

Ela Township FY20-FY22 Strategic Plan and Goal 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. The Township of Ela (“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 August of 2019. 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 mission, vision, core values, and strategic goals to determine where it is the Township wants to go as an organization.

Mission

Dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for Ela Township residents by providing unparalleled and cost-effective community-based services.

Vision

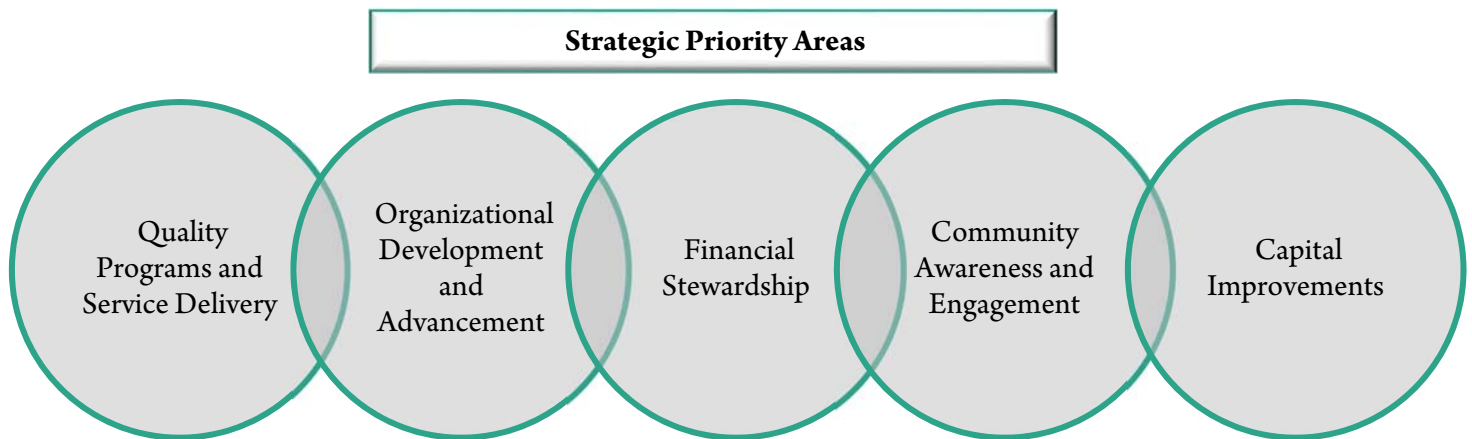
Committed to being a model Township that embraces the future by building upon a strong foundation of excellence, diversity and financial stewardship.

Core Values

Transparency	Responsibility
Customer Service	Quality
Integrity	Respect
Accountability	Trust
Ethical	Teamwork

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Ultimately, five 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 during the workshop [in no particular order] are illustrated below.



STRATEGIC GOALS

After discussions regarding the visions for the future, mission, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Township, participants were asked to identify short - and long-term goals. After the goals were developed, participants were then asked to classify each goal according to a matrix model of complexity and time. Agreed upon criteria were used to classify a goal as short- or long-term and as complex or routine (please see full report for defined criteria).

Following the classification exercise, the Board was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. In total, the group developed six short-term routine goals, seven short-term complex goals, one long-term routine goal and ten long-term complex goals. The top three goals from each category are offered as a process “snapshot” representing the most important strategic goals or priority areas for the Board and staff to address in the months and years ahead (see below). For a full review and appreciation of all the strategic goals and priority areas presented, discussed and ranked, please refer to the full report.

Short-Term Routine Goals

- Perform a comprehensive review of the Township’s current program offerings and ensure those offerings are aligned with community needs
- Enhance organizational development and advancement
- Perform an annual review of the Township’s fiscal position

Short-Term Complex Goals

- Complete a space utilization study
- Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan
- Develop a maintenance schedule to plan ahead for facilities and equipment updates

Long-Term Routine Goals

- Perform a review of contractual agreements, prior to a renewal, to identify potential cost-cutting opportunities

Long-Term Complex Goals*

- Develop and implement strategies to centralize Township services
- Develop a Workforce Development Plan that includes succession planning strategies and professional development opportunities
- Implement transportation strategies and partnerships to enhance ease of access to Township’s services, activities, youth and senior programs, appointments, social services, etc.
- Work to identify strategies and solutions to address road reconstruction and drainage issues within the Township and unincorporated areas

