VISION ROMULUS – OUR COMMUNITY, OUR FUTURE

VISION AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

CITY OF ROMULUS, MICHIGAN, USA | JANUARY 2023

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This report presents the Vision and Strategic Action Plan that has been developed following extensive community engagement undertaken during the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future planning process. Beginning in July 2022 through January 2023, the engagement process included Community Surveys, five Focus Group sessions, and the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future Think-Tank workshop. This engagement process was designed to provide an open, inclusive, and transparent platform for community members to help create a shared vision for Romulus, looking out to 2030.

This report represents Future iQ's analysis of the engagement outcomes, and how this data has informed the identification of a preferred future and strategic pillars. The Key Strategic Pillars have been developed from the community input gathered during the visioning process.

The reports and associated data analysis are available on the project portal:

https://lab2.future-iq.com/vision-romulus/

REPORT PREPARED BY:

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This report lays out the findings from each step in the visioning process. The process identified key priorities for the future of Romulus. Community members imagined and considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions. The process then drilled down deeper into what people saw as the preferred future for Romulus. This understanding helps lay the groundwork for establishing the route to this preferred future and will inform the City of Romulus regarding future planning efforts.

SNAPSHOT - REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THIS REPORT

STRONG ALIGNMENT AROUND THE PREFERRED FUTURE

Throughout the planning process, community members have worked together to identify a shared future vision for the Romulus community. There has been a very strong alignment of responses, with most people sharing a similar desire for the future of the community. In total, over 1,000 people have had input in the visioning process, which creates a robust foundation to the vision and actions.

DESIRE FOR COMMUNITY EVOLUTION

There is a strong desire to see the Romulus community evolve. People want a more forward-looking community, that intentionally embraces and leans into change. A high priority is placed on innovative education, creating strong social connectivity, and building a safe, vibrant, and engaged community fabric.

LEVERAGE GEOGRAPHIC POTENTIAL

Community participants expressed a desire for Romulus to take a more aggressive approach to leveraging the competitive strategic positioning as a transportation hub, in a key peri-urban location. The focus should be on building community infrastructure for the future, that appeals to emerging businesses and workforce.

PRIORITIZE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Throughout the process, a common theme was excitement that things were beginning to happen in Romulus. Participants repeatedly expressed a desire to be engaged, informed, and included.

1.2 | PROJECT TIMELINE

During the process, community members imagined and considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions. The process identified a shared preferred future for Romulus.

The Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future Vision and Strategic Action Plan represents the final element of an extensive visioning process that started in July 2022 and concluded in January 2023. This report represents Future iQ's analysis of the process, and how the engagement data has informed the identification of a preferred future and key strategic focus areas for Romulus. The key themes and aspirations that emerged from the engagement process are included within the "strategic pillars" and further explored in the "key action areas" of the report.

VISION ROMULUS - OUR COMMUNITY, OUR FUTURE

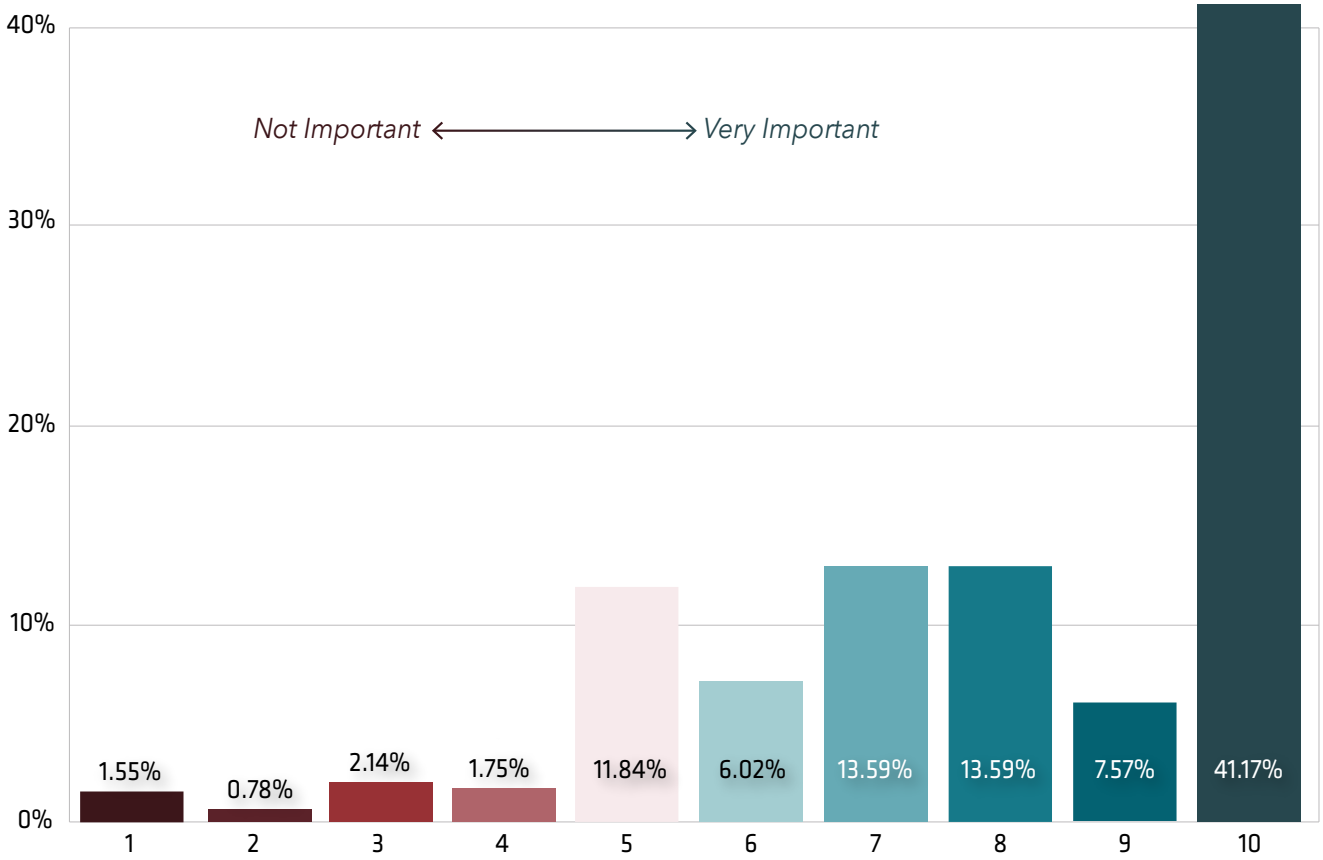
PHASE 1 **Future Visioning**	PHASE 2 **Action Planning**	**ROAD MAP**
Community Survey Think-Tank Survey Results	Think-Tank Report Focus Groups Youth Session	Romulus Vision Plan City Presentation Community Presentation
AUGUST - SEPTEMBER	**OCTOBER - DECEMBER**	**JANUARY 2023**

1.3 | IMPORTANCE OF VISIONING TO THE ROMULUS COMMUNITY

With the majority of community members believing that a shared vision is very important, this process is a foundational building block for the City's planning for the future.

