

RESOLUTION NO. 25 – 2

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE CITY COUNCIL FINAL
POLICY AGENDA WORK PLAN FOR CALENDAR YEARS
2025 AND 2026

WHEREAS, on the 19th day of November, 2024 the City Council of the City of Mason City, Iowa adopted Resolution No. 24-228, adopting the Policy Agenda for Calendar Years 2025 and 2026, and

WHEREAS, adoption of the Final Policy Agenda Work Plan is the final step in the Fall 2024 strategic planning process for calendar years 2025 and 2026.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Mason City, Iowa:

Section 1: That the Final Policy Agenda Work Plan – Exhibit A (attached), be and the same is hereby approved.

Section 2: That the Mayor is authorized and Clerk hereby directed to execute the necessary documents.

PASSED AND APPROVED this 7th day of January, 2025

/s/Bill Schickel
Bill Schickel, Mayor

ATTEST:

/s/Aaron Burnett
Aaron Burnett, City Clerk



CALENDAR YEARS 2025 & 2026 POLICY AGENDA: WORK PLAN

Calendar Years 2025 & 2026 Policy Agenda:

1. Initiate Redevelopment of Southbridge Mall with Focus on Family Entertainment and Conference Center Uses

Primarily Responsible: City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, North Iowa Corridor Executive Director, Chamber Executive Director, and other outside developers & partners.

Staff Interpretation & Action: The City has been presented with an exceptional challenge but an outstanding opportunity to facilitate the redevelopment of Southbridge Mall, following the developer's default in May 2024 and the City's acquisition of the mall through the loan guaranty. The City has already made significant investment in the mall and its environs through the Mason City Arena, the Principal Pavilion, the Willow Creek Riverwalk, and upcoming construction of the Home2 Suites Hotel. While many enclosed shopping malls around the country have experienced declines with the rise of online shopping and other factors, in part due to the mall's location adjacent to downtown, Mason City has uncommon opportunities and reasons for City involvement in the mall's redevelopment.

Based on the Council's worksession in October and subsequent guidance, staff understands the City's position to include long-term ownership of the mall while encouraging the greatest degree of private investment possible. Due to the above-listed investments in the mall and mall area along with the plan to convert much of the former Younkers store into a conference center ballroom, the City has a great deal invested and plans to retain ownership of the mall to avoid loss of control, effectively manage the many moving parts related to development, and to protect and enhance the downtown area through mall redevelopment.

With continued ownership of the mall determined, the Council laid out 4 immediate priorities for the mall:

- 1) Develop conference center in former Younkers store
- 2) Reactivate one theatre space
- 3) Address the building's roof
- 4) Attract and develop a bowling alley

With these priorities in mind, staff offers the following general plan for implementation:

Conference Center: Staff plans to organize a consultant selection process in early 2025 that will provide the professional guidance needed to successfully design and construct improvements for the conference center. Construction on the improvements has been included in the preliminary FY26-FY30 Capital Improvements Plan for FY27, and design costs are included in FY26, and a portion has already been amended into the FY25 budget.

Theatre Space: The former theatre space in the mall is largely usable, with some renovations and sound improvements needed to reactivate it. It is thought that significant benefits to the community could be achieved with manageable costs for the time being through renovation of one theatre space. The reactivated theatre could be a hub for the community's growing film community and be used for special events. It is thought that design of the improvements could begin in 2025 and staff will evaluate options for the renovation work, including whether it makes sense to package the construction improvements with the conference center project or to address them separately.

Address the Roof: A significant item for long-term viability of City and private investments is addressing the building's roof. The roof has reached end-of-life and needs to be replaced soon. To this end, the City Council approved the issuance of an RFP for rooftop solar panels that would include wrapping the cost of replacing the roof into a long-term power purchase agreement. This approach would eliminate the need for a large up-front capital expenditure to replace the roof. The City received proposals and is in the process of finalizing the power purchase agreement. It is thought that the construction work on this project could begin in early to mid 2025.

Bowling Alley: Following the loss of Mystic Lanes to a fire and the previous loss of the Rose Bowl, Mason City is currently without a bowling alley. This use conceptually fits well into the idea of remaking the mall as a family entertainment center, building on the mini-golf, axe throwing, and other current uses aligned with this concept. The City has been in active conversations with potential developers and staff is focused on bringing this concept to reality as an important anchor for the redevelopment of the mall.

2. Continue to Promote Broad-Based Housing Initiatives with Focus on Increased Owner-Occupied Development

Primarily Responsible: City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, Development Services Director, North Iowa Corridor Housing Development Corporation Director, and other outside developers & partners.

Staff Interpretation & Action: The City has achieved great success in recent years in the development of quality multi-family rental development, including The River,

The River II, the Federal Rowhomes, The Delaware apartments, and numerous downtown upper-story apartments. While the City's housing study, the full occupancies of every project that has been developed to date, and all other metrics point to the need to continue multi-family development at a similar pace as in the recent past, the Council is very interested in enhancing the amount of construction for owner-occupied housing that is occurring in Mason City.

