

Imagine Kalamazoo 2035

Strategic Vision

DRAFT – October 19, 2026

Our North Star. Five guiding principles and eight goals to guide Kalamazoo for the next decade.



A WORD FROM CITY LEADERSHIP

Dear Kalamazoo Community,



MAYOR

David Anderson

CITY OF KALAMAZOO

Kalamazoo's vision for 2035 reflects the heart of our community: we believe in one another, we care for our neighborhoods, and we work together to create a city where everyone can thrive. This Strategic Vision captures what residents have told us – Kalamazoo must be welcoming, safe, connected, and full of opportunity for all.

I am proud of the thousands of voices that shaped this plan. Your ideas, hopes, and lived experiences guide our priorities and remind us that progress happens when we lift each other up. IK 2035 is more than a plan; it is our shared commitment to a future built on belonging, creativity, and responsible stewardship. Together, we will continue building a Kalamazoo that honors its history, embraces its diversity, and invests boldly for the generations to come.



CITY MANAGER

Malcolm Hankins

CITY OF KALAMAZOO

Our community has been clear: Kalamazoo must be a place where every person can build a life of dignity, connection, and possibility. The IK

2035 Strategic Vision serves as our shared North Star guiding us toward that future. Together, we can strengthen our commitment to a happy and healthy city by serving our neighborhoods, expanding access to opportunity, and ensuring that our services meet people where they are at every stage of life.

Kalamazoo's greatest strength is, and has always been, its people. This Strategic Vision reflects our belief that a thriving city listens deeply, responds compassionately, and removes barriers so everyone can participate fully in civic life. It calls on us to invest wisely, collaborate across our departments, dedicate ourselves to excelling at customer service, and lead with the understanding that trust is built through consistent action. Our commitment is to create a city that welcomes, inspires, and supports everyone who lives, works, and plays in Kalamazoo.

As we look toward 2035, we are grounding our work in the simple truth: a better future is something we build together. This Strategic Vision unites our efforts across housing, safety, mobility, economic vitality, the environment, arts and culture, youth and family, and effective city operations. It guides us toward a Kalamazoo that grows with intention, governs with integrity, and invests in both present needs and future generations. With shared purpose and steady leadership, we will continue shaping a city where people feel they belong, can thrive, and want to stay.

2025-27 City Commission



Jacqueline Slaby, Alonzo Wilson, David Anderson (Mayor),
Stephanie Hoffman, Chris Praedel, Jeanne Hess, Drew
Duncan (Vice Mayor)



Thank You!

Thank you to all who gave their time to shape IK 2035.

CITY DEPARTMENTS

- Community Planning & Economic Development
- Public Services
- Parks and Recreation
- City Manager's Office
- Communications
- Management Services
- Kalamazoo Dept. Public Safety

INDIVIDUALS

- Amy Mervak, Amy Mervak Coaching & Consulting
- WMU Evaluation Lab
- Emerson Wesselhoff, IK2035 Intern
- Charles Montgomery, Happy City Author
- Rebekah Kik, University of Notre Dame

BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

- City Commission
- Planning Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Brownfield Redevelopment Authority & Economic Development Corporation
- Downtown Development Authority & Downtown Economic Growth Authority
- Environmental Concerns Committee
- Natural Features Protection Review Board
- Complete Streets Advisory Committee
- Civil Rights Board
- Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Organizing Committee
- Northside Cultural Business District Authority
- Community Development Act Advisory Committee

ORGANIZATIONS

- Foundation for Excellence (FFE)
- 22 Kalamazoo Neighborhoods
- Building Blocks
- ModeShift
- Disability Network
- Continuum of Care
- KydNet
- OutFront
- El Concilio
- Kalamazoo Community Foundation
- Northside Ministerial Alliance
- NAACP
- Metro Transit
- Kalamazoo Public Schools
- Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study
- Park Kalamazoo
- Kalamazoo Promise
- Western Michigan University
- Kalamazoo Valley Community College
- Kalamazoo College
- Bronson
- Southwest Michigan First
- Upjohn Institute
- Kalamazoo Climate Crisis Coalition
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Kalamazoo County Land Bank
- United Way
- Black Wall Street
- Strong Towns
- Kalamazoo County
- Rootead
- LINK
- Dignity in Motion



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Economic Vitality

Growing businesses and stabilizing the local economy to the benefit of all.

Since the last Master Plan was adopted (7 years ago) we have:

 **22+ Brownfield Redevelopment Projects**
Reactivated vacant spaces through
Brownfield Redevelopment Grants

 **Business Outreach**
1,200+ business touch points

 **Facade & Interior Improvements**
\$1.3 million invested to improve storefronts
and interiors across the city

 **\$200 Million Private Investment Downtown**

 **Business Incubator**
\$100,000 invested in Con-Do Kalamazoo
September 2024 soft opening of new
location in Kalamazoo

 **Business Support**
\$1 million invested to start or grow small

 **Economic Development Strategy**



What does it mean to have Economic Vitality? What has changed for the better in Kalamazoo in the last 7 years? What continues to be a challenge? Fill out a post-it. What know



WELCOME TO IMAGINE KALAMAZOO

A Ten Year Vision, Created Together

Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 (IK 2035) is the City led community conversation that shapes Kalamazoo's future. Through thousands of conversations with residents, businesses, neighborhood organizations, community partners, and City staff, IK 2035 brought the community together to imagine the kind of city it wants to build over the next decade. This Strategic Vision captures that shared aspiration and serves as the North Star guiding the City's decisions and priorities in the years ahead.

How is the Strategic Vision used? City leaders and staff use the Strategic Vision to develop plans, align priorities, and inform decisions about budgets, investments, and partnerships. It shapes the City's work with the community as well as

its internal departmental plans by aligning staff expertise, capacity, technology, and budget. It provides a constant point of reference for day-to-day work and helps the City respond to changing circumstances while staying focused on its long-term vision.

Community organizations, institutions, businesses, neighborhood groups, and residents will also use the Strategic Vision to understand the community's long-term direction and identify opportunities to align their own work with the community's vision. Together, these efforts translate the Strategic Vision into coordinated action across the entire community.



WELCOME TO IMAGINE KALAMAZOO

Building on a Decade of Implementation

The first of its kind, **Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 (IK 2025) Strategic Vision**, guided the past decade's efforts to implement the community's vision while helping the City work toward long-term budget stability.

The IK 2025 journey stretched both community and government in new and exciting ways. It aligned strategic goals with the City's budget, departmental plans, public participation efforts, City Commission agenda items, and many other parts of City work. We worked hard to imagine, engage, plan, manage projects and programs, and celebrate! Building on those experiences and lessons, the City launched the IK 2035 Engagement Process to shape the next decade of community planning.

The **Foundation For Excellence**, or FFE, is a key partner in advancing the Strategic Vision. Created to help address systemic challenges and support Kalamazoo's long-term prosperity, this independent nonprofit provides annual grants to the City that stabilize municipal finances, reduce the property tax rate, and invest in community priorities articulated in the Strategic Vision. Since 2017, the FFE has invested more than \$200 million in projects and initiatives that help bring the Strategic Vision to life.

\$200 Million Invested

Since 2017, the Foundation for Excellence has invested more than \$200 Million in projects and initiatives that help bring the Strategic Vision to life.



Kalamazoo
Foundation for
Excellence



IK 2025 Progress Snapshot

A few of the highlights of what we've been able to accomplish since 2017. Many of these projects are made possible thanks to the Foundation for Excellence.



