



Hanover Township

Strategic Plan and Goal Development Update 2020

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Governmental Studies**

Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development



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Executive Summary

Strategic planning is a preferred approach to guiding an organization's future rather than making decisions issue by issue. Hanover Township (“the Township”) engaged the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to facilitate a strategic planning workshop with Board and senior staff members in February of 2020 to update its previous strategic plan. Prior to the workshop, several focus groups were held with community stakeholders to gather input on their vision regarding the Township's future. With the focus groups as a starting point for discussions, the strategic planning workshop provided a positive atmosphere for the Board and senior staff members to work together and collaboratively review and develop the Township's visions of the future and strategic goals to determine where it is the Township wants to go as an organization and as a community. As was discussed and reviewed during the workshop, executive-level workshops and strategic planning sessions are a staple of good governance and leadership for progressive organizations.

Mission, Vision, Values

Participants in the workshop were involved in several exercises aimed at reviewing and gathering input on the Township's mission, vision, and values. After participants offered refinements, a consensus on each of the final statements is presented below.

Hanover Township **Mission**

To continuously improve the quality of life for Hanover Township residents.

Hanover Township **Vision**

A better life through leadership, innovation, and diversity.

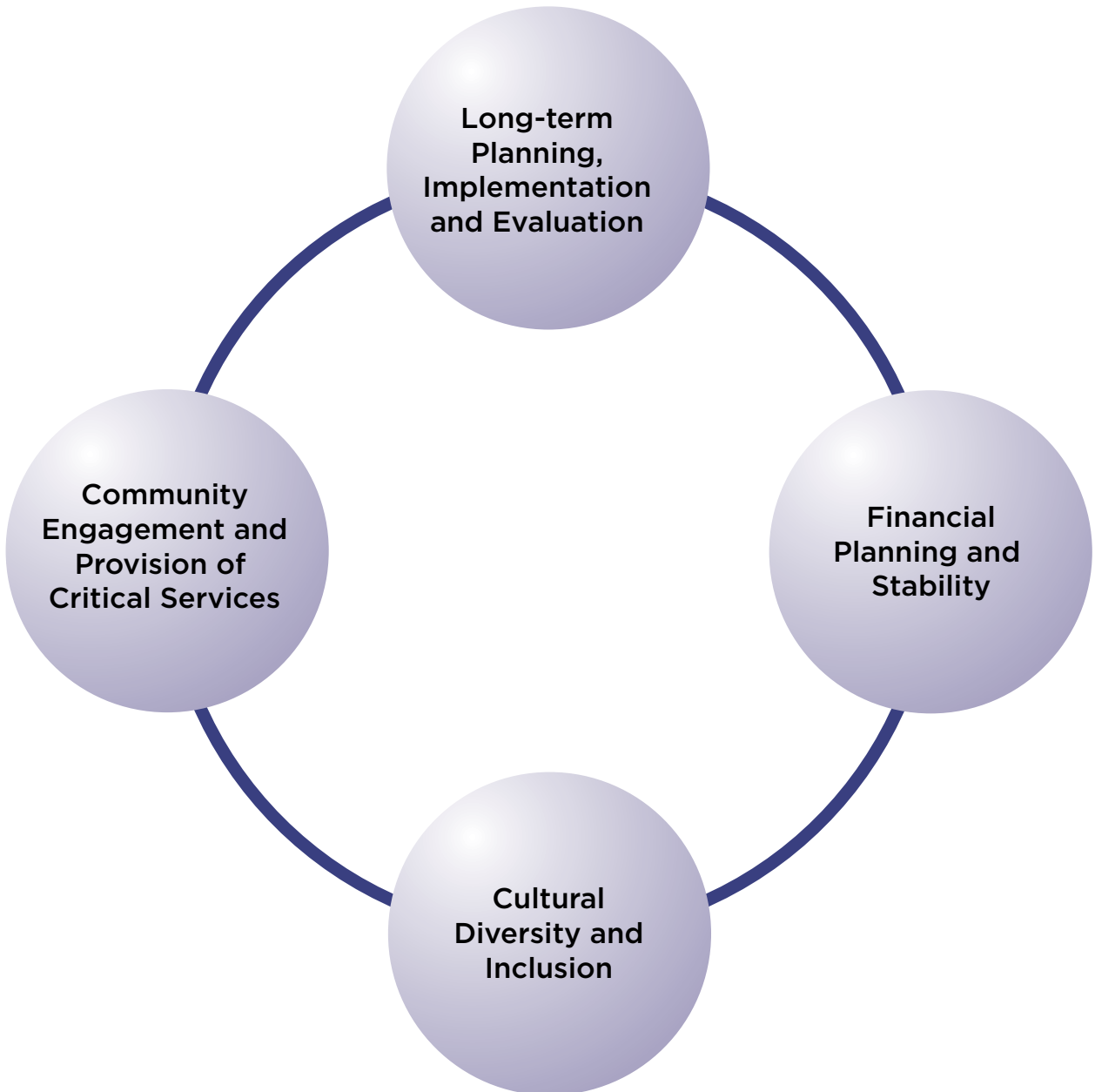
Hanover Township **Values**

