



Des Moines
WATERLAND CITY

AGENDA
DES MOINES City Council
STRATEGIC PLAN WORKSHOP
Dining Hall - 22030 Cliff Avenue S. Des Moines, WA 98188
Thursday, February 26, 2026
5:30 PM - 9:00 PM
and
Friday, February 27, 2026
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

DISCUSSION ITEM

- Item 1. **Governance**
- Item 2. **Strategic Plan**

NEXT MEETING DATE

ADJOURNMENT

Members of the public who wish to provide comment during the meeting via Zoom must register in advance. To register, please email cityclerk@desmoineswa.gov by 12:00 p.m. (noon) on the Wednesday before the meeting.

City Council meeting can be viewed live on the City's website, Comcast Channel 21/321, on the City's [YouTube](#) channel or via [Zoom](#).

MEMO

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council
Katherine Caffrey, City Manager
From: Nancy Hetrick, Vice President, Raftelis
Date: February 20, 2026
Re: City Council Strategic Planning Workshop Preparation

My colleagues Janae Janik, Julie Gieseke, and I look forward to being with you on February 26-27, 2026, to develop a draft Strategic Plan framework for the City of Des Moines. This memorandum serves several purposes:

- Clarify the goals and purpose of the workshop
- Identify what needs to be done to prepare
- Share the agenda

Logistics

When: Thursday, February 26, 2026
5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
(Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m.; the workshop will begin at 6:00 p.m.)

Friday, February 27, 2026
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Location: Des Moines Beach Park Dining Hall
22030 Cliff Ave S
Des Moines, WA 98198

Purpose

During our time together on Thursday evening, we will discuss governance practices and how to lead the City of Des Moines as a team. On Friday, we will review the results of the strategic planning stakeholder engagement activities and develop a draft strategic plan framework, including a vision statement and strategic focus areas.

Governance Roles and Description	What activities are involved in performing this role?
<p>Strategic/Vision – Big Picture Thinker The focus here is on decisions that can have significant impact on the City. Can be long-term or short-term. Often focuses on the future and what might make a significant difference; seeing possible connections and relationships; thinks beyond present data and constraints.</p>	
<p>Trustee – Steward While listening and respecting constituent views, the trustee feels responsible to the City as a whole and to future residents. The trustee will make uncomfortable decisions that may run counter to constituent wishes because the decision is in the interest of the greater good.</p>	
<p>Representative – Constituent Advocate In this role, the Council member acts as a “customer service representative. The Council member is a conduit between residents and the City services. Often, residents see this Council member as most responsive to their individual concerns.</p>	
<p>Community Builder – Bringing People Together In the community builder role, the Council member focuses on relationships and consensus-building. The community builder fosters relationships and is able to work through differences. Community is not just a casual word to the member who gravitates to this role.</p>	
<p>Decision-Maker The decision-maker sees his/her role much like a judge - information is presented, and the decision-maker votes it up or down. This is not an easy role, but often it is a more passive role in contrast to that of the community builder.</p>	
<p>Oversight In this role, the member may retain a measure of distance from the staff. The focus is on the accountability of staff to the governing body.</p>	

Sharing Expectations

We enter every relationship, interaction, and conversation with certain expectations. Those expectations are typically based on unspoken assumptions about how the other person will interact and respond to us. The purpose of this exercise is to articulate—and say out loud—what we expect and need from one another in order to be effective. As you consider your expectations, it is important to say both those expectations you have that are already being met and those expectations you have that you hope are shared among the members of the governing body.

Please take a few minutes to consider your relationship with your colleagues on the City Council and the City staff, your hopes for the governing body, and what you expect from each.

Agenda

Thursday, February 26 – 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Introductions

- Welcome and introductions
- Agenda review
- Norms and expectations for the session

Governing Together

The City Council will explore a series of questions sharing their individual thoughts on what it means to govern well together.

Sharing Expectations

City Council and staff will discuss expectations for collaboration, identifying what each group needs from the other and what each is prepared to contribute.

Friday, February 27 – 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Reflections on Day One

We will begin the day by reflecting on our conversations from Day One.

Strategic Planning Process and Project Overview

The facilitator will provide a high-level overview of the strategic planning process and the goals for this project.

Engagement Themes and Environmental Scan

The facilitator will provide an overview of key trends and the input received from stakeholders during the strategic planning process thus far. This information will provide context to help inform the discussion around elements of the strategic framework.

