

# A Strategic Plan for West Allis

## *Executive Summary*

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## 1. Introduction

The City of West Allis is the hidden gem of southeastern Wisconsin. As the city that is “15 minutes to everything” with award-winning schools and first-rate parks, it has much to offer families and businesses. What’s more West Allis has a housing stock that 20- and 30-somethings seek, and it has a workforce that is attractive to entrepreneurs and other businesses looking to relocate. Many who are heavily invested in the City know what a wonderful community West Allis is for living, working and playing.

A Strategic Plan Committee (SPC) was conceived by City Alderpersons Michael May and Cathleen Probst in February of 2013 as an opportunity to obtain a pulse and a vision for the community, and to understand the steps necessary to make that vision a reality. With the aid of Mayor Dan Devine and the West Allis Common Council, a call for volunteers was posted in the city’s newsletter and through the community newspaper West Allis NOW. Over 40 persons of various ages and interests expressed an interest in the SPC.

The SPC assembled for the first time in May of 2013, and over the course of nine two-hour meetings, took task in identifying the community’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; identifying the values of the community; and identifying a specific set of goals, objectives and prioritized operational strategies that could be used to strengthen the community, empower its citizens, and move our City forward.

The following sections identify the primary findings of the SPC. The SPC does not assume the contents of this document to be an all-inclusive list of the needs and desires of West Allis. This document is to serve as a living document and starting point toward improving the community. As such, this plan should undergo frequent review and modifications to remain relevant and timely to the people of West Allis.

## 2. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

The SPC performed an exercise to identify what it believed are the community’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). Strengths are those characteristics that give the community an advantage over others. Weaknesses are those characteristics that place the community at a disadvantage to others. Opportunities are those elements the community could exploit to its advantage. Threats are those elements in or around the community that could cause trouble for the community.<sup>1</sup> The results of the SWOT may be found in the full plan document.

## 3. Community Values

Values are the basic desires and drives that form the framework of a community, and as such they serve as the fundamental building blocks of a community. After identifying and discussing the SWOT, the SPC was tasked with identifying the values of the West Allis community. The following is the resulting list of values of the West Allis community in no particular order. “In West Allis, We Value...”

Family  
 Community  
 Knowledge/Education  
 Security  
 Safety  
 Communication  
 Economic Stability  
 Cleanliness  
 Responsibility  
 Community Pride/Positive Self Image  
 Affordability  
 Fiscal Value  
 Morality/Ethics  
 Respect

Integrity  
 Stability  
 "Neighborly Feel"  
 Diversity  
 Convenience  
 Opportunity  
 Heritage  
 Service  
 Collaboration/Cooperation  
 Accountability  
 Accessibility  
 Mobility  
 Recreation  
 Social Awareness

#### **4. Goals, Objectives & Operational Strategies**

With an understanding of the West Allis community’s SWOT and values, the SPC set out to identify goals, objectives and operational strategies to move West Allis forward. Goals are the “idealized end states of the environment towards which planners strive.” Objectives are attainable outgrowths of goals as they relate to the physical world. Operational strategies are measurable ways to meet the goals and objectives, such as projects and policies.<sup>2</sup> The following are the SPC-identified goals, objectives and operational strategies. These goals are listed in no particular order of importance.

In addition to outlining goals, objectives and operational strategies, the Committee members were polled to identify the parties they feel would be best equipped to tackle each operational strategy: City Government (Govt), Schools or Recreation Department (School/Rec), the Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), Neighborhood Association (Assoc), or private investor/advocacy group (Other). Committee members were allowed to select multiple responsible parties. The results of the polls may be found in the full plan document.

#### **4.1 Goal 1: Promote open communication and cooperation between stakeholders within the City of West Allis, foster the sharing of information pertaining to community happenings, and market West Allis as a destination.**

##### ***4.1.1 Objectives:***

Minimize apathy and complacency by engaging citizens and community groups.