*Above and Beyond – We go the extra mile.
Ownership – Our responsibility is great service.
Adaptability – We move to a solution.*

Strategic Priorities

Ultimately, four key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the entire process highlighting activities and initiatives that Hanover Township should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process include [in no particular order]:

Strategic Priority Areas



Strategic Goals

After discussions regarding the visions for the future, important topics, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Township, participants were asked to review current goals and identify any changes to those goals or additional goals needed. In total, nine goals were modified or created [in no particular order]:

Hanover Township Strategic Goals

1. Evaluate and prioritize Youth and Family Services programming.
2. Develop and implement Hanover Township's Open Space Reserves Master Plan and continue to identify funding and development opportunities.
3. Consider options to create a modernized emergency services station within Hanover Township's boundaries.
4. Further embrace the diversity of all ages and cultures within the Township.
5. Maintain our commitment to community outreach, engagement and awareness of the Township's services and programs including continued implementation of the Township's Communications Plan.
6. Collaborate with stakeholders and partners in our broader community to advance the completion of a disabled housing facility within the Township.
7. Remain committed to careful fiscal stewardship by working across the organization to promote, maintain and sustain a sound financial position in both the short- and long-term.
8. Continue to grow, enhance and promote the Township's high standards for customer-focused service delivery across all departments.
9. Evaluate planning and financing options for renovations to the Town Hall.