\$3.7 M
To start or grow small businesses



1,676
Preserved or built Multi-Family & Rental Units



1800+
Trees planted across the city



1,400
Parcels with natural features protected



23%
Reduction in Gun Violence



7,500
Lead water lines replaced



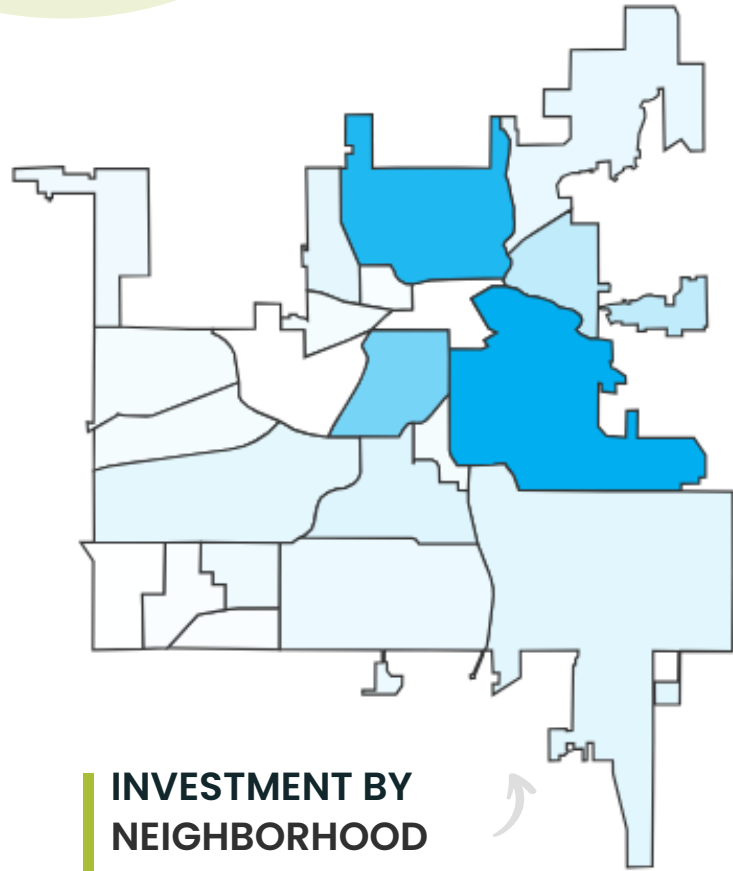
2,898
Super Rec & Camp Kzoo Summer Campers



24+
Miles of new or repaired sidewalk

INVESTMENT BY NEIGHBORHOOD

The darker the blue, the more money invested by FFE for aspirational projects.





Creating the IK 2035 Vision

The Strategic Vision is the community's response to the question: What makes a happy, healthy, and thriving Kalamazoo? The answer was developed through the IK 2035 Engagement Process, which combined community voices, best practices and staff expertise, and impactful data.

Engaging with Staff Expertise. IK 2035 kicked off in early 2024 with a robust internal engagement process that included an employee survey and multiple work sessions. Staff helped shape community engagement by identifying what the City needed to learn from residents and what information would be helpful to share. IK 2025 took several years to get organizational buy-in, slowing implementation. An early lesson learned, staff engagement was critical to set up IK 2035 for success.

By understanding what staff needs to implement the community's vision for 2035, the City can strengthen organizational capacity and better align internal investments with implementation needs.

Engaging with the Data. Throughout IK 2035, data helped ground both staff and the community in the realities of Kalamazoo while identifying opportunities and challenges ahead. It informed the analysis within each phase of engagement and played an important role in developing the Strategic Vision Goals and Outcomes. Moving forward, data will continue to inform the Implementation Plans by grounding strategies



Data Sources



- National Community Survey (NCS)
- Kalamazoo Target Market (housing) Analysis
- Kalamazoo County Housing Report and Corridor Study
- City's Sustainability and Greenhouse Gas Reports
- Metro Transit Annual Reports
- Discover Kalamazoo's data on visitor and event attendees
- Transportation data on safety, speed, and mobility
- 2026 Organizational Climate and Trust Assessment
- 2024 Staff Engagement Survey

and measures in current conditions, helping establish realistic timelines and providing benchmarks to measure progress over time.

Engaging with Community Voices. The IK 2035 engagement process invited community members to share what they value today and the future they want to create together. Kalamazoo responded through more than 5,000 community touchpoints.

Community members participated in many ways, including neighborhood meetings, focus groups, surveys, open houses, art projects, community book discussions, Meeting on the Go events, and conversations hosted by community partners throughout the city. The engagement process

followed the City's Public Participation Policy (PPP), with meetings held in schools, community centers, churches, and other familiar community spaces to create welcoming, accessible opportunities for participation.

A group of community partners representing organizations across Kalamazoo helped guide the engagement process by creating and testing engagement activities and providing feedback on what the City was hearing at key points throughout the process. The City Commission, City staff, community organizations, and the Western Michigan University Evaluation Lab also played key roles in gathering feedback and developing the Strategic Vision.

Engagement Numbers



Happy City
Book Read
Participants



Pop Up
Engagement
Participants



Public Meeting
Attendees



Partner Meeting
Attendees



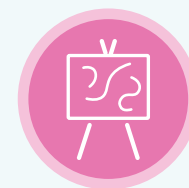
Presentation
Attendees



Meeting on the
Go Participants



Surveys
Completed



Youth Activity
Participants



5,100+

Points of Contact



Engagement Phases

The IK 2035 Engagement Process unfolded in four phases: Imagine It, Plan It, Design It, and Adopt It. Using the successes and lessons from the decade guided by the IK 2025 Strategic Vision as a starting point, each engagement phase built on what was heard in the previous one.

1. IMAGINE IT

FALL '24 – WINTER '25

The **Imagine It** phase explored the question: What makes a happy, healthy, and thriving Kalamazoo? Community members reflected on the progress made over the previous decade, what remained unfinished, and what they hoped to create together.

Through community book discussions, art projects, neighborhood events, Meeting on the Go activities, surveys, and other conversations, community members shared ingredients to a Happy City, the qualities and experiences that became the foundation for the Strategic Vision.

2. PLAN IT

WINTER '25 – FALL '25

During **Plan It**, the Happy City Ingredients and emerging goals and guiding principles were tested and refined through public meetings, focus groups, and conversations with community members, subject matter experts, City staff, and the City Commission. This phase clarified the long-term outcomes needed to achieve the emerging goals.

3. DESIGN IT

WINTER '26 – FALL '26

During **Design It**, the process brought planning to the neighborhood level and shifted from high-level goals and outcomes to a more specific question: How do we achieve the community's goals and envisioned outcomes? Goal-specific discussions with community members and City staff refined strategies using community input, data, research, best practices, and local expertise.

What we learned in this phase further confirmed the Strategic Vision Goals and Outcomes. It also generated ideas and insights that carried forward into the development of strategies and measures for inclusion in Implementation Plans.

4. ADOPT IT

FALL 2026

During **Adopt It**, the Strategic Vision was reviewed, refined, and prepared for adoption, creating a shared framework to guide City plans, investments, and decision-making over the next decade.



City Led Meeting Locations by Phase

★ Imagine It ★ Plan It ★ Design It



How Community Shaped the Strategic Vision Framework

Community input shaped not only the content of the Strategic Vision, but also how it was organized. Each phase built on what came before, with each round of engagement strengthening and validating the emerging Strategic Vision before the next phase began. The examples below highlight some of the most significant ways the Strategic Vision Framework evolved in response to community input gathered.