Economic Development: A Deeper Dive

Through small group conversations, participants will discuss economic development in Des Moines.

Vision for Des Moines

We will review the current vision statement and stakeholder themes about the future of Des Moines. Through an engaging activity, we will also discuss this group's vision for the future.

Strategic Focus Areas

We will discuss, determine, and define the “big buckets” of things that must go well for the City to achieve its vision.

Next Steps and Parting Thoughts

We will review next steps in the City's Strategic Planning process. We will end the day with each participant sharing a reflection on how they feel about the work done during the workshop.

CITY OF

Des Moines, WA

Sense of Stakeholders Summary Report

January 2026

This page intentionally left blank to facilitate two-sided printing.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
STAKEHOLDER INPUT	3
STRENGTHS	3
KEY CHALLENGES.....	4
THE FUTURE OF DES MOINES.....	6
MISSION AND VALUES	10

Executive Summary

The City of Des Moines (City), WA, is in the process of developing its first citywide strategic plan. A strategic plan helps to answer three specific questions:

- What do we know to be true today?
- What do we hope will be true in the future?
- What must go well in order to make it so?

In this way, a strategic plan creates a roadmap to achieve long-term success and guides resource allocation and decision-making to move the city toward its vision for the future. A strategic plan also creates a shared understanding of the operating environment, and what is most important for the city and community.

In November 2024, the Des Moines City Council convened and drafted a mission, vision, and set of values for the city. The City Council presented the following:

- **Mission:** Des Moines is a waterfront community committed to maintaining a safe, sustainable environment, while ensuring a high quality of life for all to live, work, and play.
- **Vision:** To be the premier waterfront destination in the Pacific Northwest.
- **Core Values:** Safety, sustainability, integrity, transparency and innovation.

This strategic planning process builds on the Council's work by engaging a broad segment of the population to understand their hopes and aspirations for the community that will inform the development of strategic focus areas and key objectives that city staff can pursue. These engagement activities included the following:

- Individual interviews with members of the Des Moines City Council to discuss their vision for the future of the city.
- Five focus groups, attended by a total of 50 members of the community. Participants discussed what they love about Des Moines, current strengths, challenges, and their desired future for the city.
- An online survey was distributed to city staff. Employees had the opportunity to provide input on the organizational mission and values, as well as strengths, challenges, and the opportunities facing Des Moines. A total of 113 employees provided responses.¹
- An online survey was made available to members of the Des Moines community. Survey respondents shared what they love about Des Moines, what they would prioritize for the city to focus efforts on, current challenges, and their vision for the future. A total of 1,036 community members provided responses.
- A Town Hall meeting was attended by over 80 members of the community. Participants provided their thoughts on a vision for the future of Des Moines, including how they want Des Moines to look and feel in the future, as well as providing specific feedback on key focus areas.

This document summarizes the input received from the City Council, staff, and members of the community for the Council's consideration in developing the city's strategic framework.

Key takeaways include:

- Economic development and community vitality are top priorities, including a thriving downtown district, strong support for local businesses, and a marina that serves all residents with recreation activities.

¹ This number is comprised of 87 completed responses and 26 partial responses.

- Financial and budgetary constraints and a lack of sustainable revenue sources could limit the city's ability to maintain the current quality of life and invest in improvements.
- The city's natural beauty and location contribute to the quality of life for residents and serve to make Des Moines an attractive destination in the future.
- Des Moines has an active and engaged community that is passionate about its hometown and values opportunities to connect with other residents.
- While community members appreciate the quality of life in Des Moines, they expressed a need for increased investment in public safety, including a desire for more officers, better traffic control, and more robust animal control services.

Stakeholder Input

Understanding how Des Moines is perceived by key stakeholders provides important context for the strategic planning process. Receiving input is essential to ensure that the strategic framework aligns community hopes with the organization's day-to-day reality and how internal and external stakeholders perceive the city. The sections below capture high-level themes identified during the stakeholder engagement process.

Strengths

Identifying Des Moines' core strengths is essential to the strategic planning process. Understanding what stakeholders value most ensures these foundational assets are preserved and leveraged as the city evolves. Stakeholders were specifically asked to identify strengths of Des Moines today that could contribute to future success. Feedback from City Council, community members, and staff revealed a shared appreciation for the people of Des Moines.