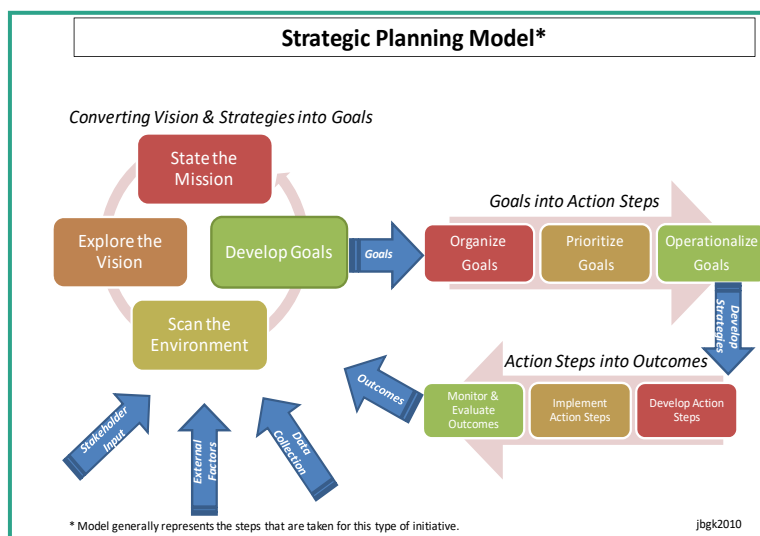
* **Note: Two goals in the long-term complex category received tied scores for being ranked third.**

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 of, 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.

The Board and senior staff members gathered in August 2019 to discuss the Township’s mission, vision, core values, 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.

Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model



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.

Outline of Workshop Leadership Exercises and Discussion Sessions

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 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.

Session I. Introduction Exercise – Icebreaker and Visioning

Each participant engaged in a visioning exercise by selecting two items from the “garage sale” table, and using them to answer two questions. The first item was used to answer the visioning question, “In 10-15 years when I return to the Township, I hope to see, or think I will see...,” in regards to services, programs, staffing levels, capital needs and general concepts that should or would be present in the Township at these intervals. The second item was related to the question, “What do you see as the biggest issue the Township will face in the next 1-3 years?” 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 Ela Township’s Desired Future Condition: Visions of the Future

Garage Sale Item	Visions of the Future
Brick	Great foundation, build on ideas and go forward
Garbage can	Reduction in waste, run efficiently and taxpayer-friendly
Yellow ball	Sunny outlook
Hard hat	Strong foundation to move forward as a group
Lightbulb holder	“See the light” in the next 15 years
Brick	Hope the Township is still around providing quality services (improve not diminish)
Flower	More harmony in the future, moving along well, see the fruits of our labor
CD case	Stay current with technology, ongoing improvements
Map	“Put us on the map” people know who and where we are
Coffee cup	Abundance of services, help more people
Gold coin	Highway department – being reconsidered as the gold standard
Checkbook	Fiscally sound, responsible government entity, budget in place to meet demand

Exploration of Ela Township’s Important Current Issues

Garage Sale Item	Current Issues
Rope	Make sure everyone is pulling in the same direction, larger picture to stay on track
Hanger	Awareness of community – know the Township’s services and support
Hard hat	Creating a well-defined/structured infrastructure improvement program
Golf ball	Thoughtful approach to getting to where we want to go, thoughtful and proactive response
Batteries	Energy level still there in the future (internally and externally)
Capitol bldg.	Size of government in Illinois layers of government/structure of Illinois government
Duck	Keep us afloat during the time townships are under scrutiny, remain relevant with unique services and offerings
PVC pipe	Drainage/stormwater issues resolved (own and for services provided)
Headset	Updated technology
USB	Communications – communicate to people what the Township does
Memory card	Embrace technological advancements, improved efficiencies, access for residents
Cone	Park improvements – ongoing issue, updates to agreements with sport teams, maintain open space and quality programs and partners

Session II. Surrender or Lead

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

Group #1

[Team name: Group #1]

1. We want to do everything, but we can’t.
2. The two most important things to focus on are the residents and their needs, because that’s what we do.
3. If it weren’t for the essential services we provide, we would see a diminished quality of life.
4. We need to finally prioritize, strategize, organize, and keep that momentum going.
5. Common vision and teamwork will have the biggest impact on our future in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #2

[Team name: Oh My Quad!!!!]