Ten Strategic Vision Goals guided the work of the last decade. The Imagine It phase laid the foundation for the IK 2035 Goals with nine common themes. These early conversations also revealed that some priorities were too important to belong to a single goal. Instead, community members described them as expectations that should shape every area of City work.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), for example, shifted from a standalone goal (Shared Prosperity) in IK 2025 to a Guiding Principle that informs every goal in IK 2035. Likewise, continuous engagement reflected the community's desire for ongoing partnership throughout IK 2035's ten-year implementation. Together, these and other cross-cutting priorities became the five Guiding Principles, a new element of the Strategic Vision Framework.

The question, "What makes a happy, healthy, and thriving Kalamazoo?" guided the Imagine It phase. As community members explored that question, it

became clear they did not view a happy, healthy city as a potential goal. Instead, they described it as the result of making progress across every area of the Strategic Vision. Initially this was reflected as a Guiding Principle. After deeper discussions during Plan It, a happy, healthy Kalamazoo became the overarching aspiration for the Strategic Vision.

The nine themes that emerged from the Imagine It phase were tested through additional public meetings, topic-specific discussions, conversations with City staff, and review by the City Commission in the Plan It phase. As relationships between themes became clearer, several were combined and refined. This resulted in eight integrated Strategic Vision Goals that better reflect the connections between the community's priorities.

WMU Evaluation Lab



The WMU Evaluation Center – Evaluation Lab, supported the City of Kalamazoo throughout the IK 2035 engagement process by attending activities, supporting conversations, collecting results, and assisting with analysis.

The Evaluation Lab “seeks to advance social justice missions of organizations serving diverse communities by offering affordable, collaborative, and culturally responsive evaluation services.”

IK 2025 Goals

Our starting point

- 1 Shared Prosperity
- 2 Connected City
- 3 Inviting Public Places
- 4 Environmental Responsibility
- 5 Safe Community
- 6 Youth Development
- 7 Complete Neighborhoods
- 8 Strength Through Diversity
- 9 Economic Vitality
- 10 Good Governance

IK 2035 Engagement: Imagine It

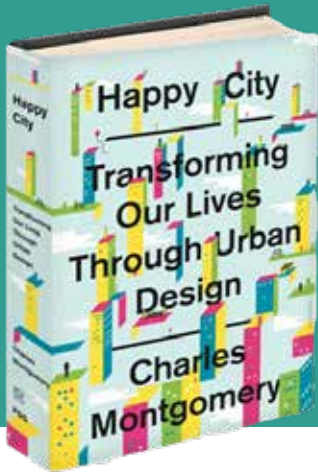
Building themes & priorities



IK 2035 Engagement: Plan It

Strategic Vision Framework: A happy, healthy city





A COMMUNITY BOOK READ

What makes a Happy, Healthy City?

Imagine Kalamazoo Reads & Draws

As part of the Imagine It phase, the City used a community-wide book read as a strategic visioning tool for the first time. More than 1,000 people participated in discussions of Happy City by Charles Montgomery through book clubs, community groups, and public events. All were welcome at these events, whether one read the book, viewed Montgomery's TED Talk, or were just interested in what it meant to have a happy city.

Why Happy City? Because Happy City poses an interesting and fundamental question: how do our lives in the city – who we see, where we live, and how we get places – shape our sense of happiness?

Charles Montgomery visited Kalamazoo to speak at events hosted by the City and Southwest Michigan First, extending the conversation to hundreds more community members.

City staff also invited Kalamazoo youth to express their vision of a happy, healthy Kalamazoo through art. Youth from across the city responded by creating artwork at schools, after school programs, and Kalamazoo Public Library (KPL) branches. Their Happy City art work was displayed at the KPL Downtown branch and on the City's website.

Together, these conversations created a shared language for exploring what makes a happy, healthy, and thriving city, and the ideas that emerged helped shape the Strategic Vision.



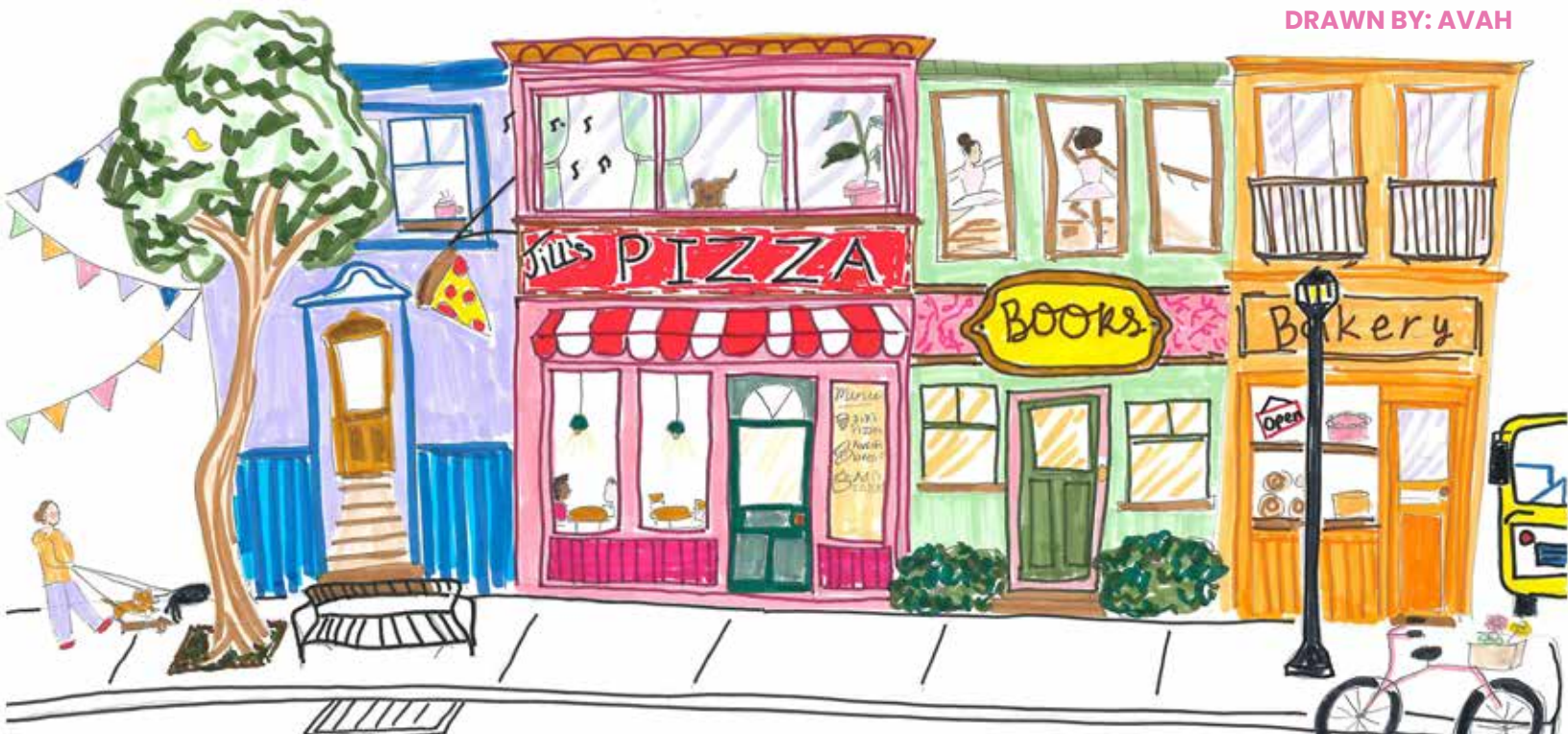
How do our lives in the city – who we see, where we live, and how we get places – shape our sense of happiness?