Encourage partnerships and minimize overlaps in effort so that resources can be more efficiently utilized.

Increase community awareness and pride.

Shed negative stereotypes.

#### ***4.1.2 Operational Strategies:***

Create a website that serves as a “one-stop shop” of community happenings, showcases existing organizations and businesses, and attracts outside interest.

Develop a West Allis smartphone application, perhaps working in tandem with the website previously described.

Develop West Allis-type social media pages and a strategy to engage people effectively through various social media means.

Redesign the City’s Newsletter and incorporate news from organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and West Allis Downtown BID to inform residents of happenings outside of the government realm.

Establish a community newspaper.

Produce frequent positive media stories for local news outlets.

Coordinate and implement a comprehensive public relations/advertising campaign.

Install (or update where already provided) signage and landscaping along major corridors and at entry and exit points to West Allis welcoming people and thanking them for visiting

Rebrand the community in a way that all stakeholders can rally behind a common theme.

## **4.2 Goal 2: Foster strong, safe, secure, and stable neighborhoods that celebrate the history and vision of the people living in those neighborhoods**

### ***4.2.1 Objectives:***

Minimize apathy and complacency by empowering citizens to take ownership of their community.

Improve communication between neighbors and by doing so foster safe and secure places in which to live, work and play.

Promote responsible home and business ownership and property maintenance to fight against deterioration and encourage revitalization.

Improve personal investment by rental property owners, and ensure properties are well maintained and tenants are responsible.

Improve property values by increasing retention within West Allis and increasing attraction to West Allis.

#### ***4.2.2 Operational Strategies:***

Increase the number of neighborhoods participating in the Block Watch Program by 40% by the end of 2014, 50% by the end of 2015, and 75% by the end of 2016.

Design and implement a neighborhood association program that empowers and partners with interested citizens. Establish 10 neighborhood associations by the end of 2015.

Provide signage and other streetscaping elements to neighborhoods with established associations.

Encourage residents to keep porch lights on to minimize crime.

Develop and communicate screening tools and services for landlords.

Contact owners of rental properties when police, health, or other contact is made with renters.

Host an event, and/or implement a public relations campaign, promoting responsibilities of citizens and outlining a community vision by the end of 2016.

Develop a “welcome wagon” program to share pertinent community information with new home owners (school, City and business information), and welcome new property owners to be active participants in their community.

Increase the notification radius for when properties are proposed to be rezoned, redeveloped, or applications for special use permits are made. Utilize tools in addition to mailed notifications to increase awareness.

Implement an outreach program to encourage urban farming and community gardens.

Develop a leadership program/academy.

Incorporate a broken windows policy that focuses on quality of life crimes.

Tighten property maintenance enforcement.

Create more “Friends of \_\_\_\_ Park” groups.

Create a dog park.

### **4.3 Goal 3: Encourage a robust and diverse business environment that respects cultural heritage and responsible land use, and meets community needs and desires.**

#### ***4.3.1 Objectives:***

Attract and retain reputable businesses that will improve the local economy and the City’s perception.

Improve the communication and ease of doing business between the City and business owners.

Promote responsible business ownership and property maintenance to fight against deterioration and encourage revitalization.

Improve personal investment by rental property owners, and ensure properties are well maintained and tenants are responsible.

Improve property values by increasing retention within West Allis and increasing attraction to West Allis.

Promote the creation of niche markets.

#### ***4.3.2 Operational Strategies:***

Perform a community survey to identify the businesses desired in the community, revise zoning codes as necessary, and seek those businesses that fit with citizen desires.

Increase the notification radius for when properties are proposed to be rezoned, redeveloped, or applications for special use permits are made. Utilize tools in addition to mailed notifications to increase awareness.

Establish an internal business liaison at City Hall to serve as the point person for businesses and to greatly minimize bouncing between departments and people.

Revise zoning codes and the permit process as necessary to break down barriers to opening and maintaining a viable business.

