

TRANSFORMING TOMORROW TOGETHER
GREATER MANKATO 2040

SUMMARY REPORT

VISION AND STRATEGIC PILLARS

FEBRUARY 2024





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CONSULTANT'S SUMMATION

This summary report represents the synthesis of the community input gathered during 2023, and is framed as a future vision, strategic pillars, and high level potential action areas. This report and summary has been prepared by Future iQ, as a consultant's summation.

Greater Mankato 2040 is a planning and visioning project that explores the future of the Greater Mankato region. This project is about coming together as a region and building a vision and roadmap for 2040. Over the past year, we have worked with over 1,000 stakeholders to shape the future vision and strategic roadmap for the Greater Mankato region. This process has produced lots of ideas and strategic vision, which has been condensed into this high-level summary.

This report and the associated data analysis are available at:
lab2.future-iq.com/greater-mankato-2040/



REPORT PREPARED BY:

future→iQ[®]
Create Future Intelligence[®]





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The 'Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040' logo has been created to represent this regional planning effort. Some of the key design elements of the initiative logo include:

- The 'Transforming Tomorrow Together' theme represents the important values of working together to shape the future.
- The term 'transforming' points to the intended depth of the work to create the future strategic positioning of the region.
- The 'Greater Mankato 2040' points to the long-term focus, and the collaborative approach with the broader region.
- The globe in the center reflects the big picture nature of the initiative, and the exploration of future global positioning of the region.
- The star reflects a compass, as we search for our future direction, and the desire to reach out to the corners of the region.
- The colors aim to reflect the water and agricultural aspects of the region and landscape.





The project will continue to run through 2024, as we now work to implement the strategic ideas and actions that have been contributed by regional stakeholders.

OVERVIEW OF THE GM2040 STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

‘Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040 (GM2040)’ is a process to recast our future plans and identify where the region now fits into a rapidly changing world. It builds on past work and looks out to 2040 to identify what is our future ‘sweet spot’. A fundamental premise is that the world is changing fast, and the region needs bold thinking to help envision how it will thrive over the coming decades.

The Mankato region has a history of successful long-term regional planning. The previous Envision 2020 planning process helped guide the region over the last 10-15 years, and has produced numerous positive outcomes built on an approach of collaboration and revitalization.

Key highlights to the approach include:

- ‘Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040’ has been a robust, inclusive, and forward-looking regional community planning process.
- The process has explored the future strategic positioning of the Greater Mankato region, and is working to create an enduring, collaborative vision and roadmap to the future.
- We have been examining how the region needs to evolve and transform, and what is our unique proposition in a Midwest and global context.



The ‘Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040’ initiative has been guided by a strategic working group, which has included perspectives from local governments, commercial organizations, educational institutions, economic development organizations, and non-profits. The shared regional plan helps lay the foundation for an implementation roadmap with actions designed to move us toward the shared vision we create for the region.