The conversations throughout the Imagine It and Plan It phases identified the qualities and experiences that community members said contribute to a happy, healthy, and thriving Kalamazoo. These Happy City Ingredients became the foundation for the Strategic Vision.

Happy City Ingredients

- **Housing for All** – Everyone has access to affordable, stable, and safe housing.
- **Connected & Accessible Transportation**
 - Reliable transit links every neighborhood. Walking and biking are safe, easy, and part of everyday life.
- **Clean, Green, and Beautiful** – Tree-lined streets, clean parks, public art, and a revitalized Kalamazoo River define our cityscape.
- **Basic Needs with Dignity** – Clean drinking water, healthy food, internet access, and essential services are guaranteed for all.
- **Inclusive & Equitable** – Kalamazoo celebrates and supports all people—welcoming immigrants, LGBTQ+ residents, **individuals with disabilities**, people of color, and every member of our community.
- **Vibrant Public Life** – Public spaces are filled with creative energy—murals, music, events, and opportunities to connect.
- **Safe & Supported** – Everyone feels secure in their home and neighborhood, with trust in community-focused safety efforts.
- **Environmentally Sustainable** – Our city is climate-smart, carbon-neutral, and built to thrive for future generations.
- **Opportunity for All** – Residents have access to good jobs, education, and local businesses—so no one has to leave to succeed.
- **Transparent & Accountable Government** – We are a City that listens. Decision-making is fair, inclusive, and built on trust and collaboration.

DRAWN BY: AVAH



Writing the Vision Statement

The 2035 vision statement describes what Kalamazoo will look and feel like in the future. It was collaboratively developed by the community and City staff during the Plan It phase of Imagine Kalamazoo.

All Kalamazoo Neighborhoods. Initially, the vision statement began, “In 2035, all residents...” Through feedback, we heard that Kalamazoo is a city of distinct neighborhoods, and that the term “residents” did not adequately account for all the people, businesses, and activities that our neighborhoods represent. “All Kalamazoo neighborhoods” more accurately reflects how Kalamazoo sees itself — and affirms that every neighborhood deserves the same quality of services and opportunity. This is a commitment to geographic equity: no neighborhood is left behind as the city grows and thrives.

Sustainable, Responsive, and Accessible Services. The core function of the City is the services it provides. Sustainable, responsive, and accessible services mean Kalamazoo residents have what they need to thrive. This requires the City in 2035 to be more resilient and nimble — ready to seize new opportunities and meet future challenges. Together, these three qualities define core service quality: sustainable services that last and are fiscally sound, responsive services that adapt to resident feedback and changing needs, and accessible services that everyone can reach and afford.

Every Stage of Life. The community’s vision for 2035 keeps everyone in mind, from our oldest community members to our youngest. Each generation requires a unique support network, and the City’s services must flex to meet those different needs — from youth to young families to older adults aging in place. This reflects a commitment to generational inclusivity: a Kalamazoo that works for residents at every point in their life, not just one stage.

Together, these three elements — geographic equity across neighborhoods, service quality, and generational inclusivity — form the foundation for how the City will measure progress toward the 2035 vision.

Youth & Young Professionals

Every Stage of Life includes Kalamazoo’s youth and young professionals. Elementry and middle school students want to independently move around their neighborhoods. They want more choices in activities and third spaces to come together. Young professionals in Kalamazoo also want more choices in activities and places to gather in vibrant active public spaces, particularly after work and into the evening. Young professionals identified concerns about housing, more options for shelter and services for the unhoused, and an activated Kalamazoo River. These voices shaped the goals and outcomes of this document, including arts, culture, and placemaking, housing, and the environment.

IK 2035 VISION STATEMENT

In 2035, all Kalamazoo neighborhoods are supported by **sustainable**, **responsive**, and **accessible** services that lift people up and bring our community together at every stage of life.





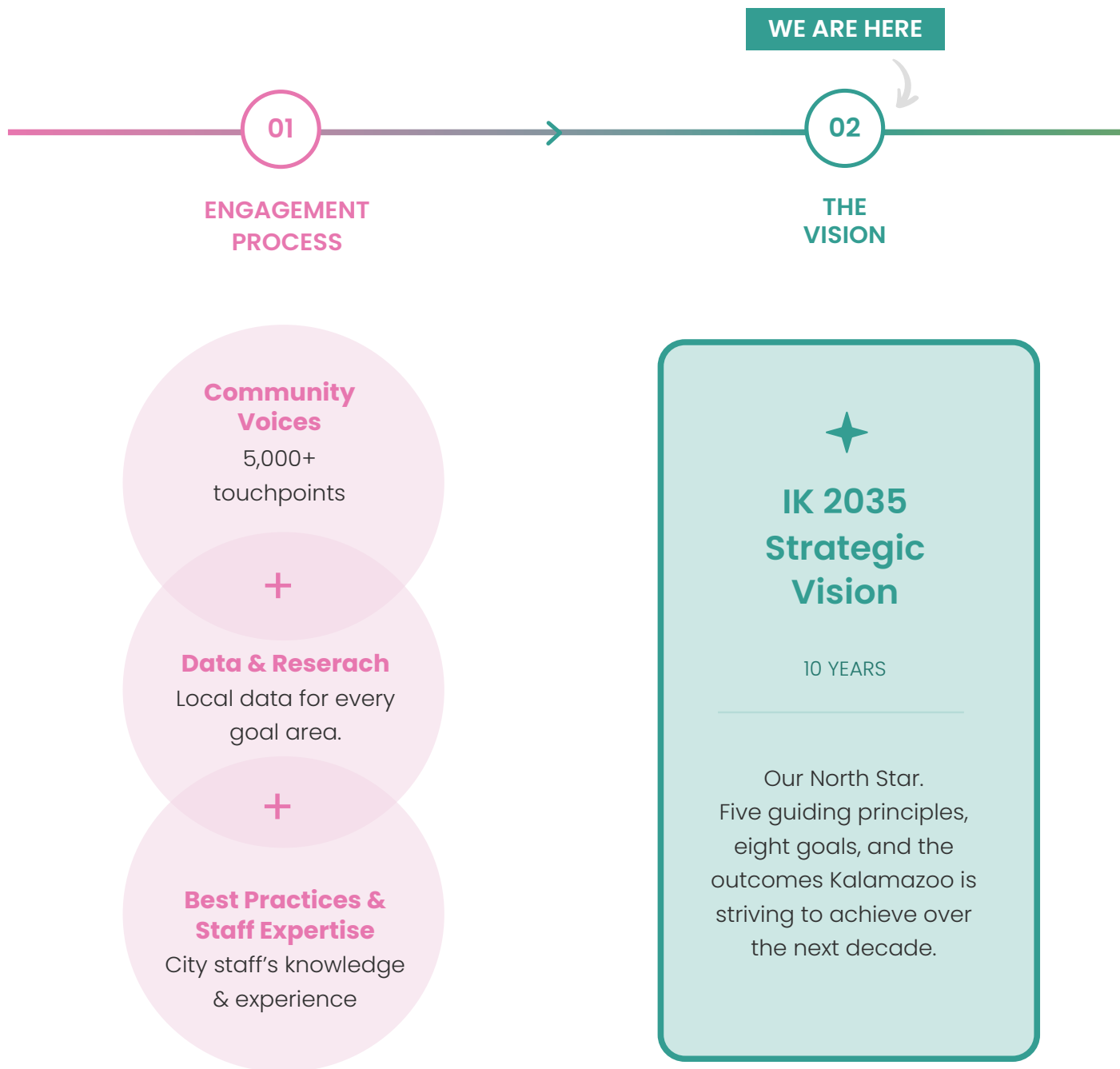
Building on Our Community's Strengths



Kalamazoo is already home to extraordinary community strengths, from its neighborhoods and educational opportunities to its businesses, cultural organizations, healthcare providers, and community partnerships. The Strategic Vision doesn't replace the incredible things already happening in Kalamazoo. It helps create the conditions that allow those efforts to have an even greater impact.