This includes a committed, engaged resident base with a passion and desire for the city's success, as well as professional leadership and a dedicated workforce within the city organization. Beyond human capital, Des Moines' prime geographic location is viewed as a significant strength, offering a combination of waterfront access, natural beauty, and proximity to nearby metropolitan centers and Sea-Tac airport. Internally, city employees also highlighted strengths related to the internal operations of city administration, including an organizational culture where strong teamwork and collaboration allow the city to remain adaptable and resilient.

Strengths of Des Moines:

- Committed and engaged community.
- Location and city aesthetics.
- City staff and leadership.
- Organizational adaptability and resourcefulness.

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT DES MOINES

When asked what they love about Des Moines, community members highlighted the **community of people**, **small-town feel**, and **access to the natural environment**, including waterfront and green spaces. Some quotes from community members are included below:

- *"We are lucky to have a community that wants to help us do this work, and we should use that."*
- *"I came down to the farmer's market [at the marina] and thought, 'I gotta live here.'"*
- *"I wanted to live in a city that felt like a small [town] where you know your neighbors."*
- *"You don't have to live in the front row to enjoy the waterfront."*
- *"I appreciate the heart and soul of little hamlet. It's a great community to build relationships...raise families and grow."*
- *"Close to everything, but not so big that there is no feeling of community."*
- *"I love that while small, we are mighty."*

A word cloud representing responses from community members about what they love about Des Moines is shown below. Word size represents the frequency of mentions, so larger words were mentioned more frequently across all community responses.

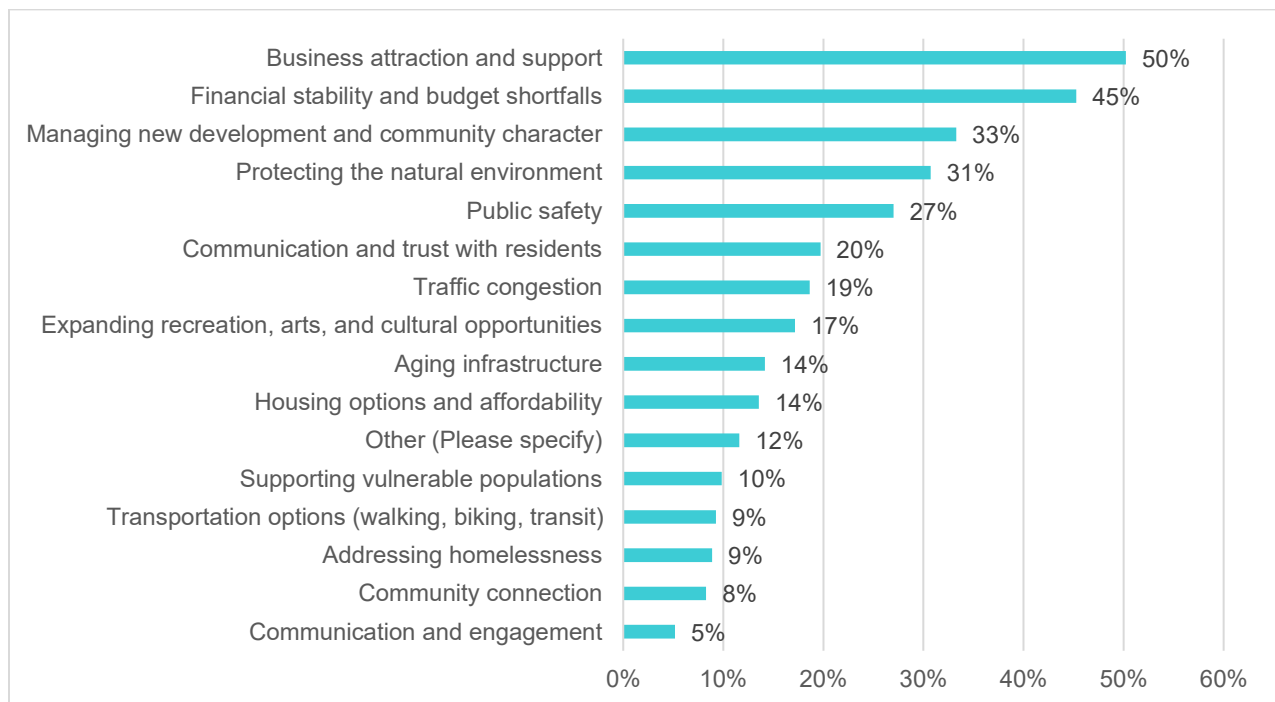
worried that small businesses may not get assistance in meeting requirements. Focus group participants identified the need for a city liaison to assist both new and existing small businesses with the permitting process. Community members also highlighted tensions between new developments that are necessary for the city while preserving the character that contributes to the small-town feel they love. Employees specifically mentioned a lack of businesses in the downtown area, limited areas for new commercial development, and a limited retail tax base.