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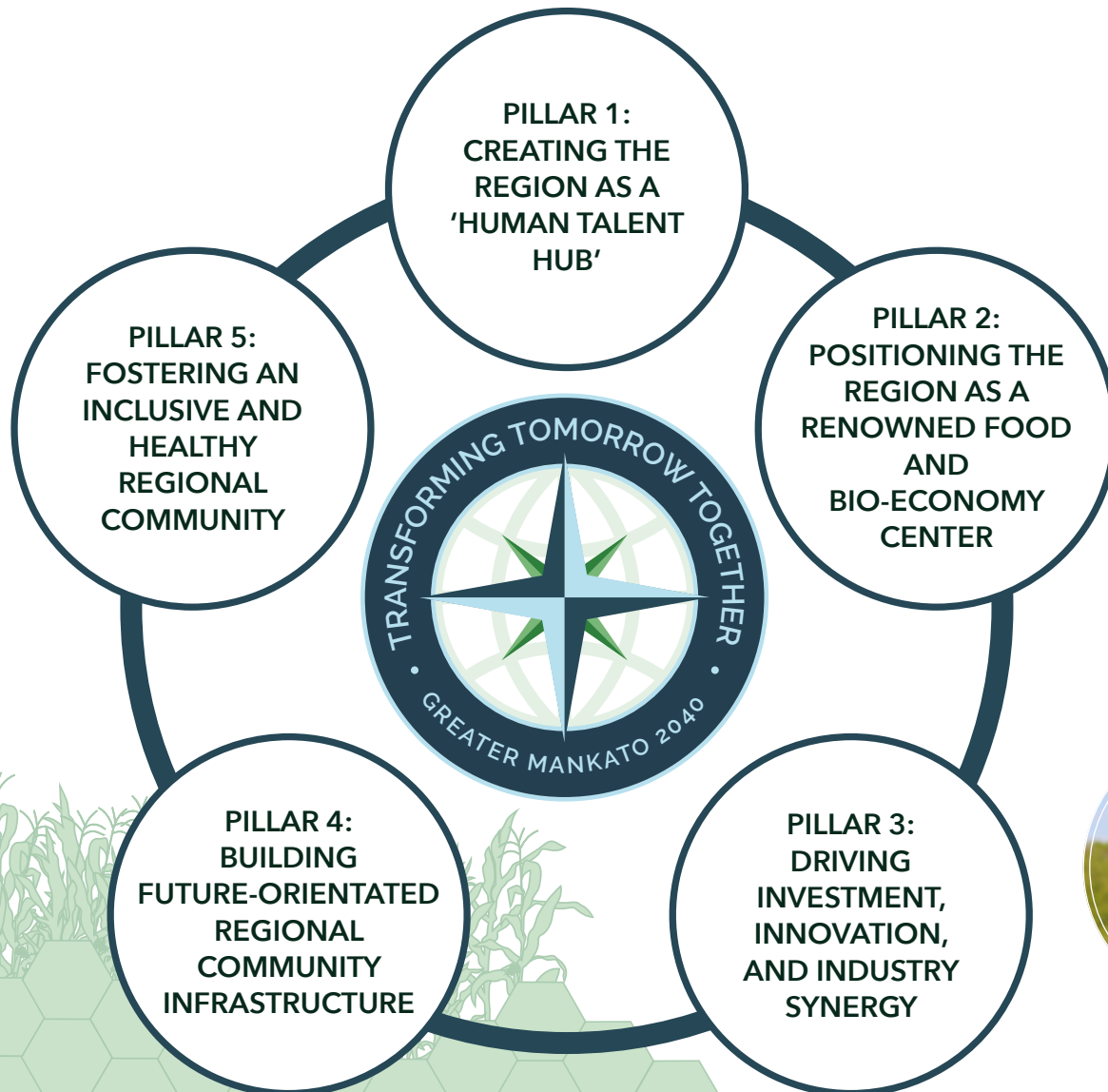
- As part of this planning work, we have convened over a 1,000 people in community and stakeholder conversations, workshops, focus groups, surveys and think-tanks.
- We have encouraged participants to take a bold and ambitious long-term view and think about how the Greater Mankato region can thrive in a changing world.



GM2040 | VISION AND STRATEGIC PILLAR FRAMEWORK

The Vision and Strategic Pillar framework was developed through the process of stakeholder and community engagement. This framework helps focus thinking on the vision, and to organize ideas and critical action areas.

This framework was tested and validated extensively through focus groups and community updates. The Strategic Pillars are seen as interdependent, and mutually supportive of the central vision. The pillars include a 'package' of proposed strategic action areas that work together to deliver the preferred future.



TRANSFORMING TOMORROW TOGETHER - GREATER MANKATO 2040

During the planning process, stakeholders have identified a preferred future that best reflects their vision for the Great Mankato region in 2040.

This is a future where the Greater Mankato region becomes renowned for its collaborative and inclusive approach, and a future-ready culture that enhances the ability to anticipate and adapt to change. This allows the region to take on a role as a significant powerhouse in the upper mid-west, fueled by its talent, with a focus on food and the bioeconomy, and its reputation and ability to create high levels of livability [More information on the preferred future is available on the project portal, and in the [Think Tank report](#).]

This future is created by a simultaneous focus on two macro approaches which, combined, approaches are predicted to propel the region toward the desired future:



INTENTIONAL RE-INVENTION AND EVOLUTION OF THE COMMUNITY

- Focus on workforce and workplace transformation, with a holistic approach to work and employees, including emphasis on quality of jobs and broader metrics of success (wellness/happiness).
- Workplaces deliberately become more fluid with new work patterns. Education is more flexible and constantly available, amplifying a lifelong learning approach.
- The region evolves to deliberately foster new ideas, cultures and experiences, and collaboratively invest in shared community amenities. There is a broad approach to attracting people, with appeal as an inclusive regional community that values health, equity and diversity.