A Connected Strategic Vision Framework

The IK 2035 Engagement Process comprised of thousands of community conversations, data and research, and the expertise and best practices from City staff defined the framework for a Happy City and the eight Strategic Vision Goals. The ingredients that appeared consistently across all topics became the five Guiding Principles. Taken collectively, they describe what Kalamazoo is striving to achieve.



Guiding Principles: Connecting the Threads

The Five Guiding Principles reflect what matters most to the Kalamazoo community. They serve as connecting threads woven through every goal, so what matters most to the community is reflected across every aspect of the Strategic Vision. This supports a holistic approach to implementation, reinforces the connections among the goals, and strengthens the Strategic Vision.



Strategic Vision Goals

The Strategic Vision Goals organize the community's vision into eight interconnected areas of focus. Each goal focuses on an essential part of a happy and healthy Kalamazoo.

ARTS, CULTURE, PLACEMAKING



Vibrant public spaces, arts, and culture create belonging and vitality in every neighborhood making Kalamazoo a regional destination reflecting local identity and history.

COMMUNITY TRUST & SAFETY



Ensure reliable, responsive, and equitable services that meet the needs of all community members the city serves.

ECONOMIC VITALITY



A thriving business ecosystem that advances economic growth and equitable community wealth building.

EFFECTIVE CITY OPERATIONS



Ensure transparent, responsive and accountable City operations through internal collaboration, strategic resource management, and consistent communication.

ENVIRONMENT



Advance a healthy and resilient environment that sustains the community today and for generations to come.

HOUSING



Expand the supply of accessible, quality, and affordable housing that supports neighborhood stability for all community members.

TRANSPORTATION



Safe, connected travel that supports year-round and equitable mobility for all travelers.

YOUTH & FAMILY



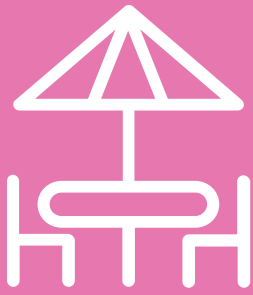
All young people and families have access to what they need to be safe and supported for healthy growth and success.

Designed to Work Together. With the interwoven Guiding Principles, the Strategic Goals provide a shared direction for City departments, community partners, and others to align their planning, investments, and decision-making. While each goal focuses on one aspect of community life, they are designed to work together, moving our collective efforts toward a more equitable, connected, and resilient future.









Arts, Culture, Placemaking

THE GOAL

Vibrant public spaces, arts, and culture create belonging and vitality in every neighborhood making Kalamazoo a regional destination reflecting local identity and history.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Kalamazoo community members described arts, culture, and public spaces as essential to the city's identity and quality of life. They celebrated the city's creativity, local artists, and cultural assets while imagining a future where these strengths are accessible to everyone and position Kalamazoo as the regional (and beyond!) leader in arts, culture, and creative placemaking. They imagined public spaces across all neighborhoods providing opportunities for recreation and gathering.

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Arts and culture in every neighborhood.**

Arts, culture, and public spaces across the city bring people together. Every neighborhood offers welcoming and accessible places for residents and visitors alike, with events that celebrate our history, diversity, and creativity. These spaces are designed for all ages and abilities—safe, comfortable, and easy to reach by walking, biking, transit, or car.

- **Community members shaping the places they love.**

Community-led placemaking expresses the city's rich cultural diversity and strengthens belonging, while local art reflects the unique character of each neighborhood. Investments in local artists and arts organizations strengthen neighborhood economies, spark innovation, attract talent, and generate shared prosperity.

- **A Downtown that celebrates arts, culture, and creativity.**

Downtown Kalamazoo serves as a vibrant arts and cultural hub where festivals, performances, and public art enliven the streets, support a sustainable economy, connect neighborhoods, and make Kalamazoo a regional destination for visitors from across the Midwest and the Country.

- **Creative spaces that reflect community values.**

The City's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility ensures that every project, program, and partnership reflects community values and removes barriers to participation. Through continuous engagement and operational excellence, it is easy for residents, artists, and partners to shape and activate spaces that inspire joy, creativity, and connection.

Outcomes



More activated civic and natural spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and vibrant places for year-round gathering, recreation, and cultural engagement.



More community-led placemaking and cultural expression that is shaped and supported by residents and local artists.



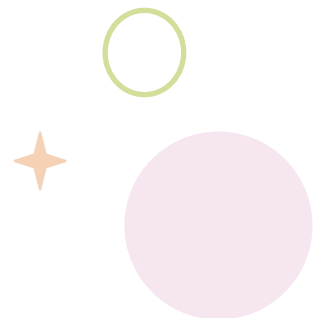
Greater investment in year-round spaces and programming, including third-places, and youth experiences.



A stronger arts and culture economy that supports community vitality, attracts regional visitors, and is accessible to all.



Elevate Kalamazoo's unique parks, open spaces, and natural assets as economic attractions and regional destinations that celebrate the city's diverse cultures.







Community Trust & Safety

THE GOAL

Ensure reliable, responsive, and equitable services that meet the needs of all community members the city serves.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Residents described community trust and safety as growing from everyday experiences with city government and with one another. They value reliable public services, safe and welcoming neighborhoods, transparent communication, and opportunities to help shape decisions. They imagined a city where residents and government work together to create safe, sustainable, connected, and resilient communities.

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Welcoming spaces where trust and belonging grow.**

Neighborhoods, parks, and public spaces are welcoming, safe, accessible, and reflective of Kalamazoo's diversity. These natural and built spaces create daily opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to gather, belong, and thrive. Together, they form the foundation of a resilient and inclusive city.

- **Safe, reliable public services that reflect care and accountability.**

Every city service and interaction reflects care, equity, and accountability. Reliable essentials such as clean water, safe streets, and well-maintained public spaces are delivered sustainably and with environmental responsibility and operational excellence. Police, fire, and emergency services respond swiftly and fairly while adapting to the community's evolving needs.

- **Transparent government that listens and follows through.**

Residents are informed and have a voice in shaping the services and systems that affect their lives. Open communication, transparent decision-making, and consistent follow-through show that community feedback leads to action. Through continuous engagement, the City works with residents and partners to reduce barriers and make government responsive, equitable, and easy to navigate.

- **Shared responsibility for community well-being.**

Residents, organizations, businesses, and the City work together to create safe, healthy, and resilient neighborhoods. Everyone has a role to play in strengthening community safety and well-being.

Outcomes



Increased community safety and trust through reliable services, improved transparency, engagement, and collaboration across all neighborhoods.