The visioning process was an opportunity for the community to come together and shape the future trajectory of Romulus, looking out to 2030. As the chart below displays, community members had a strong belief in the importance of a shared vision and this was reflected in responses to ***Community Survey #1*** which launched the visioning process in 2022.

QUESTION: HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK IT IS TO HAVE A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF ROMULUS?



DataInsight

- Maintaining a shared vision for the community will involve clear and consistent communication that reaches all corners of the Romulus community, in various forms and formats.
- Applying the shared vision for the community will require regular check-ins by the City's Departments and Council to maintain an aligned approach to decision-making in the future.

2.0 | THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING THE 'PREFERRED FUTURE'

Romulus community members spent many valuable hours contributing to the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process. This momentum will be carried forward in future planning efforts by the City.

2.1 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The community of Romulus embarked on a participatory engagement process involving ***Community Surveys***, a ***Think-Tank***, and ***Focus Group sessions***. This engagement process was intended to create a unified community vision which will serve as the foundational support for future planning efforts.

Extensive Community Survey
Aug. - Oct. 2022

Scenario-Based Think-Tank Workshop
Sept. 21-22, 2022

Focus Group Sessions
Nov. 9-10, 2022

Community Survey #2
Dec. 2022

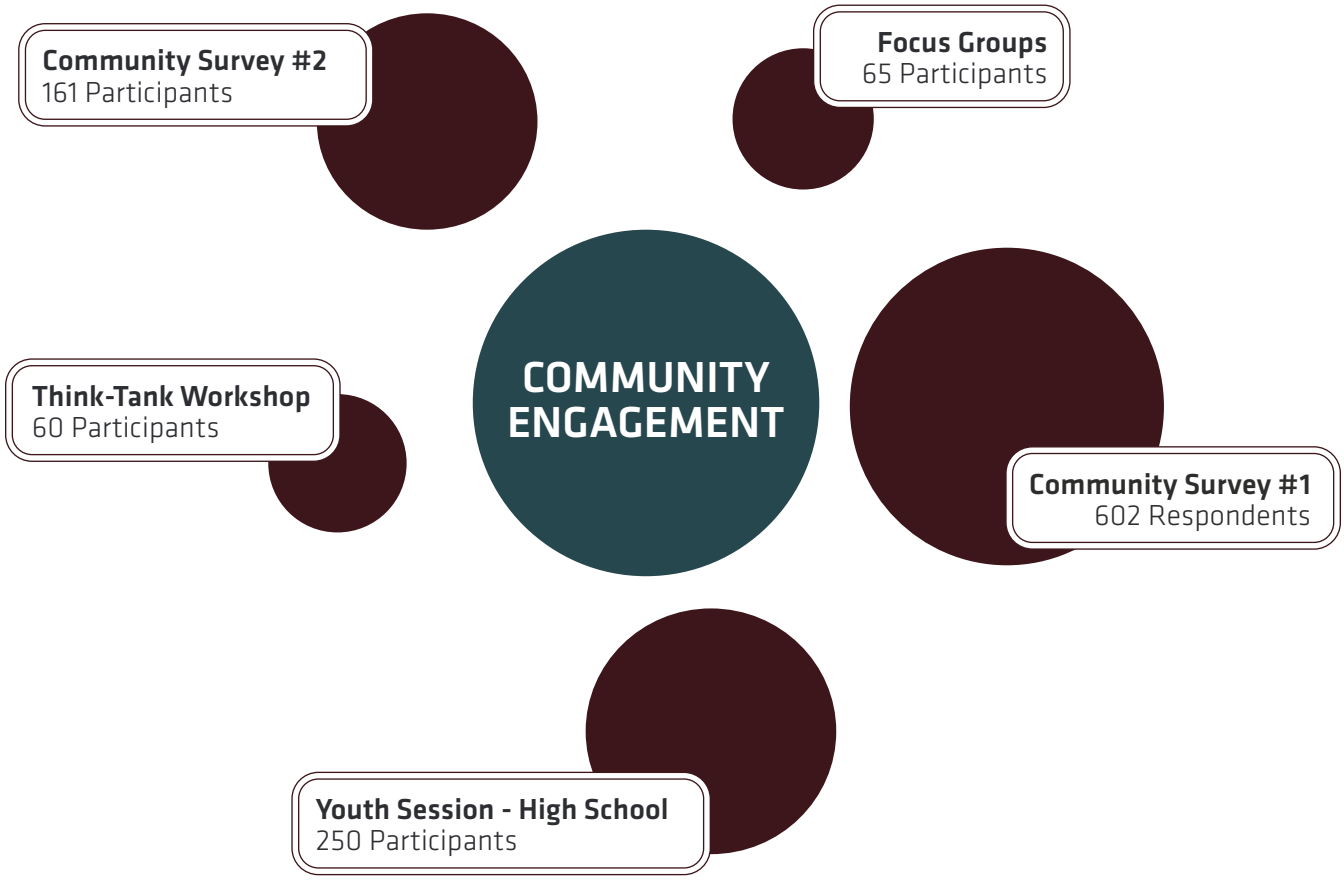
Final Report Presentation
Jan. 23-24, 2022

Data-Driven Consensus-Based Vision
Jan. 2023

Approximlately 1000 Romulus residents took part, at some point, in the visioning process. This shows clear commitment by the residents but also strong leadership and motivation by the City Mayor and Staff.

2.2 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Community engagement was the key feature of the visioning project. The engagement was offered via two online (and hard copy) surveys, a two evening Think-Tank workshop and five focus group sessions. Online, the project portal provided regular updated information and will continue to serve as a central location where community members can go to view reports and information on the process.



DataInsight

- A key feature of the visioning process was the response rate to Community Survey #1, with over 600 responses. There were almost 250 responses by high school students, which strongly represented the "youth" voice.
- One of the key community engagement features for the visioning process was the project portal, which served as a central location where community members would go to find project information, take surveys, view survey results and data visualization, reports and register to participate in project events. To explore the project portal, please visit ***https://lab2.future-iq.com/vision-romulus/***.