STRONG INNOVATION FOCUS IN ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Strong focus on innovation and new sectors; including building on existing industries in creative ways.
- There is also innovative investing in emerging economies and human health, such as biosciences, tech, and 'food as medicine'.
- Public infrastructure focuses on re-development and repurposing aimed to maximize existing public infrastructure.
- Focus is on more diverse housing types, green building, new modes of transportation, and sectors that spur broad innovation.



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During the planning process, this preferred future was also termed a regenerative and synergistic future. In this context, these terms mean:

- **Regenerative** is emerging as a concept of social interest and preference. In this perspective, there is greater awareness of living ecosystems, and the potential for systems to co-exist and co-evolve, rather than one at the expense - or at a different pace - of others. The focus is on healthy humans, ecosystems and planet.
- **Synergistic** refers to the cooperation between multiple organizations, to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.

»»»»» PILLAR 1: CREATING THE REGION AS A 'HUMAN TALENT HUB'



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Create the region as a renowned 'human talent-hub'
- Create the region as an entrepreneurial magnet

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, the concept of the region being a 'human talent hub' has gathered significant support. The focus group discussions identified this pillar as a key part of the future strategic positioning of the region. Across the United States, and around the world, there is currently a significant competition for talent, especially in the skill areas associated with emerging technologies and biosciences, including health and medicine. For the Greater Mankato region to achieve its vision, it will be important to be at the forefront of talent creation, attraction and retention. This requires a holistic approach to skills development, local livability, career opportunities and lifestyle choices.

Proposed strategic action areas to support this pillar include:



CONTINUE TO FOSTER DEEP COLLABORATION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL ENTITIES

The region already hosts an enviable range of quality educational institutions, that are already working in a coordinated manner. This collaboration should be further deepened, to continue to create a seamless regional skills and talent development system.



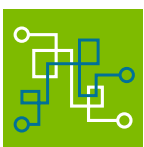
CONNECT STUDENTS TO LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

A key opportunity is to retain the talent in the region. Currently there is considerable turnover, especially in University students, who attend courses in the region but then leave for careers. This includes a sizable cohort of talented international students. Student focus groups highlighted the opportunity to create connections with the local business ecosystem, that may better present local career options and choices.



BUILD COMMUNITY CULTURE THAT ENCOURAGES TALENT EXCELLENCE

A thriving talent hub will require a pervasive culture that recognizes, appreciates and celebrates talent. This will also need to translate to fostering and encouraging entrepreneurial thinking and mindset. This is a message that will need to be cultivated by many regional leaders, to help nurture this cultural focus.



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- Minneapolis / St Paul is emerging as one of the key US metropolises that is attracting younger people and talent. The Greater Mankato region can leverage this trend and offer a more intimate smaller regional center experience.
- Many stakeholders noted that the region is currently orientated to families and family-based experiences. This focus will need to broaden, with more amenities to attract emerging and younger generations who have different social desires and aspirations.

»»»»» PILLAR 2: POSITIONING THE REGION AS A RENOWNED FOOD AND BIO-ECONOMY CENTER

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Become a leading food, bioscience and bioeconomy innovation center
- Foster sustainability and regenerative practices
- Boost regional reputation and relevance on national and global scale

The ability to produce food and biomass is a key economic driver for the upper Midwest and the Greater Mankato region. Overall, southern Minnesota has some of the highest levels of solid biomass resources per square mile in both the United States and the world. This biomass production capability is the foundation of new possibilities in the bioeconomy. The region is uniquely positioned to be a key player in the coming food and bioeconomy revolution, with its combination of food production capability, abundant fresh water, and access to renewable energy.

Proposed strategic action areas to support this pillar include:



ELEVATE THE FOCUS ON FOOD AND BIOECONOMY

There is a clear and compelling opportunity in the food and bioeconomy space, driven by the local production capability, a high level of sophistication of the existing industry, and increasing global demand. However, this opportunity does not seem to be well understood and appreciated by many people in the region and seems to be tied to an outdated view of 'agriculture'. The important future opportunity should be promoted, and the modern scientific nature of the food system highlighted.