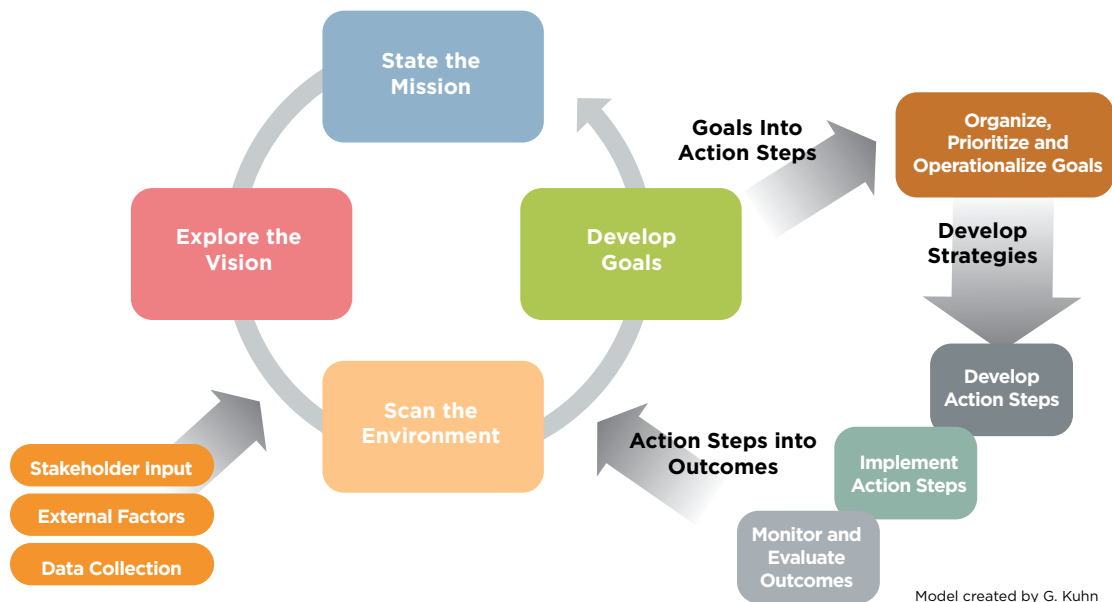
Introduction

As an organization, the Township has placed itself among the special class of governmental entities that have made a commitment to formalized strategic planning and goal setting exercises (Figure 1). As Township leaders are aware, strategic planning is not a new phenomenon for progressive communities and government agencies. Policymaking boards and staff in both private and public organizations, including the Township, recognize the value of such processes. This important work will serve the community well into the coming years and is as important as ever in the uncertain times related to the global pandemic occurring at the time of this report.

The Board and senior staff members gathered in February 2020 to discuss the Township’s vision, important policies, topic areas, as well as review and develop goals, and ultimately establish the future direction for the Township. The strategic planning workshop provided a positive atmosphere to set aside time to methodically, *strategically*, determine where it is the Township wants to go as an organization. As was shared with the Board and senior staff members at the conclusion of the workshop, the organization should resist the temptation to rearrange priorities as the fiscal year moves along. It is important to adhere to the results of the Board and senior staff members’ efforts throughout this process and the Township’s budgeting process.

Keep in mind that the judicious use of the Township’s limited resources (including financial resources and professional staff time) will be the key to good results. These high standards can place a strain on the organization, as excellence requires adequate staff time, expertise, and resources. In the end, quality policies and quality implementation equate to tough choices in setting priorities and in allocating resources. Only a limited number of goals and objectives can be effectively managed and implemented at any given time. In a very realistic sense, clear and stable priorities must be maintained if the Township desires to stretch its resources as far as they can go.

Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model*



**Model generally represents the steps that are taken for this type of initiative.*

Pre-Workshop:

Taking Stock, Stakeholder Focus Groups

This pre-workshop component is an important piece designed to help ground the environmental scanning portion of the process. Listening is vital to planning, and these steps are an important part of “taking stock” and helping to understand current Township policies and operational perspectives, perceptions, and preferences. In total, four (4) focus groups were conducted in January 2020. The focus groups generally included 8-12 participants during each session.

The focus group sessions conducted included representatives from the following groups:

- Township Front-Line Staff
- Human Services Organizations
- Civic Institutions (e.g., village managers, police and fire chiefs)
- Township Auxiliary Staff/Volunteers

The focus group sessions were designed to serve as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information presented next in summation was designed to add *exploratory and thematic information* for the Board and Senior Leadership Team to consider during the strategic planning workshop. As a result of the focus group sessions and the responses recorded, the facilitators identified five overarching themes that emerged during the environmental scanning process (Figure 2). The themes represent important topic areas that the Township should direct efforts towards over the next 3-5 years. The themes are presented below [in no particular order]. Please see [Appendix](#) for a full summary of all focus group questions and aggregated responses for each theme.

Figure 2. Environmental Scanning, Overarching Themes



Outline of Workshop:

Leadership Exercises and Discussion Sessions

Session I. Introduction Exercise: Icebreaker and Visioning

The format for all of the discussion sessions used in the planning effort employed approaches that were highly participative and interactive. The process was informed by the environmental scanning components and the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Township. The workshop facilitators utilized a group discussion approach called *'Nominal Group Technique'* where participants were assured equal opportunities to speak and share opinions by the facilitator. During the workshop discussion sessions, individuals had the opportunity to generate and share their ideas, as well as participate in group activities allowing them to weigh alternatives and refine their thinking through dialogue. As ideas were shared and debated, the group worked steadily toward a consensus regarding organizational values, purpose, future directions, and priorities.

Each participant engaged in a visioning exercise by selecting an item from the “garage sale” table, and using it to answer the visioning question, “In 10-15 years when I return to the Township, I hope to see, or think I will see...,” regarding services, programs, staffing levels, capital needs and general concepts that should or would be present in the Township at these intervals. Participants were asked to think about their ideas ahead of time and then be ready to share them with the group during the first session of the workshop. This was a brainstorming exercise—all ideas about the Township’s future were encouraged and shared. No evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session. Below is a summary of those answers.