Prepare an "Open for Business" guide to help businesses understand the process they must follow to open a business.

Make façade, infrastructure, and other improvements to West Allis Downtown and other commercial corridors that will attract businesses and residents.

Develop a comprehensive strategy for business recruitment and implement the strategy.

Introduce a business/entrepreneurial component/track to the school curriculum.

Establish business mentoring services.

Encourage outdoor dining.

Provide customer service training to city inspectors and front-line staff who work one-on-one with the public on a frequent basis.

Tighten property maintenance enforcement.

Review management and reporting structures of the West Allis Downtown BID and the Chamber of Commerce to reduce/eliminate redundancies; identify areas of improvement; apply strategic goals and measurements; and reward innovation and success.

Remove or retime traffic signals in West Allis Downtown to make the area a more desirable route for travel.

Create a courtyard or park in West Allis Downtown.

#### **4.4 Goal 4: Promote the cultural arts within West Allis.**

##### ***4.4.1 Objectives:***

Celebrate diversity, creativity and talent.

Increase an appreciation for the cultural arts.

Encourage the beautification of West Allis.

Provide additional recreational activities within the community.

##### ***4.4.2 Operational Strategies:***

Organize and host a “Jazz in the Park” or “Chill on the Hill”-type event.

Organize and host a starving artist event.

Establish a program that encourages murals/art walls in public and private places that respect the cultural heritage and local vibe of the adjacent neighborhood(s).

Establish a traveling artist exhibit.

Establish a theater or cultural arts center.

#### **4.5 Goal 5: Engage the citizens of West Allis by providing a myriad of activities and opportunities for involvement.**

##### ***4.5.1 Objectives:***

Minimize apathy and complacency by engaging citizens and community groups.

Increase community awareness and pride.

Increase opportunities for youth involvement in the community.

#### ***4.5.2 Operational Strategies:***

Establish a volunteer corps to carry out a number of activities to meet the needs of the people of West Allis.

Organize a race event (running, walking, and/or bicycling)

Recreate a city-wide festival or celebration.

Reestablish activities such as ice skating, community dances, etc.

Create a community center/sports complex.

Coordinate a plant exchange at the West Allis Farmers Market where residents can share divided perennials and other plants with other residents.

Develop a leadership program/academy.

### **4.6 Goal 6: Embrace and encourage the use of sustainable “green” technologies**

#### ***4.6.1 Objectives:***

Improve access to quality food.

Reduce runoff.

Minimize energy dependence.

Beautify the community.

#### ***4.6.2 Operational Strategies:***

Implement an outreach program to encourage urban farming and community gardens.

Encourage the construction of rain gardens on private property.

Coordinate a plant exchange at the West Allis Farmers Market where residents can share divided perennials and other plants with other residents.

Develop a policy for incorporating sustainable and green technologies in development areas and into public facilities.

Incorporate green features, such as LED street lighting and bioswales, into street reconstruction.

## 5. Summary

As previously explained, the SPC is comprised of interested residents and business owners of West Allis. They are invested in the community, its neighborhoods, and its future. As such, the SPC is committed to the strategy as outlined in this document. Many are willing to assist in carrying out the tasks as outlined and are seeking support and assistance from city officials to move forward.

A few next steps that have been identified include:

Sharing this document with major stakeholders in the city;

Seeking support from Common Council members to become involved and assist in leading the strategic plan forward with input and assistance from the SPC and other community volunteers;

Seeking and applying to funding sources to finance identified operational strategies; and

Create an “open government” whereby residents and business owners can feel comfortable in participating, providing suggestions, having their voices heard and responded to in a timely fashion.

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<sup>1</sup> “SWOT Analysis.” [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis). 24 January 2014. <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT\_analysis>.

<sup>2</sup> Shofer, Joseph and Wachs, Martin, “Abstract Values and Concrete Highways” [Traffic Quarterly](#), 1969.