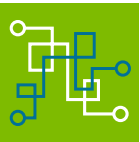
ENHANCE STRATEGIC LEVERAGE AND INFLUENCE

The bioeconomy is a key area of increasing interest and investment. The region should support GreenSeam as the 'go-to' voice for bioeconomy, food, agricultural innovation and Policy, and elevate the regional focus on this sector.



AMPLIFY THE GREENSEAM BRAND

Connected to the previous bullet point, the region should support the expansion and amplification of the GreenSeam brand and profile and recognize it as a strong local purpose-based consortium. This will help promote the role the region plays in the important global food system, and the future potential.



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- The bio-economy is a term used to define an economic system that focuses on the sustainable use of renewable biological resources. Instead of relying solely on finite fossil fuels, the bio-economy emphasizes utilizing resources such as plants, algae, and waste materials to produce a wide range of products, from food and feed to biofuels, biochemicals, and bioplastics.
- The bio-economy encompasses various sectors including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and biotechnology, aiming to create value from biological materials in a way that is environmentally friendly and economically viable. It's about harnessing the power of nature to drive innovation and create sustainable solutions for a variety of industries and challenges.

»»»»» PILLAR 3: DRIVING INVESTMENT, INNOVATION, AND INDUSTRY SYNERGY



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Build investment courage and appeal
- Build regional industry collaboration and synergy

A key part of the preferred future vision is around industry innovation and helping expand critical industry clusters. While food and agriculture will remain mainstay economic drivers, the region also supports other strong economic concentrations, including manufacturing and healthcare clusters. A critical part of this strategic pillar is facilitating new investments and capital attraction to the region. This should be focused on expanding the existing industry and economic base, but also finding creative ways to support new sectors.

Proposed strategic action areas to support this pillar include:



ACTIVELY BUILD INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

Industry cluster models can be particularly effective at building synergy and creating new connections across existing industry ecosystems. This approach is particularly good in tackling shared challenges such as workforce, technical assistance and investment attraction. The cluster approach helps bring greater focus on what might be otherwise disparate groups of businesses. This strategic action areas connects strongly to Pillars 1 and 2.



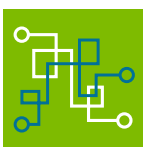
CONNECT WITH THE INVESTMENT COMMUNITY

Building strong connections with the investment community will be critical to facilitating new capital investment to propel industry expansion and scale. This connection will also help provide critical information about the perceived performance of the region, and how it rates against other locations and regions. Conversely, it will also help build the awareness and understanding about the region, and its aspirations and future potential.



EXPAND POLITICAL HEFT AND INFLUENCE

The Greater Mankato region has an important task to build its heft and influence with State and national policy makers. In the broader Midwest region, people are increasingly concentrating in the large metropolises, and the weight of influence can change. Making and maintaining the case for the region will help ensure government funding initiatives consider the region, and not just gravitate to the very large urban centers.



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- The Greater Mankato region is one of the key regional centers in Minnesota. It is well located to leverage this relationship and offer a viable location for industry and investment. The Rochester area offers a great example of how to build a clear focus, message and strategic proposition. Greater Mankato region could benefit from a similarly high-profile message.
- Building greater synergy between industry clusters could help foster innovation and shared approaches to regional challenges.

»»»»» PILLAR 4: BUILDING FUTURE-ORIENTATED REGIONAL COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Stimulate innovative housing solutions
- Drive evolution of transportation systems
- Build future-orientated community amenities

Throughout the stakeholder engagement and planning process, the topic of regional infrastructure and amenities was often highlighted. There is an overall sense of a disconnect between current urban design and amenities, and emerging generation trends and desires. While the region has many great facilities, and there has been significant progress on downtown and main street redevelopments, there is much more to do. There is a society wide trend to build more public recreation spaces, trails and connectivity, and walkable and bikeable infrastructure. This was reflected in stakeholder discussions and focus groups. In addition, there are the emerging challenges of climate mitigation and more energy and environmentally efficient sustainable practices. However, infrastructure is a big and expensive issue, and in some cases requires significant funding, planning and construction lead times.