Exploration of Hanover Township’s Desired Future Condition: Visions of the Future

Garage Sale Item	Visions of the Future
Fire truck	Community-wide festivals with food trucks
Squad car	Help teens in trouble stay out of squad cars by offering volunteer opportunities, mentorships, etc.
Hard hat	Represents extensive building projects, facilities, and infrastructure
PVC valve	Building projects, infrastructure, Town Hall updates (e.g., brick and mortar)
Baseball	Youth Center
Chain	Retain volunteers – join the team
Brick	New facility for the Town Center
Capitol building	What can the Township be in the eyes of the State and the community - help earn recognition
Birthday candles	Celebrate another 170 years – not burned down by the State
Basketball	Youth Center for activities and programs – maybe close to the Township Center
#1 Candle	We can be the best we can be – drive, ambition, aim high
Flexible spring	Township has been flexible to address and adapt
Hammer	More space, more services, Youth Center/facility, etc.
Globe	Continued engagement with a multi-cultural community, embrace diversity
Computer	Come back and see more technology, more access via the web
Brain	Continued improvement – physical and mental health
Bus	Represents expansion of services and access to services
Capitol building	We need to demonstrate that we’re needed, valuable, relevant – we’re a front door to many, including immigrants

Session II. Surrender or Lead

Participants were introduced to a leadership exercise entitled “Surrender or Lead.” The premise of the exercise is that participants worked to develop responses to some simple, but effective and thought-provoking questions. Participants were asked, in small groups, to respond to a series of structured questions designed to initiate discussion and reveal hopes, perspectives, challenges, opportunities, and possible barriers based on the collective view of each participant’s group. The group’s responses were recorded and are reported below. Underlined and bolded sections are key phrases that the group provided in response to the exercise’s open questions and prompts.

Group #1

1. We want to **grow services**, but **retain quality**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **innovation** and **diversity** because of **changing demographics and technology**.
3. If it weren’t for **funding**, we would **expand services and facilities**.
4. We need to finally **address language barriers**.
5. **Capital projects** will have the biggest impact on the Township in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #2

1. We want to **build a youth center**, but **the referendum failed**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **quality service** and **leadership** because **residents deserve it and leadership affects quality services**.
3. If it weren’t for **our weak State association**, we would **not have a target on Township government**.
4. We need to finally **hold our State association accountable**.
5. **Infrastructure improvements** will have the biggest impact on the Township in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #3

1. We want to **improve services for our diverse population**, but **we need to develop strategic ways to address those gaps**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **service delivery** and **transparency** because **Townships are under scrutiny**.
3. If it weren’t for **an unsuccessful referendum**, we would **have a youth center**.
4. We need to finally **come up with a long-term plan to address growth – facilities, parking, programming, and language barriers**.
5. **Hanover Landing** will have the biggest impact on the Township in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #4

1. We want to **expand services, facilities, and staff**, but **we need money**.
2. The two most important things to focus on are **outreach/education** and **excellent services because our survival depends on it**.
3. If it weren’t for **staff and volunteers**, we would **not lead at what we do**.
4. We need to finally **expand space**.
5. **Springfield actions (consolidation/property tax freeze)** will have the biggest impact on the Township in the coming 2-3 years.

Session III. Environmental Scanning: Internal and External S.W.O.T Analysis

The next step of the strategic planning workshop involved reviewing and accounting for the internal and external factors present in the environment that can potentially influence the success of the Township, both negatively and positively. Given the exploratory statements and challenges raised in the Surrender or Lead exercise, participants were then asked to identify what constraints and practical difficulties are likely to be encountered that will make it challenging to achieve the desired future state. These elements included both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, resources, etc. Furthermore, participants were asked to identify the Township’s **strengths (S)** and **weaknesses (W)**. In what areas does the Township regularly excel, and in what areas are there difficulties or shortcomings in terms of expertise, resources, training, etc.? What **opportunities (O)** are on the horizon that can be used to the Township’s advantage? Conversely, what trends or **threats (T)** lie ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? Those answers are captured next.