Council members, employees, and community members also discussed challenges pertaining to the city’s **budgetary and fiscal issues**. Nearly 80% of employee survey respondents noted this as a significant challenge, highlighting concern about the city’s ability to generate sufficient revenue in the wake of rising costs and the allocation of funding. Many respondents simply noted “budget,” “funding,” or “money” when responding to the question prompt, without providing additional details. Challenges related to fiscal sustainability have the potential to limit the city’s ability to maintain the current quality of life and take advantage of opportunities in the future.

Managing community expectations is another theme in which all stakeholders feel there are challenges for the city to overcome in order to increase community trust. Council members conveyed the need to improve communication with the community and ensure transparency. This sentiment was echoed by employees, who noted challenges related to balancing community expectations with constrained resources, gaps in the public’s knowledge of city operations, and building engagement and trust from the community.

Employees identified additional challenges that are internal to the organization. A key example is **limited workforce capacity**, which can lead to high workloads, a lack of staff availability, and limited collaboration between internal departments. One respondent commented on the impact this has on the city’s ability to be innovative and support future growth, while others highlighted the effect this has on employee retention.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, community survey respondents were provided with a list of 16 choices and asked to select the top three challenges currently facing the city. Results from the survey question are provided below:



desire to create a “lively downtown,” while also calling out opportunities for mixed-use development. Council members shared a desire to improve the city’s reputation as being “business-friendly” by addressing zoning challenges and supporting streamlining processes.

Another dominant theme identified by many community stakeholder groups was **maintaining quality of life**. Many community members appreciate Des Moines for its high quality of life and small-town feel and want to find a way to preserve what they love. Stakeholders saw opportunities in addressing challenges with the nearby airport to improve noise and air pollution. Stakeholders also value the existing events (e.g., farmer’s market), activities (e.g., youth sports), and facilities (e.g., senior center), and how they contribute to the sense of community in Des Moines. Stakeholders aim to build upon these current amenities and create more opportunities that bring the community together and attract visitors to the city.

One theme identified by multiple stakeholder groups focused on bolstering the city’s **fiscal stability and responsibility**, including having sustainable revenue sources. Stakeholders want Des Moines to have a balanced budget and healthy reserves, while maintaining basic service provision and increasing economic development. Community members also expressed a desire for more transparency and community engagement in the budgeting process.

Many stakeholders saw an opportunity to leverage active residents and new outreach activities to **foster relationships with the community** through education, communication, and engagement. Community members who responded to the survey showed appreciation for the ability to share their opinions in this current strategic planning process and expressed hope for a more collaborative approach going forward. Community members also expressed excitement in new city leadership and optimism for continued engagement. Employees noted opportunities for improving customer service through outreach efforts, collecting feedback from the community, and modernizing the city website. Council members conveyed similar sentiments by aiming to foster meaningful engagement and demonstrate that input is valued.