The 2022 study found that the 10-year demand for new owner-occupied units in Mason City was 177, with 133 of those being single-family and 44 being multi-family units. This would require construction of approximately 18 new owner-occupied units each year, versus an average of about 10 new owner-occupied units currently being produced per year. Meeting this higher demand will require identification & development of new sites and new programs & incentives.

A major upgrade to the City's housing development efforts was made in late 2024 with the addition of a full-time North Iowa Corridor Housing Development Corporation director position. A highly experienced and talented director has been hired and is expected to serve as a great partner and driving force for housing development in Mason City and the North Iowa area in the future.

Recently, the City partnered with Habitat for Humanity on the redevelopment of the former Madison school site. This development will immediately result in 6 new units and eventually will result in 13 new units. Additionally, the City is working to redevelop the distressed 500-600 block of 4th Street NE in partnership with the HDC. The HDC plans to move 2-3 homes and renovate them for resale. The remaining houses on the block will be demolished, and the City plans to redevelop that space for 10-12 owner-occupied townhomes, in partnership with a developer to be identified. Also, the HDC is actively renovating 2 of the houses moved from the Blackmore site in late 2023 and has started marketing of the first renovated house.

Other efforts that are expected to be undertaken in the next year are a builder incentive to construct new homes on unoccupied but fully developed residential lots in Mason City. The City has also identified other areas through its infill housing ad-hoc committee that are primed for owned-occupied development and plans to work actively with property owners to move these sites toward development. The City also will stay engaged with existing developers and will consider tools such as residential TIF and others to encourage increased development. Finally, the City will undertake increased rehabilitation of existing housing stock to follow up on the HOME pilot grant program, using the Forest Park TIF expanded area. The City made its first certification for the housing rehab program in December 2024 and will have funds available starting in July 2025. Staff will work to develop appropriate program guidelines and bring these to Council for consideration.

3. Conduct Downtown Assessment to Evaluate Beautification, Bike & Pedestrian-Friendliness, and Other Factors

Primarily Responsible: City Administrator, City Engineer, Development Services Director, Main Street Mason City, Iowa DOT, other outside partners.

Staff Interpretation & Action: Many great improvements have been made in downtown Mason City in recent years including commercial and residential development, the Federal Avenue streetscape, and others, and Council would like to see a comprehensive assessment of the downtown's beautification, bike-friendliness, and pedestrian-friendliness conducted in order to steer future decision-making and to ensure that Mason City has a welcoming and bustling downtown well into the future.

Staff anticipates meeting in this light with the Iowa DOT in 2025 on the subject of the Highway 65 one-way pair (Washington/Delaware). Highway 65 largely frames the core downtown area, and any improvements to the one-way corridors must be made with the participation and coordination of the DOT. While improvements to Highway 65 should be seen as a longer-term initiative given these constraints, staff sees it as important to get this process moving soon.

A key step in this regard is envisioned as bringing in Main Street Iowa in early 2026 to conduct a downtown assessment. As part of this, the Iowa Downtown Resource Center will administer a community survey and identify strengths with a robust cross section of individuals, organizations, businesses, etc. The on-site study will be performed by four to five downtown development professionals. They will spend three days in the community visiting local businesses and interviewing stakeholders, as well as conducting a public presentation. Based on what they see and learn, they will prepare a 30- to 40-page written report that details short- and long-range recommendations to use for our planning. The report also provides design concepts that support the recommendations.

Following completion of the Main Street assessment, staff envisions follow-up work with outside consultants to build on and implement the recommendations of the report.

4. Evaluate and Develop Comprehensive Marketing, Communications, and Public Relations Strategy and Encourage Coordinated Promotion of Existing Assets Such as Arts Community

Primarily Responsible: City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, Executive Assistant to City Administrator, Main Street Mason City, Visit Mason City

Staff Interpretation & Action: The City has extensively worked to enhance its communication and outreach in recent years, including numerous regular efforts such as the River City News and fun outreach on social media such as Buddy the Elf. The City also was intentional in its branding and marketing for the Prairie Rock Trails bike park and amenities, in partnership with Visit Mason City. However, there is always more that can be done in terms of marketing and communication, and staff

intends to continue and improve upon these efforts in the coming years through a number of strategies. Staff understands that increased development of statistics and other measures of performance are important to telling our story, and will seek to enhance the City's efforts in those regards.

Main Street Mason City is in the process of a comprehensive branding effort that includes involvement of a number of partners, including the City. We have gained some valuable insight from this process and propose to work with Main Street's consultant to update and improve the City's branding in the same manner. We already have funding identified for future years in the CIP starting in 2025 for branding efforts and implementation.

Additionally, staff plans to work very closely with the cycling community for promotion of the opening in 2025 of numerous new amenities under the Bike North Iowa initiative, including the bike park and the Prairieland Trail. These amenities are meant for a larger audience than just the immediate region and will need active promotion and marketing to raise awareness and increase tourism to the area.

Staff also anticipates working closely with partners to support the creation of an area Arts Council. This effort should help to promote and coordinate Mason City's numerous assets in the arts.