S.W.O.T. EXERCISE (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Internal

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Employees/staff/new staff • Volunteers • Education • Transparency • Professionalism • Responsiveness • Financial reserves • Coordination, cooperation, communication • Intergovernmental relationships • Diversity including a diverse Board • Technology • Location in Cook County • Efficiency • Breadth of services • Programs • Communication and marketing • Financial position • Mental Health Board • Reputation/brand • Flexible/adaptable • Facilities at satellite locations • Board works well together • Transportation program • Creative funding (e.g., Township foundation, grants) • Unique assets in boundaries - forest preserve, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language barriers • No large storage garage • Coordination, cooperation, communication • Changing demographics • Technology not as up to date as could be, outsourced currently • Main campus is far from the Township center • Need for improved transportation options • Land-locked • Relationship with school district - data sharing, etc. • Campus is “land-locked”

External

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced services - volunteers and talent alignment • Language skills available and expansion • Evaluate consolidation opportunities • Cooperation/collaboration • Technology improvements • Anti-government movement spurs change/innovation • Statewide association • Staff turnover • Intergovernmental relations • Changing demographics can offer exploration of new programming • Technology • Location in Cook County • Communications • Marketing program • Fiscal position and management • Mental Health Board • Reputation • Flexibility • Energy, environment, sustainability • Cemetery • Facilities • Quality employers and jobs • Creative foundation grants • Municipal partnerships • Park Districts • Forest Preserves • School District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language barriers and lack of translator resources available • Coordination, cooperation, communication • Technology • Need for improved transportation access • Lack of volunteers and lack of diversity among volunteers • School District challenges • State legislature • Anti-government movement • Threat of consolidation • Other Townships • Economy/downturn • Changing demographics affecting service needs • Cook County government/policies/taxes • Staggered election cycle - all members at once • Impact of weather on infrastructure and services • Statewide association

Session IV. Nominal Group Goal Identification

With the preceding workshop discussion sessions acting as a sound foundation for goal-setting, the final workshop session was a healthy group discussion of current goals and/or action items needed to achieve the future visions as expressed by the group. To begin the process, the previous strategic planning goals were reviewed for levels of completeness and appropriateness. Goals could be modified, removed if complete, or kept as is if they were still ongoing. After the current goals were reviewed, participants returned to the groups they had worked with during the previous Surrender or Lead exercise. Each member was allotted time to highlight the three or four most important policy and/or program goals that they think the Township should accomplish in the next one to five years. The groups then shared their short- and long-term goals with the larger group. Goals that participants developed could be general or highly specific.

Board and senior staff members then worked together to consolidate the goals based on similar topic areas, including the suggestion that more operational goals should be addressed at the staff level and incorporated into administrative plans. As a result, nine strategic goals were established and are presented below [in no particular order]. These nine goals were determined to be the key strategic areas that the Township should focus on over the next several fiscal years.

