

CITY OF WATERTOWN, NEW YORK
WORK SESSION AGENDA
Monday, September 14, 2026
7:00 p.m.

This shall serve as notice that a work session of the City Council will be held on **Monday, September 14, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.** in the City Council Chambers, 245 Washington Street, Watertown, New York.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Strategic Plan Update

Presenters:

- Geoff Urda, Senior Planner
- Erica Anderson, Assistant to the City Manager

2. Layout of 2027-2028 Projects / Project Updates

Presenters:

- Tom Compo, City Engineer
- Karen Overton, Interim Department of Public Works Superintendent

3. CDBG Demolition Projects Update

Presenters:

- Michael Lumbis, Planning and Community Development Director
- Joseph Albinus, Planner

4. City Manager's Update

Topics:

- Code Changes
- Harvest Festival Update
- Christmas Tree Lighting
- Landfill Solar Update

Staff Report

September 14, 2026

To: The Honorable Mayor and City Council

From: Eric Wagenaar, City Manager

Subject: Strategic Plan Update

In late 2025, at the direction of the City Manager, Planning Staff began interviewing department heads (and deputies) to initiate the process of writing a new Strategic Plan for the City of Watertown, replacing the Strategic Goals and Objectives adopted in 2019. Following these interviews, with additional input and feedback from department heads, Planning Staff, in collaboration with the City Manager's Office, prepared a new DRAFT Strategic Plan.

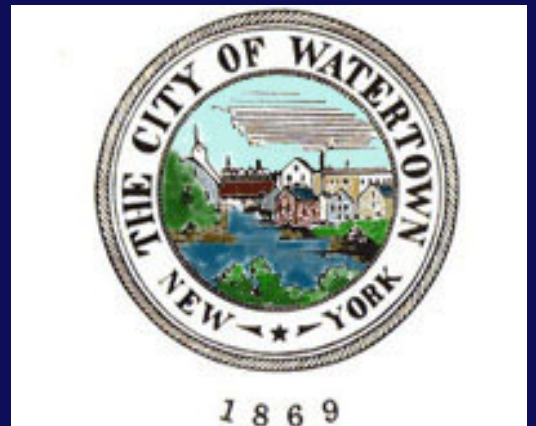
A copy of the DRAFT document is attached for presentation and discussion at the City Council's September 14, 2026, work session, at which Staff will request feedback from Council Members to incorporate into the final version of the document. Once additional revisions are complete based on the City Council's direction, Staff will advance the Strategic Plan to Council for adoption by resolution.

Once adopted, the Strategic Plan will represent formal City policy for prioritizing resources and conducting City operations.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026



City of Watertown



Introduction

The 2026 Strategic Plan represents an update to the 2019 Strategic Goals and Objectives. Like the previous document, it is intended to cover a five-to-seven-year planning horizon and should be updated/replaced in the early 2030s.

Unlike the 2019 version, which was 40+ pages and contained eight primary goals, each with multiple sub-goals and an aggregate of over 200 objectives, this document is purposefully much tighter to increase its utility to Staff. Based on interviews with every City department, this Strategic Plan recognizes four central goals/strategies and identifies the most critical objectives towards achieving those goals.

In contrast to the Comprehensive Plan, which is a long-range, high-level vision for all aspects of Watertown as a community (land use, transportation, economic development, etc.), this Strategic Plan will guide the specific internal operations of City government and is intended for near-term action. It sets priorities for allocating resources and refining procedures.

The four central goals/strategies are:

- 1. The City's budget should finance the level of customer service that our citizens expect.**
- 2. Internal and external communication must be clear, effective and consistent.**
- 3. Maximize partnerships that will allow the City and other local and regional entities to deliver services together that are not achievable independently.**
- 4. The City must address its most critical infrastructure needs and focus on essential services.**

Each of these four goals/strategies contains multiple objectives that implement that goal and operate consistently with the underlying strategy. When building budgets, creating work plans and deploying each department's workforce, we strive for these objectives.

Vision

When the City of Watertown wrote its Comprehensive Plan, it engaged the public over an 18-month planning process with over 200 citizens providing input. A Steering Committee made up of a wide variety of stakeholders also helped guide the process every step of the way, which included writing a community vision statement. The adopted Comprehensive Plan identifies the City's vision as follows:

Anchored by its historic downtown and strong community, Watertown is the heart of Jefferson County, serving as a hub of commerce, healthcare, and education; a base for stable and competitive employment opportunities; and an incubator of innovation and entrepreneurship. Watertown is an international destination offering the best of active urban living in the North Country with a rich tapestry of arts, culture, and recreational opportunities for all seasons. The City's greatest strength lies in its residents, lifelong and new, who cultivate a vibrant community life, and take pride in their safe, walkable, family-friendly neighborhoods.

Watertown is the North Country's City - Inspired and Powered by People

Accomplishments since 2019: Comprehensive Plan

Since the City adopted its Comprehensive Plan and its previous Strategic Goals and Objectives, both in 2019, the City has made progress and implemented many of the recommendations in both documents. These plans are not meant to become static, but rather to become reality. Below is a non-exhaustive list of accomplishments that were originally identified seven years ago and have since been implemented.