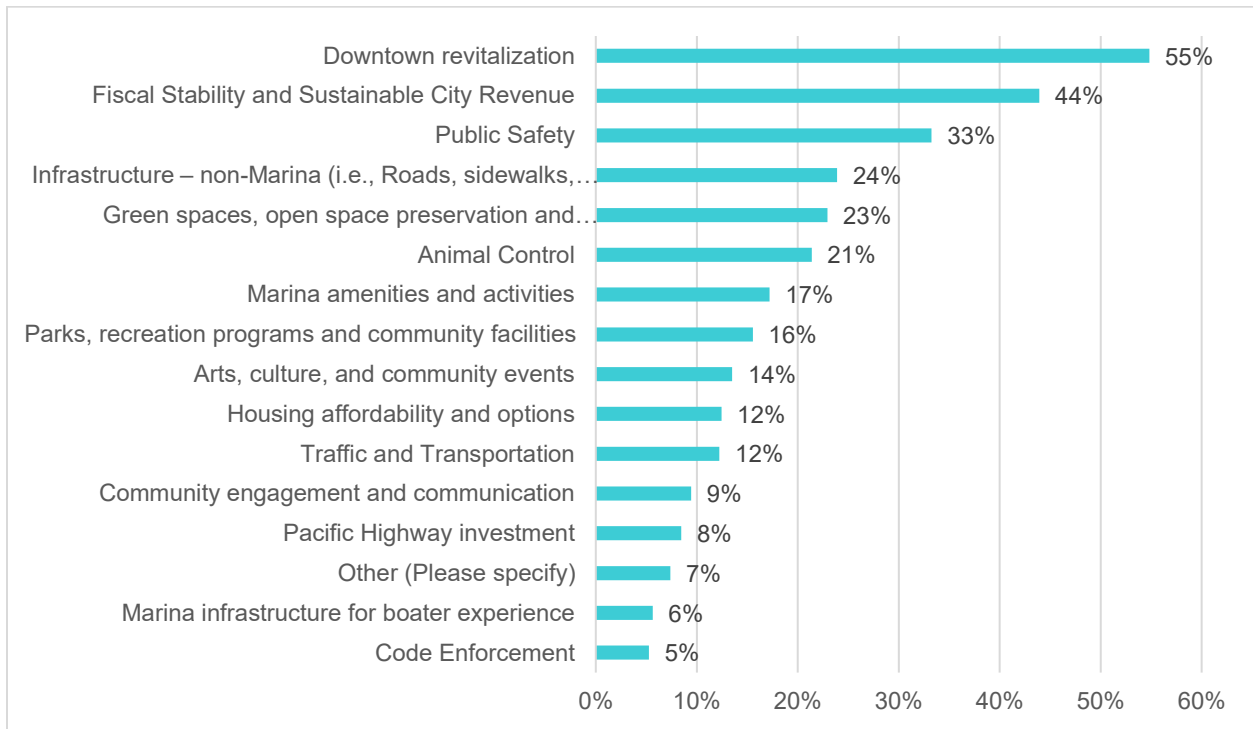
Another theme identified by some stakeholders focused on the **protection of natural resources**, including more access to parks, trails, and green spaces throughout the city. Other community members highlighted the importance of equitable access to the waterfront and protection of tree canopies. Stakeholders saw an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with Saltwater State Park to increase access to trails and attract visitors to the area.

Community members highlighted the importance of **public safety** and maintaining safe traffic throughout the city. Stakeholders emphasized their support and trust in the current police staff, especially new Police leadership, to improve safety and quality of life. Community members also highlighted the need for animal control and rescue services, reduced homelessness, and safer pedestrian infrastructure throughout the city.

Employees identified opportunities related to **workforce support and development**, including maintaining up-to-date written procedures, holding more frequent team meetings, and providing professional training and teambuilding opportunities.

Another theme identified from interviews with council members and community comments from the town hall pertains to **traffic and mobility**. Many community members see opportunities to improve congestion through key areas of the city. Stakeholders also highlighted new transportation developments, such as the light rail expansion, which could impact mobility and accessibility in Des Moines, as well as connectivity to the rest of the region.

Lastly, community members who responded to the survey were given the opportunity to select the top three areas the city should focus on in the next three-to-five years from a list of 16. Results from the survey question are provided below:



THIS-OR-THAT

To capture the community’s vision for the future of Des Moines, over 80 town hall meeting participants engaged in an interactive ‘physical polling’ exercise wherein attendees indicated their preferences by moving to designated areas of the room. The four topics were Community Feel, Economic Development, Waterfront Marina, and Open Spaces and Environment. The following sections provide descriptions, context, and results for each topic, including visualizations that estimate the distribution of participant support for each topic area.

COMMUNITY FEEL



This prompt asked whether Des Moines should embrace development in economic corridors to create more businesses and events (Vibrant, Active-Community Focused) or protect its residential identity from regional traffic and noise intrusion (Residential, Neighborhood-Focused). The majority of participants favored a vibrant, active-community focused future for Des Moines.