2.3 | SCENARIO-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING THE FUTURE

The Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process was built on a ***scenario-planning methodology***. The Think-Tank held in September 2022, began with examining external and internal trends shaping the future of Romulus. More detail on the process is available in the ***Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future Think-Tank Report***. (For more information, visit ***https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Romulus-thinktank-report-WEB.pdf.***)

FUTURE-SPLITTING QUESTIONS™

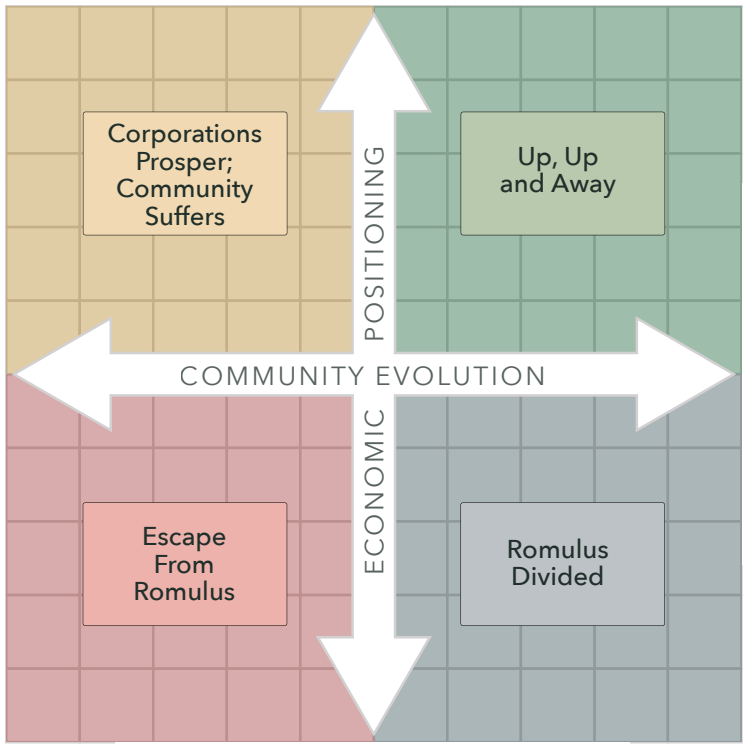
The scenario-based planning methodology is based on two key "Future-Splitting Themes" represented by the axes in the scenario matrix. Each axis represents a continuum with different future directions and outcomes at each end.

Romulus takes an aggressive approach to leveraging the competitive strategic positioning as a transportation hub, in a key peri-urban location. The focus is on building community infrastructure for the future, that appeals to emerging businesses and workforce.

Leveraging Geographic Potential

Maintain a focus on established and traditional values, such as safety and the 'quiet rural feel.' Community neighborhoods gradually evolve in their own way. The focus is on sensible and careful community change and evolution over time.

Maintain Status Quo



'Progressive' Change

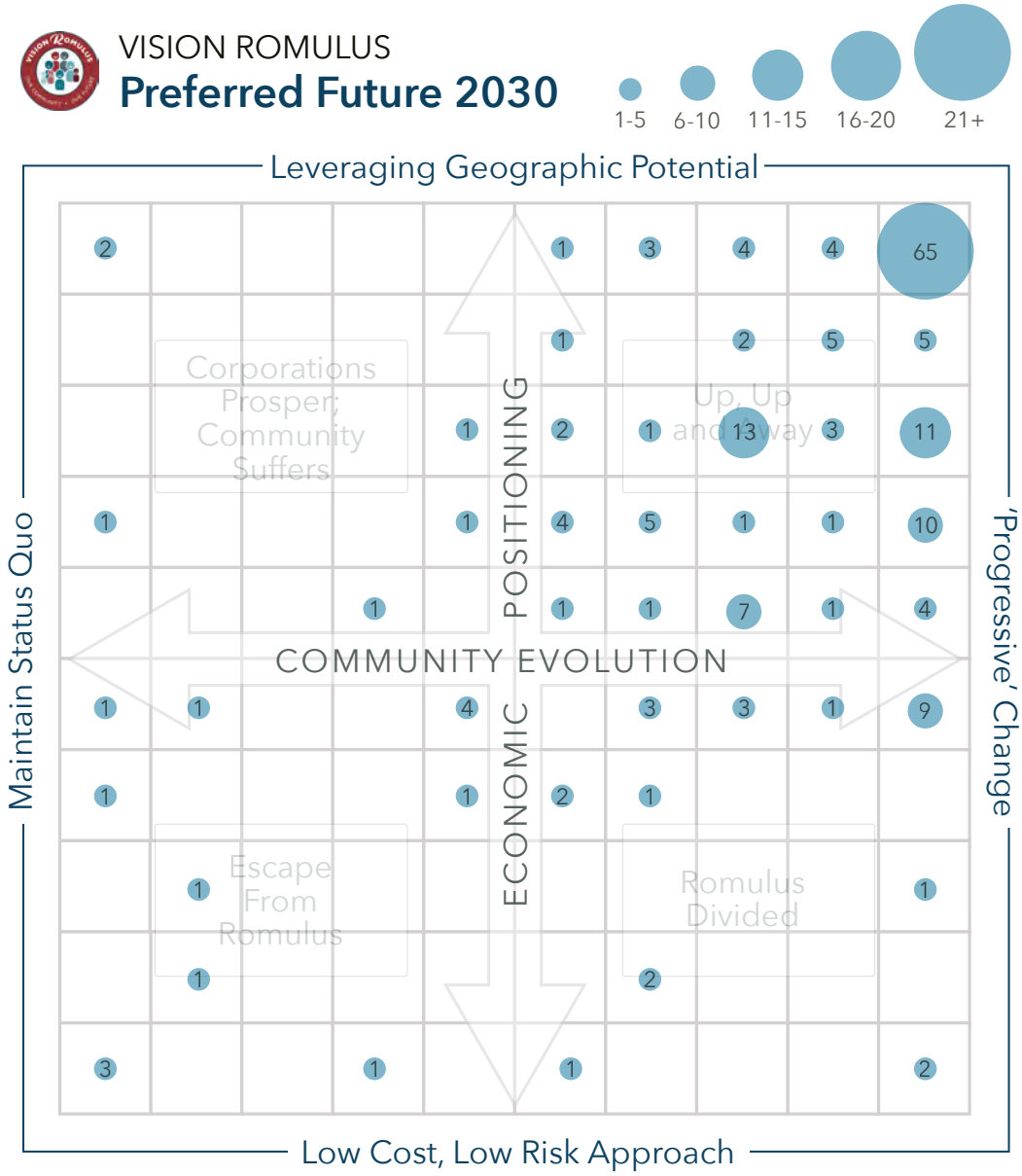
Forward looking community, that intentionally embraces and leans into change. High priority is placed on innovative education, creating strong social connectivity, and building a safe, vibrant and engaged community fabric.

Low Cost, Low Risk Approach

Investments in economic development and infrastructure are focused on minimizing cost and reducing risk to community. Economic development is primarily driven by outside investors, and policy and zoning tools.

2.4 | IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED FUTURE

During the Think-Tank, participants were asked to consider what they thought was the preferred future for Romulus looking out to 2030. This was derived by laying a 10x10 grid over the scenario matrix, creating the option for 100 slightly different versions of the future. The scenario matrix is defined by the main continuums (axes), the end point descriptions and the scenario narratives. The responses from the participants were grouped to create heatmaps. The following diagram shows the main concentration of responses in the least desired, expected and preferred futures for Romulus in 2030.



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- The heatmaps showed significant groupings of responses to the least desired, expected and preferred futures, and these are shown in the above chart. These responses were also validated during the Focus Group discussions.
- The responses highlight a desire to create the "Up, Up and Away" scenario, which requires significant movement on the 'Economic Positioning' axis, and the 'Community Evolution" axis. This data laid the foundation for the creation of the Community Vision and Strategic Pillars.