1. We want to serve everyone, but are limited.
2. The two most important things to focus on are our core values and mission statement, because they give us a base to grow on.
3. If it weren't for limited resources, we would expand facilities and programs.
4. We need to finally form a united plan and follow through.
5. Elections will have the biggest impact on our future in the coming 2-3 years.

Group #3

[Team name: Team #1]

1. We want to be a model Township, but not lose focus of our purpose to serve Township's residents.
2. The two most important things to focus on are to be fiscally responsible and provide quality services, because we are accountable to taxpaying residents.
3. If it weren't for our dedicated staff, we would not be able to provide such quality services.
4. We need to finally implement a prioritized and proactive plan.
5. Successfully executing our plan for the benefit of our taxpaying residents will have the biggest impact on our future 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 process 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 organization'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?

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

INTERNAL

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Desire to serve ◆ Staff ◆ Passion ◆ Support ◆ Creativity ◆ Facilities ◆ Fiscal responsibility ◆ Service users ◆ Essential/core services provided ◆ Strong tax base ◆ Collaboration ◆ Intergovernmental agreements ◆ Responsive ◆ Township structure ◆ Intergovernmental relationships ◆ Infrastructure ◆ Gap service provider ◆ Parks & recreation ◆ Open space ◆ Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Technology ◆ Organization (lack of) ◆ Facilities (quality/maintenance) ◆ Lack of funding ◆ Communication ◆ Marketing ◆ Lack of clear vision ◆ Prioritizing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can vs. should ○ Wants vs. needs ◆ Collaboration ◆ Data-driven decision-making ◆ Unawareness of services and Township's function ◆ Infrastructure ◆ Alternative revenue sources ◆ Standard operating policies/procedures ◆ Civic disengagement ◆ State of Illinois ◆ Parks and recreation ◆ Open space ◆ Social media ◆ Transportation ◆ Mobility/connectivity throughout the community ◆ Lack of emergency ◆ Planning/security

EXTERNAL

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Technology ◆ Facilities ◆ Aging population ◆ Township consolidation ◆ Alternative revenue sources ◆ Those unaware of services ◆ Better marketing ◆ Setting priorities ◆ Collaboration ◆ Government service provider to other governments ◆ IGA's ◆ Our communities in the Township ◆ Relations with other local governments ◆ Infrastructure ◆ Create Standard Operating Procedures (S.O.P.'s) ◆ Civic engagement (lack of) ◆ State of Illinois limited services ◆ Parks & recreation needs ◆ Programs to address legalization of marijuana ◆ Social media ◆ Automation ◆ Teamwork/camaraderie. ◆ Weather impacts ◆ Transportation ◆ Mobility & connectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Technology ◆ Facilities ◆ Aging population ◆ State outmigration ◆ Diminishing state tax base ◆ Township consolidation ◆ Infrastructure ◆ State of Illinois government and budget ◆ Lack of parks & recreation ◆ Demand for parks & recreation ◆ Rising maintenance costs ◆ Legalization of marijuana ◆ Social media ◆ Disinformation/misinformation ◆ Weather/changing weather patterns ◆ Transportation ◆ Mobility/connectivity (lack of) ◆ Safety/security threats ◆ Non-secure facilities

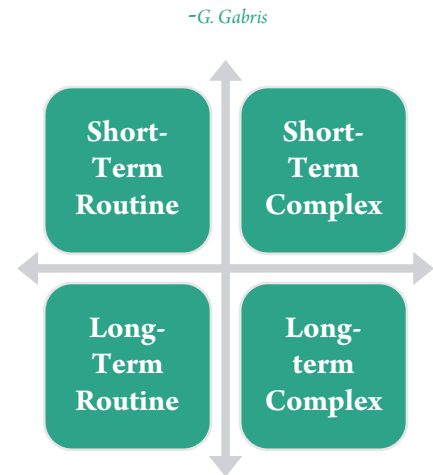
Session V. Nominal Group Goal Identification

With the preceding sessions as a sound foundation for goal-setting, the final session was a healthy group discussion of goals and/or action items needed to achieve the future visions as expressed by the group. To begin the process, participants returned to the groups they had worked with during the previous exercise. Each member was allotted time to highlight the three or four most important policy and program goals that he or she thinks 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 highly specific or general.