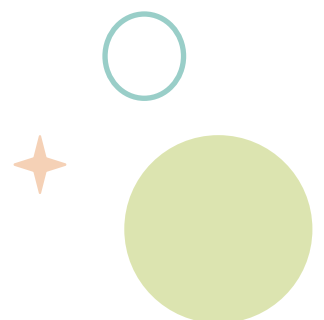
More public spaces that support connection and belonging for all.



More equitable access to city services as systemic barriers are removed.



Greater shared responsibility for safety and well-being through community partnerships and civic participation.







Economic Vitality



THE GOAL

A thriving business ecosystem that advances economic growth and equitable community wealth building.

COMMUNITY VOICE

The community described a strong local economy as essential to Kalamazoo's long-term vitality and quality of life. They value locally owned businesses, thriving neighborhoods, **and** a vibrant, **welcoming** Downtown serving **youth, college students, young professionals, and adults. An economy with** opportunities for local businesses and entrepreneurs to succeed, and an economy that creates opportunity for all. They imagine a city where economic growth strengthens neighborhoods, expands opportunity, and builds shared prosperity.

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Neighborhoods and a Downtown that thrive together.**

A strong economy reaches every neighborhood and resident. Vibrant commercial hubs close to home meet daily needs and are easily accessed by car, transit, bike, or on foot. These areas bring energy to community spaces while also drawing visitors from across the region. Downtown Kalamazoo serves as the cultural and commercial heart of the city: a safe, welcoming, and financially strong center that reflects the community's creativity and ambition, **builds from assets like the Event Center and adjacent college campuses**, while connecting seamlessly to surrounding neighborhoods.

- **Businesses of every size contributing to shared prosperity.**

A diverse, resilient, and growing economy supports local businesses with the resources they need to succeed, enables entrepreneurs to access capital without barriers, and benefits from larger employers that provide the stability that anchors shared prosperity. Continuous investment in commercial development throughout the city strengthens neighborhood economies, creates greater flexibility in how people connect to services, and reinforces a sense of place through active, accessible public spaces.

- **Economic growth that benefits everyone.**

Economic growth benefits historically underserved communities, supports local talent, and aligns with housing, transportation, and placemaking goals. The City partners with the community and listens to its needs, while equity and sustainability guide every decision. By telling Kalamazoo's story with confidence and care, the city continues to position itself as a place where creativity, inclusivity, and opportunity thrive together, building an economy that works for everyone.

Outcomes



More vibrant neighborhood commercial streets supporting housing, daily needs, local businesses, and equitable economic activity.



A Downtown that increasingly serves as the welcoming cultural and commercial heart of the region, supporting a thriving economy that serves residents, workers, and visitors.



A stronger, more diverse, and more inclusive small business ecosystem where barriers to start-ups and growth are reduced.



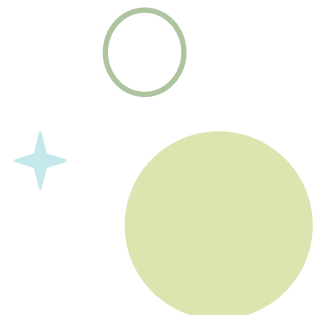
Increased alignment of educational opportunities, talent attraction, and workforce development



Greater alignment of development and business sustainability practices that support community health, long-term resiliency, and protect natural resources.



Greater equitable economic opportunity that closes the racial and economic wealth gaps.







Effective City Operations

THE GOAL

Ensure transparent, responsive and accountable City operations through internal collaboration, strategic resource management, and consistent communication.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Residents describe reliable services, clear communication, and accountable government as essential to their experience of Kalamazoo. They value responsive customer service, responsible stewardship of public resources, and opportunities to help shape decisions. They want a city government that works collaboratively, continuously improves, earns trust through its actions, and adapts to meet today's needs while preparing for tomorrow's challenges and opportunities.

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Reliable services that build confidence and trust.**

Every service and interaction reflects respect, equity, and accountability. Residents experience consistent quality in the essentials they depend on, including well-maintained infrastructure, clean and safe public spaces, timely customer service, and transparent information about how decisions are made. These core services build confidence in City government and reinforce a sense of belonging and trust across all neighborhoods.

- **A collaborative organization that continuously improves.**

City departments are aligned around shared goals and work together as one team. Internal communication is strong and timely, enabling staff to collaborate effectively, respond quickly to community needs, and deliver services with excellence. Teams have the tools, training, and support they need to do their best work. Investments in people, equipment, technology, and infrastructure are thoughtful and forward-looking, built on a culture of continuous improvement, operational discipline, and responsible stewardship of public funds.

- **Transparent government that listens and responds.**

The City listens and responds to residents, businesses, and community partners by creating multiple avenues for input and ensuring that feedback leads to visible action. Transparent communication, accessible information, dashboards, and regular updates help residents understand how the City is performing, what improvements are underway, and how they can participate in shaping their government. City operations are easy to navigate, aligned with community priorities, and responsive to the people they serve.

Outcomes



Improved organizational excellence by building a high-performing and supported workforce.



Greater transparency and public trust through clear communication and inclusive engagement.



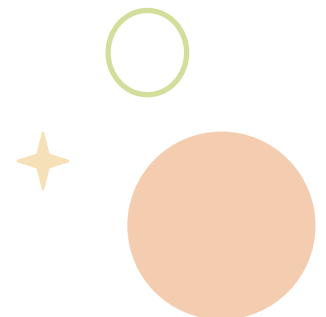
Greater alignment of strategic financial stewardship, planning, and resource allocation to support community priorities.



Greater community collaboration through meaningful engagement.



A culture of continuous improvement, accountability, and customer service across all departments.







Environment

THE GOAL

Advance a healthy and resilient environment that sustains the community today and for generations to come.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Residents describe Kalamazoo's parks, natural areas, and waterways as essential to the city's beauty, health, resilience, and quality of life. They value clean water, healthy parks and natural spaces, responsible stewardship of natural resources, and equitable access to a safe and sustainable environment. They imagined a city that protects and restores its natural assets while leading by example through environmental responsibility, innovation, and shared stewardship.

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **A healthy environment that protects people and natural resources.**

Kalamazoo is known for its healthy, sustainable environment that supports residents today and for generations to come. Through innovation and collaboration, the city manages flood-prone areas in ways that protect homes, waterways, and drinking water while strengthening neighborhood safety and resilience. The Kalamazoo River and its green corridors are cleaner, more accessible, and celebrated as places for recreation, gathering, and connection with nature. Recycling, composting, and reusing materials are everyday practices that reflect a shared commitment to sustainability and responsible resource use.

- **A city that leads by example in environmental responsibility.**

Guided by principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, all residents benefit from safe, healthy environments, and public investments reduce barriers to participation. Operational excellence drives this work through strong partnerships, transparent decision-making, and energy-efficient city services increasingly powered by renewable resources. Natural and built spaces are restored and maintained through green infrastructure, expanded tree canopy, and equitable access to parks and open spaces in every neighborhood.

- **A walkable and connected city that models sustainable development.**

A compact, walkable, and connected Downtown Kalamazoo models sustainable land use and transportation choices, reducing environmental impacts while promoting economic vitality and social connection. Downtown's mix of housing, commerce, and cultural activity reduces car dependency, encourages multimodal travel, and showcases green building and infrastructure practices that can be replicated citywide.

- **A community that shares responsibility for environmental stewardship.**

Residents, businesses, and community partners share responsibility for protecting Kalamazoo's natural assets. Through inclusive education, outreach, and shared stewardship, the community works together to strengthen resilience and celebrate the beauty of a cleaner, greener city.