Proposed strategic action areas to support this pillar include:



INVEST IN UNDERSTANDING AND ABSORBING FUTURE URBAN DESIGN TRENDS

There is potential for the region to learn about urban design trends, and aggressively incorporate these into future plans. This is underway in some communities and could be a key focus of a future regional study and learning tour that would explore best practice in comparable regions in the country. This has an important connection to the livability and the region's positioning as a talent hub.



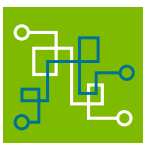
BUILD CONSORTIUMS TO ACCELERATE INNOVATION

There is huge potential to convene novel consortiums that could help create unique local solutions to grand challenges such as housing and transportation. This could bring forth a 'commons approach' of shared investment and problem solving, that was discussed at the Think-Tank and create more local synergy.



CONNECT LOCAL RESEARCH CAPACITY TO SOLVE REAL LIFE PROBLEMS

There is an enticing opportunity to connect the community to help envision and creation solutions for some of the infrastructure concerns, such as housing, transportation, and community design. This connects some of the pillars and builds interesting and useful linkages, especially with Pillars 1 and 2.



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- Community infrastructure is an area of some significant innovation. It will take time and intentional planning to adapt and transform infrastructure, so promoting the vision and trajectory is an important interim step.
- There is a macro trend to more walkable and connected communities, and less emphasis on car dominated transportation. This is a major shift, with multiple implications for urban design, infrastructure investment and amenities.

»»»»» PILLAR 5: FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE AND HEALTHY REGIONAL COMMUNITY



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Foster an inclusive, diverse culture and population
- Encourage a healthy and happy regional community

Throughout the stakeholder discussion sessions, an important topic was the evolution of the community culture and fabric. While some people expressed that they like the community vibe and culture just the way it is, many people also saw opportunity to continue to create more connectivity, inclusiveness and openness to new ideas. Of particular interest to many people across the workshops and focus groups was the idea of creating a healthier and happier community. Recent studies have also highlighted the need for more inclusivity, and this theme was reflected in the focus groups sessions with young professionals and university students. This reflects shifting social values and is an important topic that relates to the pillar themes of human talent hub and regional positioning.

Proposed strategic action areas to support this pillar include:



FOCUS ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

There was significant interest in the notion of the region having a focus on healthy living, wellbeing and happiness. This was discussed in multiple settings, including the issues of recreation trails, healthy food choices and community gathering locations.



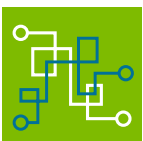
SOCIAL INCLUSION AND BELONGING

A key aspect of the community vision was a sense of belonging, being connected and engaged. This was reflected in multiple focus groups and sessions and was highlighted by 'outsiders' such as the University students. There is an opportunity to evolve the community fabric to be more open and inclusive, especially for new arrivals, immigrants and new residents



FUTURE-READY CULTURE

An important part of this pillar is the notion of building a future-ready culture that is forward looking and is anticipating and adapting to important underlying trends. This requires a nimble mindset, and an ongoing investment in scanning for emerging opportunities and positioning the region to be at the forefront of important topics.



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- The decade ahead is likely to be one of significant social change, with new generations bringing different values and priorities. This will shape community and regional decision making.
- The issues of diversity, equity and inclusivity are complex, and can be uncomfortable to deal with in some cases. However, at a level of creating an inclusive and healthy community as a bedrock principle, this will help the community retain its appeal and attractiveness to a wide range of talent, future residents and investors.



»»»»» NEXT STEPS

This regional planning process has been supported by a wide range of stakeholder and institutions in the Greater Mankato region. This summary report lays out the outcomes and direction as determined in the engagement sessions, with over 1,000 people contributing ideas and perspectives.

The Greater Mankato Growth, Inc organization (GMG) has agreed to take the leadership role in helping develop the implementation plan, and convening other regional stakeholders to work on the Strategic Pillars and potential action areas. This work will progress through 2024.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about **Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040**, please contact:

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'Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040' is a planning and visioning project exploring the future of the Greater Mankato region. This project is about coming together as a region and building a vision and roadmap for 2040. More details about the initiative and the associated data analysis are available on the project portal:
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The participation, guidance and commitment of the **project Strategy Working Group** has been invaluable to this project.





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