Classification. At the end of the open discussion, participants were asked to classify each goal according to a matrix model of time and complexity (Figure 2). Agreed upon criteria were used to classify a goal as short- or long-term and as complex or routine. The purpose of the exercise is to group goals of roughly the same type together so when prioritization occurs, the participants can avoid the problem of comparing “apples to oranges.”

The agreed upon criteria used for classifying goals as either short- or long-term and routine or complex involved the following: **Short-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway in the next one to three years. **Long-term goals** were those goals that could or should be completed or substantially underway within a three to eight year timeframe. **Routine goals**, although not necessarily simple or easy, were goals that could be accomplished with a strong commitment by the Township, and could likely be accomplished within present budget streams, some modest outside assistance, or with minor task or staff reallocations. **Complex goals** were goals that required extraordinary resources, specialists, funding, or the agreement of outside organizations or agencies, or, a private partner/contractor.

Figure 2. Goal Time & Complexity Matrix



Open Group Discussion and Consolidation of Goals

This final phase of the discussion served as the forum for Board and staff members to discuss, evaluate, and debate the ideas and goals offered by each participant in the previous sessions. Participants were asked to give their opinions, evaluations and judgments of the worthiness and value of different policy objectives.

Prioritization of Goals

After the workshop, each Board member was asked to delineate, via an online ranking exercise, which goals should be given the highest priority. The Board was provided an online ranking tool where point values were assigned to each goal in each quadrant of the time and complexity matrix by individuals. The calculation of goal prioritization consisted of “forced ranking” where the ranking of each identified goal is averaged by the rankings given by all participants. For example, if a goal were given the scores of 2, 5, 6, 6, 1, 2 and 3, the average total would be 3.57. **The lower the score, the higher the priority.** Again, the average totals were based on the ratings provided.

The following illustration presents the Board’s **top three goals**, within each quadrant, as they emerged from the consensus ranking exercise (Figure 3). The top three goals are offered here as a *process “snap shot”* of the most important strategic goals or issues areas for staff to address in the months and years ahead. In total, the group developed 6 short-term routine goals, 7 short-term complex goals, one long-term routine goal and 10 long-term complex goals.

Figure 3. Top Three Goals within Each Quadrant of the Time and Complexity Matrix

Short-Term Routine Goals

- Perform a comprehensive review of the Township’s current program offerings and ensure those offerings are aligned with community needs
- Enhance organizational development and advancement
- Perform an annual review of the Township’s fiscal position

Short-Term Complex Goals

- Complete a space utilization study
- Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan
- Develop a maintenance schedule to plan ahead for facilities and equipment updates

Long-Term Routine Goals

- Perform a review of contractual agreements, prior to a renewal, to identify potential cost-cutting opportunities

Long-Term Complex Goals*

- Develop and implement strategies to centralize Township services
- Develop a Workforce Development Plan that includes succession planning strategies and professional development opportunities
- Implement transportation strategies and partnerships to enhance ease of access to Township’s services, activities, youth and senior programs, appointments, etc.
- Work to identify strategies and solutions to address road reconstruction and drainage issues within the Township and unincorporated areas