3.0 | COMMUNITY VISION

In the "Up, Up and Away" approach, the needs of the current and future community are balanced with industrial growth. This Report lays out a series of actions and ideas that can be incorporated into the future planning efforts by the City of Romulus.

The visioning process allowed community members to explore the future evolution of Romulus around the two main themes of 'Economic Positioning' and 'Community Evolution'.

The preferred future identified for the Romulus is called "Up, Up and Away". The preferred future is described as:

The 2030 preferred scenario forecasts a future where there is a balance between Romulus building upon its geographic position in relation to the airport, while enhancing the community fabric and evolution. The characteristics of this scenario convey a future where there is a strong and intentional forward focus on leveraging the competitive geographic positioning of Romulus and building both a homegrown and out of state future workforce. This is accompanied by a deliberate focus on retaining the Romulus 'sense of community' which has always been so valued as well as enhancing that community evolution through encouraging innovative education, retaining, and attracting youth and creating a stronger social connectivity. To retain and attract youth, there is a focus on providing activities and amenities and a strong school district for people to start their families in Romulus. To remain competitive Romulus evolves with new housing, strong environmental practices, and is proud of a downtown main street location and unique neighborhood areas, which meets the social and practical needs of the community.

For more information on the Think-Tank and the description of 'Up, Up and Away,' please visit:

https://lab2.future-iq.com/vision-romulus/

FutureInsight

- Romulus is unique due to its geographic positioning in relation to the airport, Detroit and Ann Arbor. This positioning can bring economic benefits, while retaining and building upon everything that makes Romulus a strong and cherished community.

4.0 | STRATEGIC PILLARS FRAMEWORK

The strategic pillars help to organize future thinking into five important elements for Romulus. These are intended to be the foundational building blocks that support and guide the community towards its preferred future, "Up, Up and Away".

The Strategic Pillars of the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process were developed from the community input and data which was gathered over the course of the entire engagement process. The 'pillars' represent the major themes or topic areas that underpin the preferred future for Romulus, looking out to 2030. The key action areas listed under each pillar are the building blocks to achieve the preferred community future and were generated by each Focus Group session which was held for each pillar. The follow-on community ideas are suggested steps by community members that could be taken to put the community on the path to this preferred future.

FutureInsight

- The Strategic Pillars create a framework that draws together important elements identified by community members as being most critical in terms of the future of Romulus.
- The Strategic Pillars are not intended to solve all of the community's challenges in the short or medium term. Rather, they represent a series of key focus areas that can guide future planning for Romulus.

"One Romulus" - a connected community that shares an identity and vision. United we stand, divided we fall.

4.1.1 | IMPORTANCE OF "ONE ROMULUS"

Throughout the entire visioning process community residents have expressed their deep attachment to the community and the unique social fabric that exists in Romulus. Respondents from across all age demographics, including high school students, have described the close-knit quality of Romulus where 'everybody knows everybody'. This is even though there are four quadrants which make up Romulus, with Detroit international airport in the center of the quadrants. For the community to see themselves as a connected "One Romulus", there will be a need to think as a whole, rather than as four separate areas around the airport. Throughout the process, a common theme was excitement that things were beginning to happen in Romulus. Participants repeatedly expressed a desire to be engaged, informed, and included.

How can Romulus best pivot to a "One Romulus" model by 2030?

Value to **Residents**

- Residents were asked in the Vision Survey about whether it was important to build the "One Romulus" approach. 93% of respondents felt that it was 'important' to 'very important' to build the "One Romulus" connected community that shares an identity and vision.

4.1.2 | KEY ACTIONS: "ONE ROMULUS"

The following key action areas consolidate ideas and priorities identified by the community during the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process in relation to "One Romulus" and the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away".

Assemble an expanded "One Romulus" strategic committee

While community members have expressed the historical and current strong sense of community within Romulus, there is a need to now focus on building the "One Romulus" connected community in an intentional manner. It will be necessary to assemble a dedicated committee to work together with a plan to build this model. Focus Group participants spoke about bringing individuals from across the community to work together to build a more cohesive community. The committee could consist of City Leadership, Pastors, Business Leaders, Chamber of Commerce, Community members from across the four quadrants and the School district with a diverse representation regarding age, background and expertise. Initially the committee would go out to the four quadrants, with the intention of bringing the quadrants together in central locations to meet with the committee. Currently the Mayor has been conducting "One Romulus" meetings in 2022, and these could be strengthened by a broader community-based committee approach.

Create a dedicated "One Romulus" communication plan

A recurring theme throughout the visioning process is the need for stronger, more consistent, and vibrant communications from the City to the community. It has been suggested in the initial community survey that there is a need for a communications focus to better inform the community of what is happening in Romulus. The communications focus would have the brief to build "One Romulus" with an 18-month Communications Strategy which would align and co-exist with the work from the "One Romulus" Strategic Committee. The communications focus would also be a key part of the "One Romulus" Strategic Committee. This work would include a consistent social media approach, as well as newsletters, a new revamped or dedicated website to "One Romulus" and monthly mail outs and PR work with news outlets.

4.1.3 | COMMUNITY IDEAS: "ONE ROMULUS"

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away". Below are their original ideas.

- City needs to provide strong, consistent and vibrant communications to the Community.
- Employ a Communications expert to provide Comprehensive Communications strategy and outreach
- Intentional planning and communication of the Communications Strategy, every 6 months – something with momentum and for people to look forward to and take part in.
- Carry out a 12 month "One Romulus" Roadshow Tour across central Romulus locations – not assigned to the 4 quadrants.

- Rotate events that are centrally located in one area to alternate areas across Romulus.
- One Romulus Meeting of the visioning plan provided by City regarding the next steps. Bring this to each of the 4 quadrants if necessary.
- There is a need to make the 4 quadrants just "One" Romulus.
- Use the Pumpkin Festival as the launch of renewed community pride in Romulus and the establishment of "One Romulus" to break up the city silos.

> *"The Mayor so far is doing a great job at trying to engage residents in future plans. If he remains in office, he will be a huge asset to move the City forward."*
> *- Community Survey #1 Respondent*

- Provide a Community Center for the community to meet up and to share information about events, activities and meet up.

> *"The people you meet are easily the best thing about Romulus, you'll find no shortage of kindness and willpower in Romulus."*
> *- Community Survey #1 Respondent*

- Cultivate the parts of Romulus that the community loves.
- There is a need for more community participation across Romulus and attendance at community events.
- More social infrastructure where the community can get involved with local decision making.
- Provide meeting places, events and activities which will appeal to the diverse community with central locations .
- Develop awareness of what is happening in the community.
- Encourage youth to participate and run student led initiatives.

Romulus, as host community to the Detroit Metropolitan Airport and with proximity to destination centers of Detroit and Ann Arbor, has a real geographic advantage.