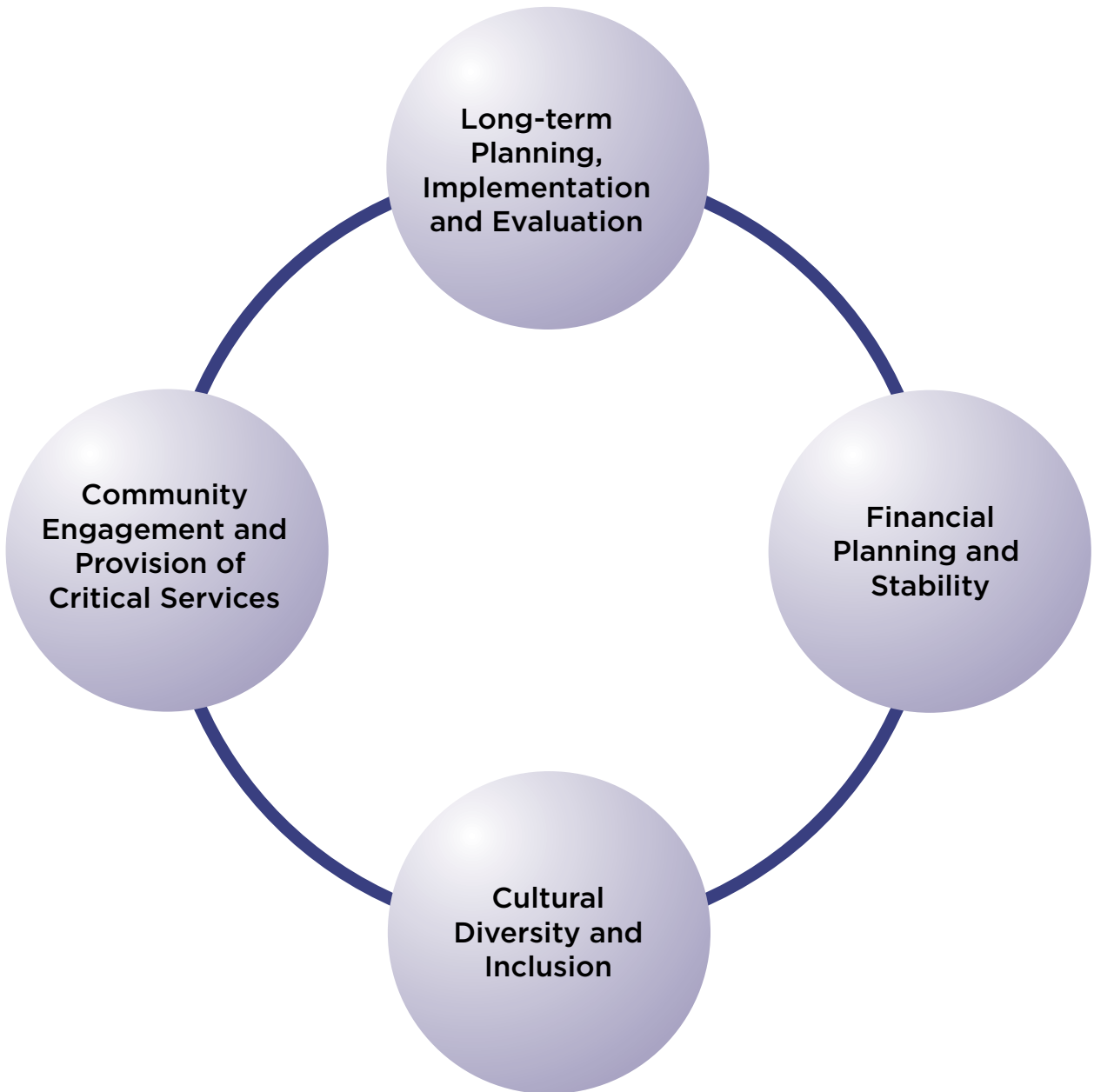
Hanover Township Strategic Goals

1. Evaluate and prioritize Youth and Family Services programming.
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5. Maintain our commitment to community outreach, engagement and awareness of the Township's services and programs including continued implementation of the Township's Communications Plan.
6. Collaborate with stakeholders and partners in our broader community to advance the completion of a disabled housing facility within the Township.
7. Remain committed to careful fiscal stewardship by working across the organization to promote, maintain and sustain a sound financial position in both the short- and long-term.
8. Continue to grow, enhance and promote the Township's high standards for customer-focused service delivery across all departments.
9. Evaluate planning and financing options for renovations to the Town Hall.

Strategic Priority Areas

Ultimately, four key strategic priority areas were identified as an outcome of the process highlighting activities and initiatives that the Township should focus on in both the short- and long-term. The strategic priority areas identified as a result of the strategic planning process are illustrated below [in no particular order].

Strategic Priority Areas



Conclusion

The value of the strategic planning process will only be realized if it is used as an active working guide to both the Township’s leadership team and staff as the issues explored during the strategic planning process are pursued. It is designed to capture the content of the discussions and to assist the Township in developing implementation plans for their high priority goals. What is apparent from the exchange of ideas and dialogue during the environmental scanning and strategic planning workshop is that the Township is fortunate to have a progressive leadership and a management team that is looking ahead and committed to strategic thinking and planning. One noted observer summarized the challenges of organizational progress this way:

*“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change,
and change amid order...”*

— A.N. Whitehead

We wish you well with the ambitious year that lies ahead.

Handwritten signatures of Greg Kuhn and Melissa Henriksen. The signature on the left is 'Greg Kuhn' and the signature on the right is 'Melissa Henriksen'.

