends might be priorities for fulfillment. Overall, it was generally recognized that it is important to be sensitive to blind spots, especially from a regional perspective, and that shared prosperity should be an overarching value in determining success.

“There are things happening in our community that give me hope that we are looking to the future. Leveraging our resources to recruit new families, Wellness Center project with corresponding revitalization of downtown. Elected officials more willing to tackle longstanding issues in our community such as poverty, economic development and crime. All are positive indicators.”

- Strategic Review Survey Respondent

Strategic plans are 'living documents' specific to each organization. Not only to they require alignment with past planning, but an honest, in-depth look ahead to the continually evolving aspirations of an organization's leaders for the future.





8.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Greater Bemidji Board Members have engaged in the strategic planning process with great enthusiasm. Their passion and interest ensured the discussions were thoughtful, and the outcomes reflective of the myriad of perspectives that exist within the organization. This dedication is reflective of the deep commitment participants have to the future of Bemidji. Future IQ would like to acknowledge the substantial background support from Dave Hengel. His time and effort were greatly appreciated.

2021 Board of Directors

- Barb Smith, *Regional President*, RiverWood Bank
- Jess Frenzel, *Controller*, Knife River Materials
- Suasn Jarvis, *President*, Sanford Health of Northern Minnesota
- Phil Verchota, *Retired*, Deerwood Bank
- Pete Aube, *Retired*, PotlatchDeltic
- Ryan Baer, *Senior VP/COO*, Security Bank USA
- Jason Brodina, *Owner*, Choice Therapy
- Mary Eaton, *President/CEO*, The Idea Circle, Inc.
- Jared Echternach, *President and CEO*, Beltrami Electric Coop
- Jake Ellefson, *Area Manager*, Otter Tail Power Company
- Kevin Erpelding, *Owner*, Corner Garage Sales and Rental
- Bob Fitzgergerald, *Director of Operations*, Kraus-Anderson Construction Company
- Shelly Geerdes, *CEO*, Pinnacle Marketing Group
- Dr. Faith Hensrud, *President*, Bemidji State University & Northwestern Technical College
- Steve Hill, *Owner*, Hill's Plumbing and Heating
- Erik Hokuf, *Owner*, AirCorps Aviation
- Gary Johnson, *CEO*, Paul Bunyan Communications
- Mike Karvakko, *President*, Karvakko
- Gretchen Knutson, *Associate VP*, Delta Dental of Minnesota
- Jim Lucachick, *Beltrami County Commissioner*
- Tim Lutz, *Superintendent*, Bemidji Independent School District
- Jorge Prince, *Mayor*, City of Bemidji
- Mitch Rautio, *Owner*, Specklebelly, LLC
- Micah Ricke, *Director of Product Development*, TEAM Industries
- Hugh Welle, *President*, First National Bank Bemidji
- Karen Weller, *Executive Director*, Bemidji Regional Airport





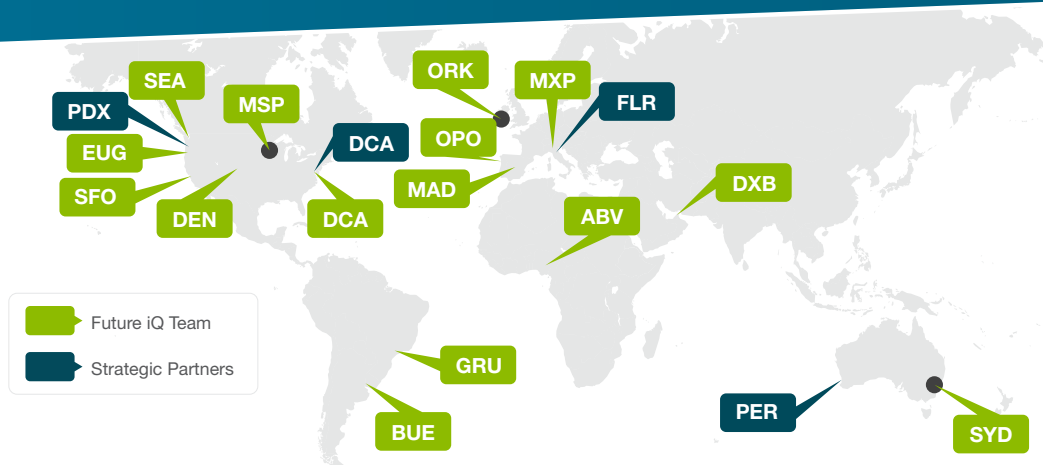
9.0 FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on Greater Bemidji, please contact:



David Hengel, *Executive Director*
Greater Bemidji, Inc.
102 First Street West, Suite 101
Bemidji, MN 56601
Phone: (218) 444-5757
Email: dhengel@greaterbemidji.com
www.greaterbemidji.com





10.0 ABOUT FUTURE IQ

Future iQ specializes in applying innovative tools and approaches to assist municipalities, organizations, regions and industries shape their economic and community futures. With nearly two decades of experience, the company has a global clientele spanning three continents.

To learn more about Future iQ, and our recent projects visit www.future-iq.com or by email at info@future-iq.com

Workshops and Report Prepared by:



David Beurle
CEO, Future iQ



Heather Branigin
VP, Foresight Research