4.2.1 | IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHIC ADVANTAGE

The unique position of Romulus in relation to the Detroit Metropolitan Airport and proximity to Detroit and Ann Arbor has been consistently highlighted throughout the visioning process. Community participants expressed a desire for Romulus to take a more aggressive approach to leveraging the competitive strategic positioning as a transportation hub, in a key peri-urban location. The focus should be on building community infrastructure for the future, that appeals to emerging businesses and workforce. The close access to major east and west, and north and south freeways, and major rail routes further contributes to this real geographic advantage. To leverage the unique geographic advantage would 'put Romulus on the map', attract businesses and individuals to Romulus and contribute to building a strong and vibrant local economy.

How can Romulus further leverage its unique geographic positioning to build a stronger local economy and attract businesses and residents to the city?

Value to **Residents**

- Residents were asked in the Vision Survey how important it is to maximize Romulus' desirable location to help build the local economy and attract new businesses and amenities. 92% of respondents felt that it was 'important' to 'very important' to maximize Romulus' desirable location. This would build a stronger local economy and community.

4.2.2 | KEY ACTIONS: GEOGRAPHIC ADVANTAGE

The following key action areas consolidate ideas and priorities identified by the community during the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process in relation to Geographic Advantage and the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away".

Develop a long-term plan to leverage the 'Gateway to Michigan' concept

The Detroit Metropolitan Airport is a major economic driver of Romulus, creating significant employment and attracting supporting businesses such as accommodation and services. The city has an opportunity to partner with the airport and other municipal jurisdictions to help craft a plan where Romulus could gain more business and visitor traffic, with intentional links to the airport economy and travelers. There is an opportunity to define Romulus as the 'Gateway to Michigan' by virtue of surrounding the airport. This could be extended to include an identifiable accommodation and entertainment corridor, that supports and hosts air travelers, as well as offering a regional destination.

Create a cohesive business and residential attraction plan

The visioning process has identified a unique geographic positioning of Romulus, with the potential to become a center of transportation and automated logistics industries. Investment into new businesses of this nature is already occurring and has significant upside potential. This value proposition needs to be clearly articulated and expanded to include the potential for a variety of residential developments. This could attract new residents, who are seeking different housing types and enjoy the rural-urban interface or are seeking the convenient location for regular air travel. Intentional marketing of the plan will be needed to increase the profile and knowledge about Romulus and what it offers.

NOTE: Romulus has over 5,000 acres of vacant property ready for development and expedited approval and development processes. Romulus has numerous economic development tools and incentives to offer incoming businesses. It also has multiple development districts available which include a Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA), a Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Next Michigan Development Corporation (NMDC), and a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ).

4.2.3 | COMMUNITY IDEAS: GEOGRAPHIC ADVANTAGE

The following bullet-points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future, 'Up, Up and Away'. Below are their original ideas.

- Leverage the gateway via the airport and pull from Ann Arbor and Detroit
- Build a central Convention Center which will be hub for visitation
- Develop varied housing options which would attract new business owners and residents to move to Romulus
- Tell the Story of Romulus and the Gateway of Michigan

- Develop Romulus' infrastructure and amenities to appeal to new residents and businesses. This would include better roads and retail/ dining options and a grocery store.
- Promote why businesses should move to Romulus
- Communicate what is great about Romulus
- Embrace the airport and hub experience

"I was born and raised here. I work here. The best thing is even with an airport in the middle of it, Romulus to me feels rural. It is located in an area that makes it a reasonable drive to multiple places, like downtown Detroit, Ann Arbor, Novi, Down River area. It is also so convenient for air travel."

- Community Survey #1 Respondent

- Promote Romulus in relation to business attraction via a national and international marketing campaign

"Romulus is in a rural setting, but retains quick access to two major expressways for quick & easy access to the rest of metro Detroit and to the international airport"

- Community Survey #1 Respondent

- Romulus should be pitching itself as the Small Town with Big Connections - 20 Min from Detroit, 20 Min from Ann Arbor. Romulus should be touting it closeness to thriving areas but with a small-town community feel.

Creating strong and connected neighborhood areas with attractive public spaces and unique local amenities that create a sense of place.

4.3.1 | IMPORTANCE OF NEIGHBORHOOD AREAS AND CORRIDORS

Enhanced neighborhood identity, and better connectivity between neighborhoods, is necessary to build the "One Romulus" that has been outlined as the first strategic pillar in this report. The "One Romulus" theme is both about the community's sense of place, and connection to Romulus psychologically but also in a practical way. To produce a cohesive and interconnected community, Romulus will need multi-use corridors to connect the neighborhoods and to connect to the shared amenities and community destinations, such as retail areas, parks, and schools. This will require a long-term approach to building a network of cycle lanes, pedestrian walkways as well as improved roads. In addition, there will be a need for a focus on neighborhood aesthetics. It was a theme throughout the initial community survey that the appearance of some homes and yards were detrimental to the overall appeal of neighborhoods and Romulus. The variable condition of the roads in Romulus was a consistent theme throughout the visioning process.

The visioning process highlighted the need for neighborhoods to be connected both psychologically and practically. Romulus will need to create strong local sense of place, and then a network of multi-modal corridors between neighborhoods.

Value to **Residents**

- Residents were asked in the Vision Survey how important it is to create stronger neighborhood areas and corridors within Romulus. 91% of respondents felt that it was 'important' to 'very important' to create these stronger neighborhood areas and corridors.

4.3.2 | KEY ACTIONS: NEIGHBORHOOD AREAS AND CORRIDORS

The following key action areas consolidate ideas and priorities identified by the community during the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process in relation to Neighborhood Areas and Corridors and the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away".

Invest in neighborhood community placemaking

The visioning process highlighted a desire for local scale placemaking in neighborhoods, that supports the One Romulus concept. Placemaking can be as varied as small-scale retail and shopping, experiential events, and creative use of public spaces. Overall, the idea is to create richer neighborhood experiences that lend some charm, activity, and connection points in different areas across the community. Current trends in urban living suggest these types of placemaking outcomes can offer great value to residents, and done creatively, can be low cost. Ideas that emerged during the visioning work were diverse and included approaches such as pop-up food truck, bandshells, plane viewing and outdoor gyms. The historic downtown was an area commonly identified as a key placemaking opportunity. The overall idea is to enhance resident experiences and create reasons for connections between neighborhoods.

Create a network of multi-modal connections between neighborhoods

Urban areas are evolving and changing, as new generational values emerge. One of these relevant urban trends is the emergence of more multi-modal connections in neighborhoods and within cities. This typically is based on dedicated trail networks that support cycling, walking and new modes of transportation such as electric scooters. In a setting like Romulus, this offers the opportunity for locals to get off busy roads and find new ways to connect through the community. These trail networks can be expensive and long-term investments, and there is significant public support and funding for such approaches. Such a network would support the One Romulus approach, by creating new ways for the community to connect and find unique community places.

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future, 'Up, Up and Away'. Below are their original ideas.