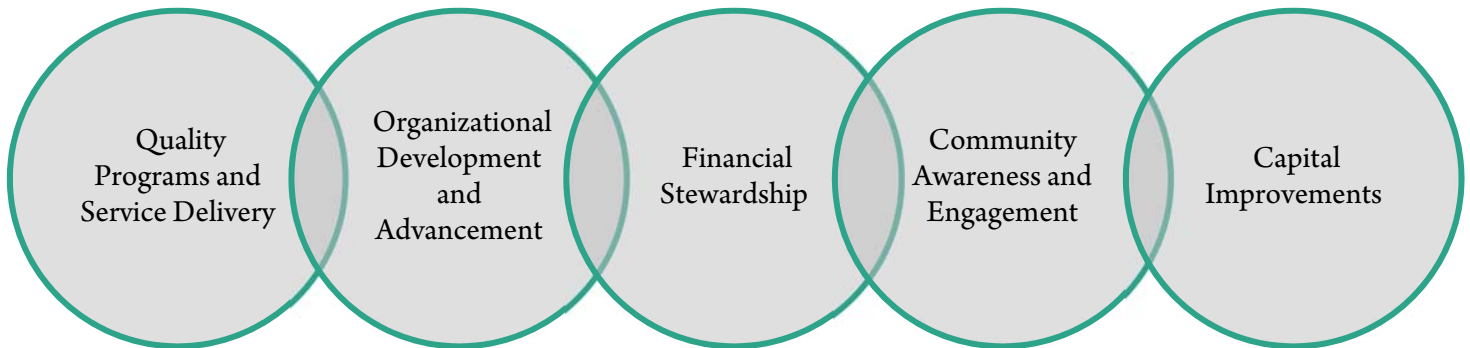
****Note: Two goals in the long-term complex category received tied scores for being ranked third.***

As part of the overall planning process, the strategic planning team developed a total of 23 goals. The above summarizes only the top 3 priorities as arranged in the time and complexity matrix. For a full review and appreciation of *all* the strategic goals developed, discussed and ranked, please see [Appendix A](#).

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS

Ultimately, five 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 during the workshop [in no particular order] are illustrated below.

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 Ela 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 action plans in a follow-up session for appropriate committees, departments and elected officers.

What is apparent from the exchange of ideas and dialogue during the discussion sessions and the strategic planning workshop is that the Township is fortunate to have 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.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is for Greg Kuhn and the second is for Jeanna Ballard.

Greg Kuhn and Jeanna Ballard, Session Facilitators

APPENDIX A:

ELA TOWNSHIP PRIORITIZED STRATEGIC GOALS

APPENDIX A: Prioritized Strategic Short- and Long-term Strategic Goals

Short-Term Routine Goal Prioritized Rankings

Short-term Routine Goals	Group Average Score
Perform a comprehensive review of the Township's current program offerings and ensure those offerings are aligned with community needs	1.2
Enhance organizational development and advancement -Develop a defined organizational and hierarchical structure -Create standard operating policies and procedures, job descriptions, and succession planning strategies	2.6
Perform an annual review of the Township's fiscal position	2.8
Review the Township's current safety and security system/protocol and identify any needed improvements	4.2
Identify opportunities and implement measures to enhance teamwork and improve employee performance/morale	4.4
Identify and establish a plan for future parks and recreation improvements	5.8

Short-Term Complex Goal Prioritized Rankings

Short-term Complex Goals	Group Average Score
Complete a space utilization study -Situating Township activities under the appropriate department	2.8
Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan	3.6
Develop a maintenance schedule to plan ahead for facilities and equipment updates	3.8
Identify potential alternative revenue sources (i.e., grant writing, IGAs, etc.)	4.2
Develop and implement a communications and marketing plan to enhance community awareness of the Township's programs, activities, and services	4.4
Develop an Information Technology strategic plan to remain current with technological advancements including integration, training, security and recovery	4.6
Identify transportation strategies and partnerships to enhance ease of access to the Township's services, activities, youth and senior programs, appointments, etc.	4.6

Long-Term Routine Goal Prioritized Rankings*

- Perform a review of contractual agreements, prior to a renewal, to identify potential cost-cutting opportunities.

**Only one long-term routine goal was developed, no ranking required.*

Long-Term Complex Goal Prioritized Rankings

Long-term Complex Goals	Group Average Score
Develop and implement strategies to centralize Township services	3.4
Develop a Workforce Development Plan that includes succession planning strategies and professional development opportunities	3.4
Implement transportation strategies and partnerships to enhance ease of access to Township’s services, activities, youth and senior programs, appointments, etc.	4.4
Work to identify strategies and solutions to address road reconstruction and drainage issues within the Township and unincorporated areas	4.4
Implement the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan	4.6
Implement the Information Technology Strategic Plan	5.4
Develop and implement a Safety and Security Plan	6.4
Implement the Township’s senior autism/dementia education program	6.8
Implement Parks and Recreation Plan improvements	6.8
Identify strategies to improve walkability and connectivity throughout the Township	9.4