Outcomes



Improved natural areas, parks, and public spaces through preservation, restoration, and damage mitigation, and reduced barriers to access.



Less waste and greater use of sustainable materials across households, businesses, and construction activities.



Greater use of renewable and cleaner energy sources with an overall increase



Greater community stewardship of Kalamazoo's natural assets through increased awareness, education, and sustainable practices.



Greater application of environmental justice in development and infrastructure projects across neighborhoods.



Improved access and overall health of the Kalamazoo River to support the natural world, economic vitality, and recreation.





Housing

THE GOAL

Expand the supply of accessible, quality, and affordable housing that supports neighborhood stability for all community members.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Residents described housing as essential to individual well-being, stable neighborhoods, and economic opportunity. They value safe, affordable, and high-quality homes, diverse housing choices, and neighborhoods where people can thrive throughout every stage of life. They imagined a city that expands housing opportunities **through preservation of existing housing and new construction of all housing types, especially those missing from Kalamazoo neighborhoods. Expanded housing that considers both current residents' needs and those of the future, especially early career and young professionals, to strengthen neighborhoods and support housing stability for all.**

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Housing choices that support every stage of life.**

Neighborhoods provide a range of safe, high-quality, and affordable housing options that support residents at every stage of life **and the residents of Kalamazoo's future**. People can remain and thrive in their communities as neighborhoods evolve. Stable and supportive housing options are available for residents experiencing severe housing cost burdens or facing financial challenges. Kalamazoo continues to expand housing choice and promote inclusive growth through missing middle housing, mixed-income, and mixed-use development that strengthens both neighborhoods and the city-wide economy.

- **Safe, healthy homes that support housing stability.**

Well-maintained, safe, and healthy homes are supported through proactive code enforcement, rental registration adherence, and programs that assist with critical and sustainable home repairs, **understanding that existing homes are our naturally occurring affordable housing**. In partnership with the larger community, sheltering and supportive housing options, foreclosure and eviction prevention, and housing support services work together to reduce homelessness and promote housing stability.

- **Homes that connect people to opportunity.**

New housing and infill development are strategically located near transit, commercial corridors, schools, and employment centers, linking residents to essential services and economic opportunities.

- **Housing systems that support long-term prosperity.**

Kalamazoo advances best practices in housing development and economic mobility through streamlined development processes and inclusive policies. The city aligns zoning, incentives, and infrastructure investments to encourage attainable housing for all, local wealth-building, and sustainable growth. Every neighborhood offers opportunity, connection, and long-term resilience.

Outcomes



More diverse housing options that support neighborhood stability and meet evolving community needs.



Expanded supply of units across the housing continuum in all neighborhoods.



More sustainable and resilient homes through promotion of new construction and renovation in all neighborhoods.



Safer, healthier, and higher quality housing conditions for rental and homeownership **within our existing housing structures.**



More housing development that is close to transit, jobs, and neighborhood amenities.



Stronger housing systems that create resident stability across the housing continuum.





Transportation

THE GOAL

Safe, connected travel that supports year-round and equitable mobility for all travelers.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Residents described transportation as essential to creating a safe, connected, and vibrant Kalamazoo. They value streets that are safe for everyone, transportation choices that connect people to opportunity, and neighborhoods where walking, biking, rolling, driving, and using transit are all viable options. They imagined a city where mobility strengthens the local economy, connects neighborhoods, and supports a sustainable and inclusive community for all.

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Safe and connected travel for everyone.**

People of all ages and abilities can travel safely and easily. Residents travel on streets where drivers follow the rules, respect speed limits, and look out for people walking, biking, or rolling. People have more ways to get around without a car through a complete, connected transportation network that integrates transit, sidewalks, bike routes, and pathways across the city.

- **Transportation that helps neighborhoods and Downtown thrive.**

Transportation helps shape neighborhoods where people want to live, work, and gather. Walkable streets and connected neighborhood nodes strengthen local businesses, attract investment, and keep more dollars circulating within the community. A more walkable and bikeable Downtown drives economic vitality by increasing foot traffic, supporting retail and dining, and creating inviting public spaces that draw both residents and visitors.

- **Connected transportation systems that expand mobility.**

Strong connections between land use and mobility make streets safer, more attractive, and more welcoming. A reliable and affordable transit system, supported by multiple hubs, strong regional connections, and convenient last-mile options, makes it easier for people to reach their destinations.

Outcomes



Improved safety, efficiency, and overall experience of moving around Kalamazoo, connecting all people to jobs, services, and daily needs.



A more complete, connected, and universally accessible transportation network, including non-motorized and trail connections.



A transportation network that better accommodates an integrated and accessible public transit system.



A network that increasingly serves all travelers through innovative, flexible, and equitable mobility solutions.





Youth & Family

THE GOAL

All young people and families have access to what they need to be safe and supported for healthy growth and success.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Residents describe children, youth, and families as essential to Kalamazoo's future. They value safe, healthy, and supportive environments where young people can thrive, families have the resources they need, and every child has access to opportunity, **including The Kalamazoo Promise**. They imagine a community that invests in and empowers young people and families through strong relationships, coordinated support, and equitable access to programs and services. **Residents recognized that a successful Kalamazoo also requires retaining and attracting recent Kalamazoo Public School and college graduates, early career, and young professionals.**

Kalamazoo Imagines...

- **Strong networks that help families thrive.**

Families are thriving, healthy, and deeply connected to schools, neighborhoods, and community networks that support them at every stage of life. Inclusive, culturally responsive programs serve children and youth from birth through early adulthood, with dependable access to high-quality childcare and meaningful multigenerational opportunities that strengthen families and neighborhoods. **These strong networks make Kalamazoo a place new families and young adults want to call home.**

- **Opportunities for young people to belong, grow, and succeed.**

Young people see themselves as active participants in a vibrant community, engaged in sports, recreation, enrichment, and life-skills learning that foster belonging and build safe, welcoming neighborhoods. Mentorship, leadership development, and clear career pathways open doors to higher education, skilled trades, and long-term employment, creating economic mobility that benefits the entire community. Teens have access to inclusive programming close to home and accessible third spaces where they can gather safely, express creativity, and build lasting connections with peers and mentors.

- **Coordinated support that expands opportunity.**

Strong systems, reliable funding, and partnerships grounded in equity, collaboration, and accountability align Kalamazoo's resources, reduce barriers, and ensure consistent access to opportunity. **Strengthening both families and neighborhoods to support student use of The Kalamazoo Promise.** Coordinated networks of schools, nonprofits, community organizations, and city services align Kalamazoo's resources, reduce barriers, and ensure consistent access to opportunity. Continuous engagement keeps youth and family voices at the center of decision-making, so

Outcomes



Greater access to youth-focused activities that build self-confidence, trust, and community engagement opportunities.



Greater youth voice and leadership by creating more meaningful opportunities to shape decisions and civic life.



More safe and welcoming places, **including third spaces**, where all youth can thrive in recreational, academic, and career building programs.