- Develop the much needed vibrant Downtown with a mix of retail and restaurants
- Downtown is needed as the central go to place for Romulus residents to shop, meet, dine and enjoy life
- Provide signage between neighborhoods and Downtown

- Create an 'Intentional' effort to support existing small local businesses
- Develop tactics to attract start-ups
- Improve roads to enhance access between neighborhoods
- Promote Community Placemaking
- 'Tidy up Downtown' effort by city staff and volunteers – give local business or events coupons as a thank you
- Promote Business and Community meetings
- Foster Business to Business networking events – what should Romulus look like in 2030 for your business?
- Promote 'Shop Local Romulus' campaign with coupons for local businesses

> *"We are a fragmented community because of the Airport. There still should be a focus on developing a walkable, livable, and developed Downtown and Main Street to have a coherent community destination."*
>
> *- Community Survey #1 Respondent*

> *"Years ago, our little Downtown area was busy. Yes, there is now Amazon and industry in our city, but it's become a bedroom community. I want our historical downtown to become vibrant again."*
>
> *- Community Survey #1 Respondent*

- Encourage community place making with ideas such as food trucks, airplane viewing, train spotting and outdoor gyms
- Provide cycling and pedestrian trails with free bike rentals via grant money
- Universal trail/walking trail to connect city and neighborhoods
- Create a Romulus amenity and retail map for community and visitors.
- Partner with airport for more funding to protect our roads.

Romulus families thriving though good housing, quality education, and renewed focus on youth.

4.4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THRIVING FAMILIES

Generations of families have grown up, lived, and stayed in Romulus. There is a strong desire to see the community evolve. People want a forward-looking community, that intentionally embraces and leans into change. A high priority is placed on innovative education, creating strong social connectivity, and building a safe, vibrant, and engaged community fabric.

This has been exemplified across all age cohorts in the visioning process, including high school students. The family base of Romulus is a key part of the social fabric. For Romulus to retain this unique quality and appeal, there will be a need to reinforce this traditional family base and invest in programs to ensure that people can live, thrive, and prosper in the community. This will also help attract new families and residents to Romulus.

How does Romulus best market itself to attract new residents and retain the current youth in Romulus?

Value to **Residents**

- Residents were asked in the Vision Survey how important it is for Romulus to focus on being a place where families can thrive. 96% of respondents felt that it was 'important' to 'very important' for this focus on Romulus being a place where families can thrive.

4.4.2 | KEY ACTIONS: THRIVING FAMILIES

The following key action areas consolidate ideas and priorities identified by the community during the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process in relation to Thriving Families and the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away".

Encourage housing options that retain and attract families

There will be a future need for a variety of housing options for families and individuals to move to Romulus or stay in Romulus. Individuals may be moving to Romulus for work purposes but also to raise their family. There will be a need to provide housing options to suit a broad range of families. These could be as diverse as tiny homes, condos, or more traditional family homes. As the Romulus population ages, there will also be a need for both multi-generational homes and a focus on Senior living. Affordable childcare for working families will be critical. Through land use zoning, policy settings and incentives, the City of Romulus can help attract and encourage a range of housing option that will suit the future of the community.

Build a strong collaborative partnership with the School District

School districts are a key part of a community's attraction for school aged families. There is an opportunity to attract families through an exceptional school system, appealing neighborhoods, job opportunities, reinvigorated infrastructure, and suitable housing options. There has been a concern from responses within the initial community survey about ensuring the school district performs well and offers a location for youth to learn and thrive. Building a strong collaborative partnership between the community, the City and the School District is essential to future success. Each partner brings a key part to creating a system where young people and families can thrive in Romulus.

4.4.3 | COMMUNITY IDEAS: THRIVING FAMILIES

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away". Below are their original ideas.

"I think we need to define 'family'. We have families with children, couples with no children and Romulus has the potential to attract multiple generations to move to and live in Romulus."

- Focus Group Participant

- Attract and retain families with affordable housing options, a central Downtown and quality schools
- Increase livability experiences for youth with enhanced youth recreational opportunities and places to meet up
- Create a strategic marketing plan on "Why I choose Romulus to live and raise my family" and publicize the diversity and strong community that makes up Romulus

- Change the perception of the Romulus school district
- Improve the school district with parent involvement regarding leadership and role models
- Provide supports for families to access baby-sitting and elderly-sitting
- Improve neighborhood-based parks and recreation programming
- Create an environment for all types of families with housing options to suit couples, families with children, single people and multi-generational families

"I think we could focus more on youth because when our young people get their degrees, they have to go to other bigger cities or states to thrive."

- Community Survey #1 Respondent

- Promote Romulus as a safe and livable community.
- Improve the look of Romulus including people's yards and homes
- Mass Transit for the labor force to get to work
- Produce marketing plan to attract families with diverse housing options
- Use vacant school property to build new condos for single people or young families
- Better communication between the schools and the City

Building and attracting the workforce for the future via skills training and education.

4.5.1 | IMPORTANCE OF FUTURE WORKFORCE

Romulus needs to create and promote a compelling proposition for why it is the best home of the 'future workforce'.

The future workforce will need specific skills that demand new levels of education and outreach to industry to further educate the next generation of workers. The new emerging industrial era, Industry 4.0, is defined by new digital technologies, and the future Romulus workforce must be literate in these new technologies. The future workforce will come from two directions. One is the home grown workforce, and the other is attracting new people to the community. To make this happen, housing options, childcare and a quality school system will be needed (which was covered in the previous Thriving Families strategic pillar). For Romulus to retain and attract a future workforce and families, it will also be critical to focus on workforce training (both at high school level and re-skilling current workers).

Value to **Residents**

- Residents were asked in the Vision Survey how important it is for Romulus to focus on creating and attracting a skilled workforce for the future. 96% of respondents felt that it was 'important' to 'very important' for Romulus to create and attract this skilled future workforce.

4.5.2 | KEY ACTIONS: FUTURE WORKFORCE

The following key action areas consolidate ideas and priorities identified by the community during the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future visioning process in relation to Future Workforce and the preferred future, "Up, Up and Away".

Retain and retrain existing workforce

There is appetite in the community to see more innovative approaches to education, and for the development of a skilled and trained workforce. This was a key part of the preferred future and seen as an important part of the future community evolution. Innovative education (including Industry 4.0) could occur within the current Romulus school system and if needed, outside of the school system via vocational training. Romulus has an opportunity to strategically think about skilling its workforce, as part of the push to more advanced industries and technology businesses that are relocating or growing in the community. Future education will need to focus on matching the students' and workers skills with the needs of a 2030 workforce.

Attract new residents as the future workforce

The current and predicted development of higher technology industries and businesses in Romulus will demand a new skilled workforce. This could become the attraction for people to move to the community and relocate close to these employment opportunities. This will bring new people to the community with different interests and skill sets. It will be important to create the value proposition as to why Romulus is a good place to live and work.

4.5.3 | COMMUNITY IDEAS: FUTURE WORKFORCE

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future, 'Up, Up and Away'. Below are their original ideas.

"We need to think bigger. We need to bring higher tech jobs and high skill/upscale jobs to Romulus. We don't have to stay blue collar - we can do both."