The following table captures the feedback and rationale shared by participants for each preference:

Vibrant, Active, Community-Focused	Residential, Neighborhood-Focused
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attractive to young people. Able to support small businesses. More similar to Burien, specifically in the holiday decorations and atmosphere of the downtown. Sense of place and vibrancy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy the calmer pace of life. Remain separate from busier areas like Seattle.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



This prompt asked where the city should allocate resources when trying to strengthen its commercial base and whether the focus should be on small, local businesses that define the unique community knowing it may have less impact on the tax base (Local, Small Business Support), or attracting larger, regional employers or commercial interests that bring greater tax revenue (Mid-to-Large Employers and Businesses). The majority of participants favored local, small business support for the future of the city.

The following table captures the feedback and rationale shared by participants for each vision:

Local, Small Business Support	Mid-to-Large Employers and Businesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local businesses are uniquely oriented to the community. Easier process for new businesses to open. City encouragement of small business support (e.g., Welcome Wagon). Local businesses are often owned by local residents, so profits are more likely to stay in Des Moines rather than larger, national chains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for larger businesses to employ residents and increased tax revenue. Currently, it lacks certain goods and services that would help support residents and city operations, such as a car retailer.

WATERFRONT MARINA

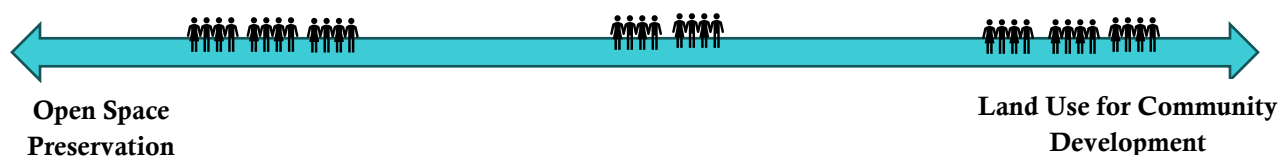


This prompt asked whether the Marina should primarily serve the general public with commercial amenities (Public Recreation Marina), or a traditional boating community with infrastructure updates (Traditional Boating Marina). A slight majority of participants expressed a preference for prioritizing public recreation at the marina over traditional boating amenities.

The following table captures the feedback and rationale shared by participants for each vision:

Public Recreation Marina	Tradition Boating Marina
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs of slips are increasing, and boaters are being priced out of the marina. • Current marina tenants may only utilize their boats a few times a year. • The public can enjoy the marina year-round. • Public development should accompany the Marina Steps project to attract people to the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marina is an economic driver of the city. • Self-supporting without burdening taxpayers, and sometimes contributes to non-Marina projects. • Already has public recreation use due to its unique location in the center of town.

OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT



This prompt asked how the city should address maintaining open space and natural environment (Open Space Preservation) versus utilizing space for community development (Land Use for Community Development). Attendees were mostly split on this topic, with about half the people on either side and many attendees standing in the middle. Overall, most residents expressed a desire for balance, with development prioritized on existing properties that have fallen into disrepair before developing open space.

The following table captures the feedback and rationale shared by participants for each vision:

Open Space Preservation	Land Use for Community Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire for more walking trails. • Open space mitigates noise levels. • Once open spaces are gone, they can never come back. • Need for thoughtful development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to develop if the city wants to be “unstuck” and “vibrant.” • Development needs to go somewhere.

Mission and Values

The city’s mission and values represent a commitment to the purpose of the organization and set an internal standard for excellence. Establishing these core beliefs creates a shared culture of accountability that helps inform decisions, projects, and service delivery throughout the life of the strategic plan. Employees who responded to the employee survey provided insight into how they view their work and the value it provides.

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

An organization’s mission statement is intended to be a clear, concise statement of purpose for the entire organization that should generally answer three questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we do?
- Why do we do it?

To help describe the employees of Des Moines, the work that they do, and what benefits the community experiences as a result of their work, employees answered the three open-ended questions listed above. Many responses from employees included multiple themes or keywords; therefore, the percentage of responses does not add up to 100%.

WHO ARE WE?

Respondents were first asked the question, “Who are we? What three words would you use to describe the employees of the City of Des Moines?” A total of 94 individuals provided input. The most common theme, as mentioned by over half of respondents, was that Des Moines employees are **dedicated and committed to the organization and betterment of the community**. Employees are passionate about their roles as public servants, friendly and caring to colleagues and community members, and resourceful in solving problems and providing quality service delivery. Other descriptors used include considerate, kind, adaptable, creative, resilient, collaborative, attentive, and supportive.