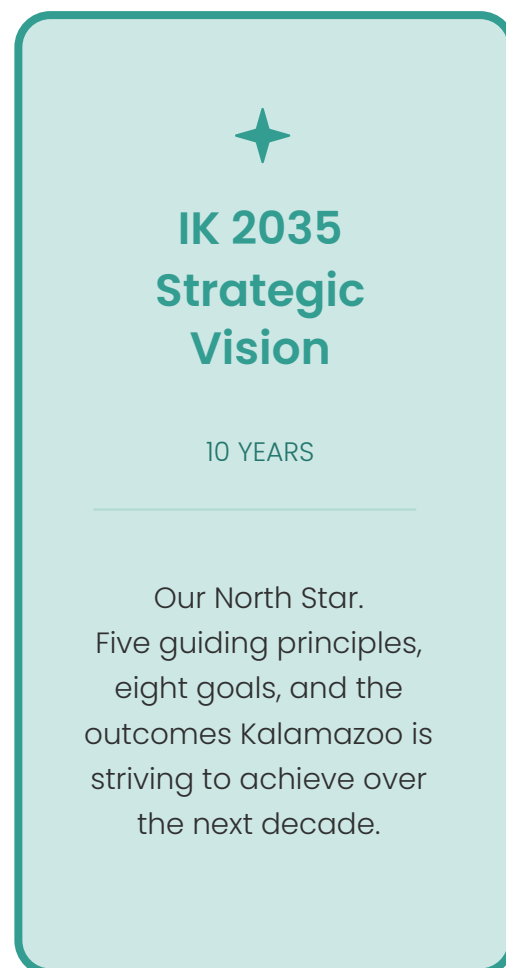
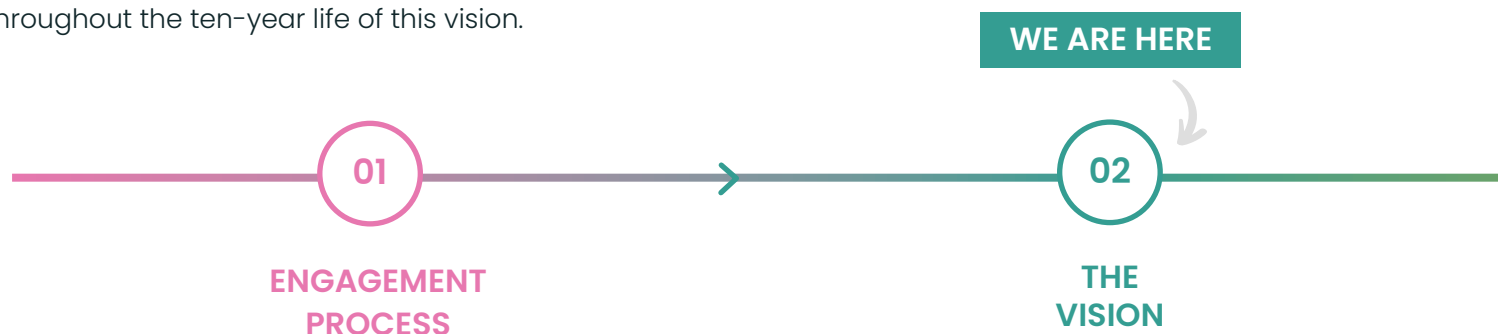
Improved youth and family well-being, including health outcomes through strong cross-sector partnerships.



More recent KPS and college graduates, early career, and young professionals making Kalamazoo their home.

Implementation Comes Next

The Strategic Vision describes the community's long-term goals and outcomes. It is intentionally high-level to cover a city-wide vision of Kalamazoo in 2035. Implementation comes next. The strategies and measures needed to achieve these shared outcomes are found in the City's implementation plans - including the ten-year 2035 Master Plan; the five-year topic specific plans such as the Neighborhood Plans and Parks and Recreation; and the annual budget to fund the work. To support this work, internal implementation roadmaps will plan for needed budget, staff, training, and technology changes throughout the ten-year life of this vision.



03

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES (10 YRS)

Master Plan

10 YEARS

How the vision shapes the physical world around us



Topic Specific Implementation

5 YEARS

Plans that achieve specific vision outcomes like Parks & Rec, Neighborhood plans, HUD, and CIP.



Annual Budget

1 YEAR

What gets funded each year.

04

INTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Government Strategy Document

Internal planning document that coordinates citywide implementation across all departments, focusing on budgeting, capacity, and technology. Managed by the City Manager's Office to support all departments in their implementation work.



Department Plans

Internal planning documents that coordinate department-level implementation and align each department's work with the Government Strategy Document.

A Framework for Implementation

Implementation to Come. The Master Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), Neighborhood Plans, and other topic-specific Implementation Plans identify the Strategies that guide implementation and the Measures that track progress over time. In other words, the Strategic Vision describes where Kalamazoo is going. The Master Plan and other implementation plans identify how the community will get there. Each implementation plan advances the same community vision through its own area of focus and expertise, creating alignment across departments, investments, and decision-making.

Together, the Strategic Vision and these implementation plans align to create a connected planning framework that helps ensure departments, decisions, investments, and actions across the City and the broader community, continue helping to move Kalamazoo toward the community's shared vision. By working toward the same long-term goals, the City, its partners, and the broader community can create greater impact than any one effort could achieve alone.

DAVIS STREET PARK

A skate park was installed at Davis Street Park during park improvements as a result of community conversations during IK 2025.



GOSM FRAMEWORK

ELEMENT	PURPOSE	FOUND IN
Guiding Principles What matters most	Principles that reflect what matters most to the Kalamazoo community. They are woven throughout planning and implementation and guide the work.	Strategic Vision & Implementation Plans
Goals What we want to achieve	The broad, long-term areas of focus that define the future Kalamazoo is working toward.	Strategic Vision
Outcomes What success looks like	The long-term changes the community hopes to see	Strategic Vision
Strategies How we will achieve our goals	Coordinated approaches across all City departments for achieving the Strategic Vision's goals and outcomes through projects, programs, plans, and policies.	Implementation Plans
Measures How we will track progress	Indicators used to monitor progress over time and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies.	Implementation Plans

The Strategic Vision is the North Star



The Strategic Vision captures the community's shared vision for a happy, healthy Kalamazoo. Communities change over time, and no one can anticipate every opportunity, challenge, or crisis. Like a North Star, the Strategic Vision provides a consistent point of reference for considering new ideas, responding to changing conditions, and making decisions that remain aligned with the community's vision. The questions below are designed to help City leaders, community partners, and others evaluate new ideas, prioritize investments, and make decisions in alignment with the Strategic Vision.

CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

What has changed since the Strategic Vision was developed?

FOCUS	QUESTIONS
Changes	Has anything changed in the understanding of this challenge or opportunity or the conditions surrounding it? If so, describe. Consider: • Changes in Community Voices • Changes in Data • Changes in Best Practices

GOALS & OUTCOMES

How does addressing this challenge or opportunity support the Strategic Vision?

FOCUS	QUESTIONS
Current Alignment	• Which Strategic Vision Goals does this help advance? Name all. • Which Outcomes does it help achieve? Name all.
Opportunities for Greater Alignment	• What opportunities are there to strengthen its contribution to the Strategic Vision?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

How does this challenge or opportunity reflect the Guiding Principles?

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	QUESTIONS
Continuous Engagement	• How has community input informed this work? • Who are the community partners and champions involved? • How will community members continue to shape this work during implementation?
Sustainability	• How does this support long-term stewardship of community, infrastructure, environmental, and financial resources? • Is there a sustainable funding approach?
Economic Mobility	• How does this expand opportunity or stability for residents? • What barriers to opportunity does this reduce? • How does this strengthen long-term prosperity for individuals, families, or neighborhoods?
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility	• How have diverse community perspectives informed this work? • Who might be left out, and how could this initiative better include them? • How does this expand equitable access to opportunities, services, or public spaces?
Operational Excellence	• How will this improve the quality and responsiveness of City services? • Is there a clear path to implementation? • Is there adequate capacity to implement it today?