- Focus Group Participant

- Affordable childcare options to assist future workforce and families
- Provide workforce education and career development opportunities for school leavers and current workforce
- Affordable housing for those who serve the community – police, teachers, etc.

- Think bigger with more high tech jobs. We can do both blue collar and high tech.
- One Romulus meetings that let the community know the job opportunities that are available

- Portal with organizations that have job opportunities and talent training in one central place
- Home to Home champions that can advocate for programs that incorporate opportunities for students
- Home to Home champions to intentionally identify businesses that will be viable for our workforce and future workforce
- Build on Romulus advantages to attract long lasting businesses which will attract jobs

"I see an exciting future opportunity for Romulus as job opportunities for those who want to be trained or are willing to learn a new trade especially in innovative technologies. There are many new developments in Romulus with all the up-and-coming new construction of businesses. There are great opportunities for people to come to live and work here. We have a great future."

- Community Survey #1 Respondent

- Provide opportunities to students to plan for and be excited for their employment future in Romulus
- Partner with local businesses including the Airport, Amazon, GM, and Kroger to work with Romulus students regarding future opportunities
- Create the structure that attracts talent to Romulus
- Collaborations between schools and businesses/airport businesses
- Provide a pipeline from the school system to Economic Corporations/Industry
- One Romulus meetings where job vacancies are shared

5.0 | COMBINED STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK

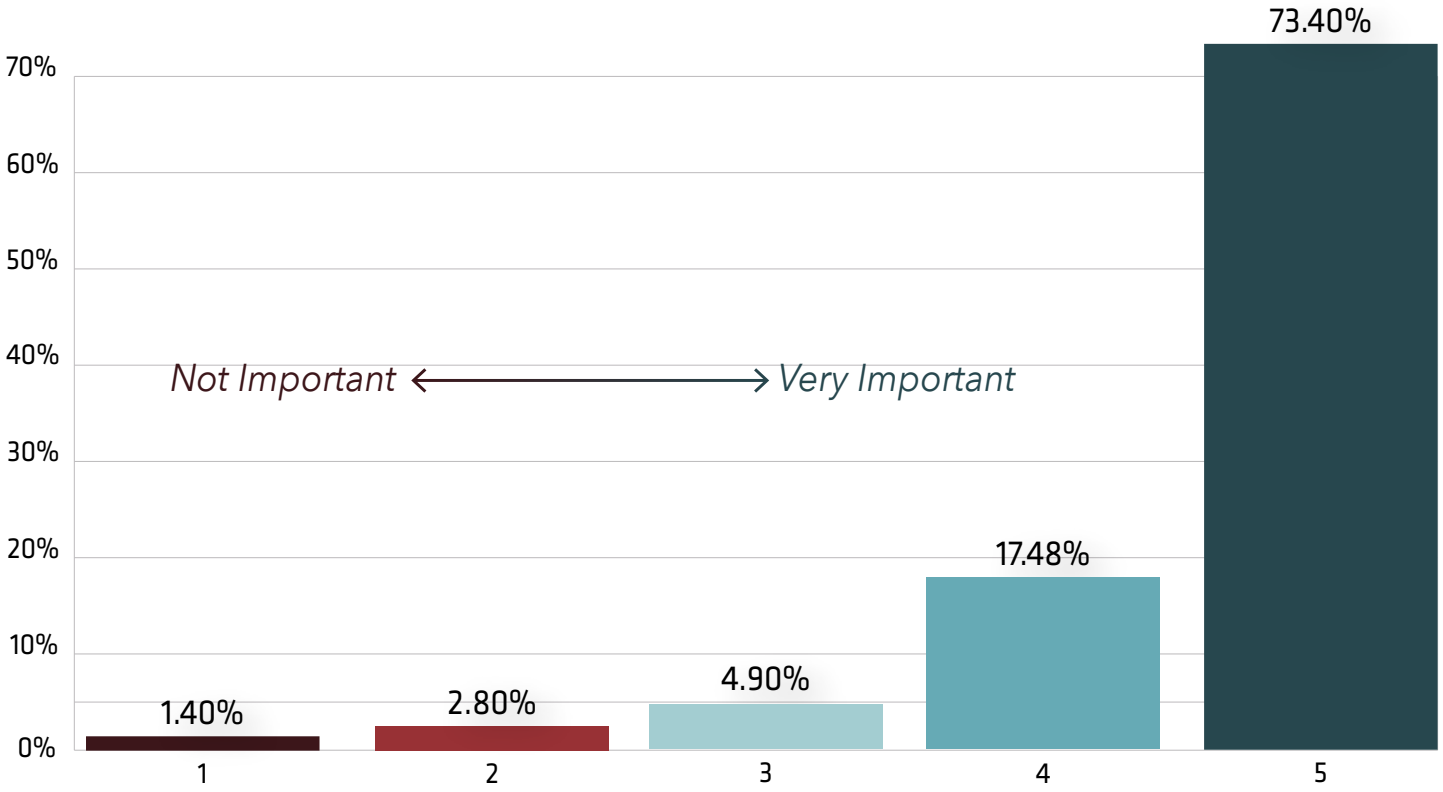
The framework for action developed through the visioning and planning process has identified a set of key actions that will help Romulus pivot its trajectory towards the 'Up, Up and Away' preferred future. This framework is the culmination of community input, surveys, and deliberation by the focus groups. The resulting overall framework creates the basis of the roadmap to the future and the guiding vision that will inform future planning efforts by the City of Romulus.

5.1 | IMPORTANCE AND URGENCY TO ACT ON THE STRATEGIC PILLARS

With all five of the strategic pillars of the vision identified as both important and urgent to take action on, the City has been given a mandate to pursue initiatives in these areas.

During the second Community Survey, respondents were asked to score the importance to the future of Romulus for each of the five identified strategic pillars. There were over 160 responses to this survey, from a good cross section of the community.

EXAMPLE: THIS CHART SHOWS THE RESPONSES TO THE FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF THE THRIVING FAMILIES STRATEGIC PILLAR.