Greg Kuhn and Melissa Henriksen, Project Coordinators and Session Facilitators

Appendix:

Focus Group Summary Themes & Responses

Focus Group Summary

One of the key analytical techniques used for focus group notes is an analyst's search for key phrases, words, or terms that cut across all groups. Coding is done by analysts' individual readings of the data, followed by key term searches with the aid of document software. The words and phrases listed below are the results of the study team's analysis of the collected focus group notes. At a glance, the reader can discover what terms were used or referred to most frequently in the feedback notes. Using individual analyst's coding, the researcher identifies terms that recur across groups and across questions. The results are revealing in that they highlight key topics or issues that should be weighed and considered when proceeding with strategic planning discussions.

The information that follows is a summary of key themes and topics that emerged during the exploratory focus group/outreach sessions. The sessions served as a primer for the strategic planning process. The information that is presented in this summation was designed to add *exploratory and thematic information* for the Board and Senior Leadership Teams to consider during the strategic planning workshop sessions.

The same exploratory focus group discussion questions were asked to each focus group and are listed below:

1. How would you describe Hanover Township to a stranger or someone who doesn't live or work here?
2. If you left Hanover Township tomorrow, and didn't return for 10-15 years, what do you think you'll see, or what do you hope you'll see, when you return?
3. What do you like best about Hanover Township? Related to that, what are the strengths/greatest assets of the Township? Opportunities?
4. Can you identify areas or topics in need of attention or improvement? Related to that, what are the weaknesses/greatest needs in Hanover Township? Threats?
5. What are/should be the top priorities for the Township over the next 3-5 years?
6. If you could change or initiate one key item or thing about the Township, what would it be?

Overall Themes

The data below were derived from the analysis of the bundled focus group data. Using qualitative analysis techniques such as reviews of phrases, developing sorting categories, and conducting word counts, the following comment themes, topics, and phrases surfaced.

Environmental Scanning — Overarching Themes



Services and Resource Allocation

- Hanover Township fills the gaps and provides services not provided by other governmental agencies
- Enhance accessibility of services – offer services in different areas of the community
- Services provide the feeling of ‘home away from home’
- Something for everyone – good social network
- More opportunities for diverse/innovative services (e.g., classes for youth and seniors to connect and share skills, physical therapy program, massage therapist at senior center)
- Expand youth and family services
- Explore more shared services to avoid duplication
- More services for non-English speaking individuals (e.g., mental health services and screenings)

Internal and External Communication

- Translators needed, not all Township employees/volunteers/partners are aware of options for language assistance
- More consistent communication between the Township and local government organizations/partners and identify areas to share services/information/ resources
- Strategies to maintain an effective/up-to-date social media presence
- Comprehensive resource guide create/improved/shared
- Better marketing of township services – more personal engagement individualized department messaging, eye-catching
- More engagement between the departments to enhance understanding of all functions and affiliations – cross marketing/understanding

Organizational and Professional Development

- Explore internal IT position and improved IT processes/equipment
- External IT issues - approval process, length to fix issues, don't have context for ongoing issues, improved phone system/training
- Evaluate employee pay and staffing structure (e.g., competitive salaries to minimize turnover, improve pool of candidates for new positions)
- Review staffing structure to allow for better coverage for breaks/vacations, avoid burnout
- Township help fund trainings for staff, volunteers, partners (police department, first responders, etc.)
 - *E.g., Computer system, sensitivity training, behavioral, mental health, emergency response, active shooter, safety, language/bilingual*

Community Awareness, Partnerships, and Engagement

- Hanover Township cannot be replaced or duplicated by another entity – message – raise this awareness to the community
- Getting more/younger/right people to volunteer
- Increased awareness of Township services and programs – education on the connection with needs and Township (e.g., local organizations and first responders)
- Ongoing demographic assessment of community changes and needs
- Enhance marketing tools and techniques
- Strengthen overall partnerships across the communities and agencies (schools, police departments, non-profits, etc.)
- More collaboration between the Township's community nurse and public safety
- Explore partnerships with other Townships that don't provide enough/same services
- Better communication between agencies to share resources and referrals

Facilities and Space Utilization Needs

- Astor building parking
- Storage and parking at senior center
- Expanded youth and family services physical space – gathering place
- Centralized emergency services equipment
- More space for summer lunch program
- Food pantry physical expansion
- Retry referendum to acquire vacant school property/facility
- Expand space to centralize services