As Des Moines employees, we are:

- Dedicated/Committed (54%).
- Friendly/Caring (40%).
- Resourceful (24%).
- Hardworking (24%).
- Helpful/Responsive (21%).

WHAT DO WE DO?

After describing the employees of the city, survey respondents provided input on what the employees of Des Moines do and how their work serves the community. A total of 92 individuals provided input. Responses fell into two main categories: **servicing the needs of the community** and **maintaining safety and livability in Des Moines**.

As Des Moines employees, we:

- Serve the needs of the community (52%).
- Maintain safety and livability in Des Moines (49%).

Des Moines employees view their primary role as being responsive stewards committed to directly serving the needs of the community. Staff are focused on providing essential public services, managing resources wisely, maintaining infrastructure, and delivering a wide array of programs designed to support and serve the Des Moines community. This service orientation is complemented by a deep level of care for the community and a passion for public service.

Employees also highlighted the critical role they play in the maintenance of physical safety and quality of life within Des Moines. Staff work to keep the community clean, well-kept, and aesthetically pleasing, ensuring Des Moines is a safe and sustainable place to live, work, and play.

Examples of responses from employees include:

- *[We are] stewards of resources to provide services and programming that keep residents safe, support infrastructure, create connections, and community asks.*
- *The city strives to ensure that we are a safe place to live, work, and recreate. We care about the community and put the needs of the community first.*
- *We ensure safety, sustainability, and quality of life through service, planning, and responsible community growth.*
- *We listen to our community's wants and needs and figure out a way to make things happen.*

WHY DO WE DO IT?

Respondents were asked why they do the work that they do, and what drives them and their colleagues to deliver for the community. A total of 89 individuals provided input. The most common response, mentioned by nearly half of the respondents, was that they have a **passion for serving and helping others**. Employees expressed a deep love for the community and expressed how rewarding it is to provide the best service possible to residents and visitors. Des Moines staff are driven by a strong sense of duty, mission, and dedication to public service, knowing their contributions positively shape and impact the lives of those they serve. These intrinsic motivations reflect employees' commitment to excellence and service.

Why do we do what we do?

- Passion for serving and helping others (47%).
- Love for our community (31%).
- It's rewarding/fulfilling (16%).

Examples of responses from employees include:

- *I continue to strive for excellence on the job because I take pride in the work I do and strive to exceed the expectations of the residents we serve.*
- *It is rewarding to see projects come to completion and see people appreciate the final product.*
- *We do it because this is our home, and we want the best for the people who live here.*
- *We're driven by the desire to make a real difference, creating opportunities, supporting businesses, and improving resources to help Des Moines thrive.*

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Organizational values embody the city's core principles and guide the way employees operate and serve the community. To help identify the values to incorporate into the city's strategic plan, employees were asked to select the values that their colleagues demonstrate when they are at their best, as well as the values that guide their own decision-making. Survey respondents were shown groups of similar values and were directed to select five groups of words from a list of 18. After selecting their top five, respondents selected which of the words from the groupings best describe how city employees should behave. The table below shows the full results.

Value Groupings	Percent of Responses ²	Number of Responses
Teamwork (includes: Collaboration / Cooperation / Unity)	55%	50
Customer Service (includes: Accessibility / Helpfulness / Responsiveness)	52%	47
Safety*	51%	46
Responsibility (includes: Accountability / Stewardship)	37%	34
Integrity* (includes: Honesty / Trustworthiness)	35%	32
Compassion (includes: Caring / Empathy)	29%	26
Resilience (includes: Adaptability / Flexibility)	27%	25
Commitment (includes: Dedication / Ownership)	26%	24
Engagement (includes: Openness / Transparency*)	24%	22

² Respondents were able to select multiple groups; therefore, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

* Indicates value drafted by City Council as Core Values for the City of Des Moines.

Value Groupings	Percent of Responses ²	Number of Responses
Respect	21%	19
Excellence (includes: Competence / Professionalism)	20%	18
Quality (includes: Effectiveness)	18%	16
Belonging (includes: Welcoming)	18%	16
Efficiency	16%	15
Fairness (includes: Consistent)	16%	15
Sustainability*	14%	13
Preparedness (includes: Forward- thinking / Proactivity)	13%	12