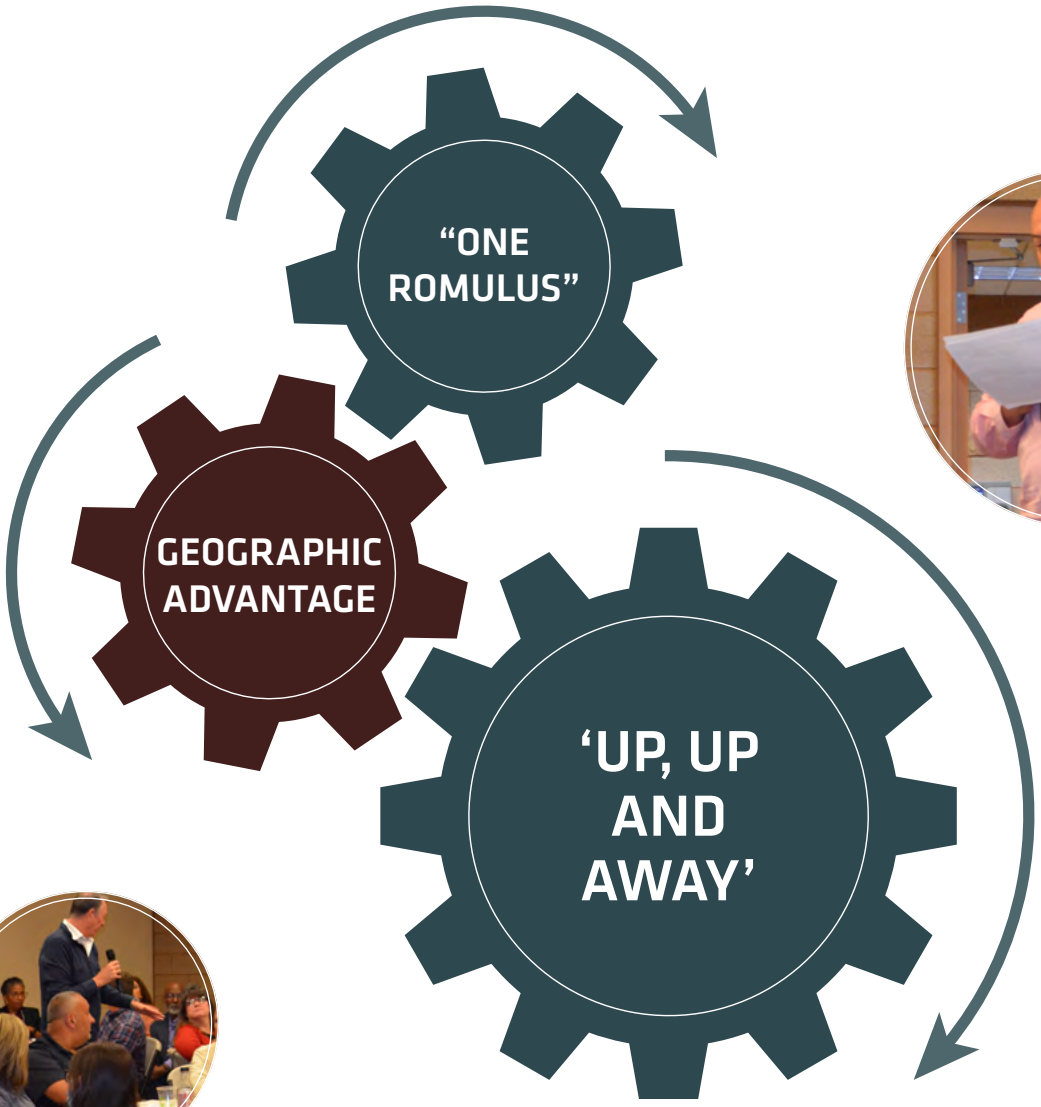
FutureInsight

- All the pillars scored highly on the importance scale. All of them had a very large percentage (over 50%) of people who scored them as Very Important.
- Overall, 90-95% of people scored each of the Strategic Pillars as important to very important. This provides good validation that the strategic pillars reflect the priorities of the community.

6.0 | DYNAMIC SYSTEMS-THINKING APPROACH

The framework for action developed through the visioning and planning process has identified a set of 10 key actions that will help Romulus pivot its trajectory towards the "Up, Up and Away" scenario. This framework is the culmination of community input, surveys and deliberation by the focus groups. The resulting overall framework creates the basis of the roadmap to the future and the guiding vision that will inform upcoming planning efforts for Romulus.

Communities function as ecosystems, where action in one area impacts other areas. The recommended strategic pillars and actions for Romulus, outlined in this report, will be more impactful if they operate together.



7.0 | CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

The Romulus community has embraced a collaborative visioning effort with enthusiasm and energy. Throughout the sessions and community discussions, there has been a continued recognition that the community is stronger by having a shared vision and strategic roadmap. The Romulus visioning process has produced a clear vision, a strategic framework, and a viable list of strategic actions. The City of Romulus Mayor, Administrative Staff, supported by City Council, are well positioned to turn these vision elements into operational plans.

In considering the visioning work and final outcomes, some specific insights are offered, from the project consultants. Future iQ helped design and facilitate the engagement sessions and provide the following comments as Consultant Insights.

GET A SEAT AT THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TABLE

Romulus sits in an enviable geographical position. It has a great peri-urban location, at the juncture of transportation routes. This suggests the area is poised for economic growth, as business seek such attractive locations. However, this development could occur without Romulus gaining the full value, or the development could occur elsewhere. Romulus needs to get a seat at the regional economic development table, and be able to put forward a compelling case, and ensure new developments deliver maximum value back to the community.

FOCUS ON PLACEMAKING IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Romulus has a strong community fabric and is a diverse community in a world that is struggling to tackle diversity, inclusivity, and equity. This strength should be leveraged, and there should be a focus made on placemaking at the neighborhood level. Strong future neighborhoods will be the foundation for a strong future Romulus. This level of placemaking will allow for innovation in housing, lifestyles, and amenities – and will help attract new residents and businesses.

INVEST IN COMMUNICATIONS

Throughout the visioning process, the community residents repeatedly emphasized the need for strong, consistent, and informative communication from the city. The efforts of the City of Romulus Mayor, Administrative Staff, supported by City Council, to increase communications have been greatly appreciated. These efforts need to be institutionalized with strong outward facing websites and communication platforms, that promote the future orientated narrative about Romulus.

BUILD ON "ONE ROMULUS"

The "One Romulus" approach has gathered traction and support. It appears to be a fantastic unifying approach that should be expanded. It articulates the core community values very well, and offers a pathway to bring the community together.

8.0 | MORE INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For more information on the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future project, please contact:

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Future iQ would like to acknowledge the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future Task Force members who met consistently throughout the process and offered guidance and support at each stage of the process.

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Future iQ would like to thank Stacy Paige, City Treasurer, RPD Officer Chris Reyna and RHS Coach Charles Searcy for participating in initial interviews and videos for the project.

9.0 | 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***.

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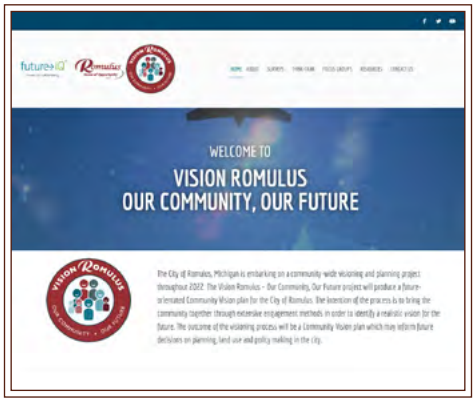
To read all reports and to explore the Vision Romulus – Our Community, Our Future process, please visit the project portal:

https://lab2.future-iq.com/vision-romulus/

Vision Romulus
Think-Tank Report
November 2022



Vision Romulus Portal

VISION ROMULUS – OUR COMMUNITY, OUR FUTURE

VISION AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

CITY OF ROMULUS, MICHIGAN, USA | JANUARY 2023