Comprehensive Plan:

- DT.1 – Collaborate with the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award recipients to implement all DRI projects, while actively implementing municipal DRI projects.
- PR.2 – Create a Master Plan for Thompson Park
- PR.3 – Expand recreational and community activities in public parks to attract a diversity of uses and visitors year-round.
- PR.5 – Ensure funding to continued maintenance of parks and operations.
- PR.8 – Support the YMCA in their effort to identify a location for a future community/aquatics center.
- ED.5 – Incubate new businesses by partnering with Jefferson Community College, the Downtown Revitalization Initiative and others.
- ED.6 – Continue to support the Local Development Corporation's Façade & Rental Assistance Programs.
- SR.7 – Continue and expand current urban forestry efforts.
- SR.9 – Incorporate green infrastructure practices into zoning code.
- GI.1 – Continue to prepare a Capital Improvement Plan to guide infrastructure investment.
- GI.4 – Update zoning, incorporating form-based codes.

Accomplishments since 2019: Strategic Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goals and Objectives:

- 1.3.2 – Help establish a JCC Downtown Facility location with college services.
- 1.4.2 – Continue to work with and promote the Chamber of Commerce on the Watertown Farmer's Market.
- 2.1.3 – Establish a “drop box” to eliminate the customer's need to enter the building and to assist with after-hour service.
- 2.3.1 – Develop a new, user-friendly website to:
 - Publish clear and precise information
 - Develop more online services that are easy to access from any device
 - Provide more e-forms that can be submitted online
 - Increase the ability to pay for more services online
- 2.4.5 – Circulate weekly Status and Information Update to inform all employees of the current projects and actions of the City, as well as acknowledge employees that demonstrated acts of superior customer service.
- 5.2.7 – Eliminate gaps in the City's sidewalk network and replace sidewalk in underserved multifamily residential areas. Replace noncompliant handicap ramps.
- 6.7.5 – Continue efforts for maintaining publicly owned areas in the downtown through investigating volunteer and partnerships with business organizations.
- 7.2.1 – Work with the Watertown-Jefferson County Area Transportation Council (WJCTC) to advocate mobility management as a core regional function to improve residents' accessibility to services, employment, education and recreational resources.
- 7.2.2 – Work with the Watertown-Jefferson County Area Transportation Council (WJCTC) to develop a regional governance for transit operations within the Greater Watertown metro area.
- 7.6.3 – Develop a Request for Proposal to hire a consultant to develop a Sewall's Island and Factory Square Revitalization and Redevelopment Plan.
- 8.1: Provide a Watertown Police Department Officer as a liaison to Neighborhood Watch groups to promote information sharing.
- 8.3.1 – Purchase two (2) patrol car mounted License Plate Readers (LPR) to assist in locating stolen vehicles, wanted persons, amber alert related vehicles and suspended operators.

Goal/Strategy One: The City's budget should finance the level of customer service that our citizens expect.

Narrative: A predictable baseline revenue is necessary to maintain critical services and provide attractive quality-of-life opportunities worthy of a regional population center.

Objectives for Goal One

- The City will adopt a fee schedule annually to cover the costs of individual services provided to user(s), to ensure that the fees charged are accurate (e.g. Trash, Water, Permit and Review applications).
- Ensure the public is aware of, and adopted budgets account for, services which benefit the entire community (e.g. plowing streets in winter, citing violations) and those for which the City chooses not to charge a fee (e.g. green waste pickup).
- Departments will have organizational flexibility to provide critical services. Stabilize current staffing levels to ensure a consistent ability to provide the expected service level.
- Conduct one department head-level training on the budget per year to increase awareness of all budget processes, from forecasting and building a budget to tracking department spending within each fiscal year. These trainings will increase efficiency, promote accountability and prevent overspending.
- Fund the required professional training, certifications and subscriptions necessary for employees to execute their jobs.
- Fund and conduct a City-wide property reassessment to determine whether assessed property values are fair, accurate, and reflect current real estate market conditions. Identify and correct any inaccuracies.
- Prioritize and preserve funding for infrastructure that supports the community's quality of life, such as core library and parks facilities maintenance.
- Identify the Parks and Recreation services, amenities and events that are irreplaceable and essential to the community, and safeguard funding for these offerings in perpetuity.
- Develop a framework for receiving inquiries and complaints that establishes an appropriate and realistic timeline for Staff to process the request and respond.

Key Takeaway: Resources are now at the minimum level necessary to sustain operations without eliminating services. The City needs to balance fiscal sustainability with ability to operate and not risk crossing a tipping point where one or the other becomes unachievable.

Goal/Strategy Two: Internal and external communication must be clear, effective and consistent.

Narrative: Internal communication must continuously improve to reduce functional isolation between departments and operate as cohesive team. The City should speak with one voice when communicating with the public. Senior Staff should equip frontline employees with the knowledge and skills they need to provide outstanding customer service.

Objectives for Goal Two

- Conduct an annual customer service training for frontline staff working in roles where they interact with the public every day and have a policy in place for customer service as a core value and cultural priority (e.g. proper customer handoff to another department).
- Include language in City job descriptions emphasizing an organizational culture of customer service. Onboarding for all positions, not just frontline roles, will orient new employees to this culture.
- Maintain a central customer service location at City Hall where customers can accomplish as much as possible in one place.
- Increase public awareness and use of available online tools for accessing information.
- Increase Staff's use of available technological tools in executing their roles and furthering professional development.
- Conduct Stakeholder outreach meetings ahead of all major infrastructure projects.
- Ensure consistent cross talk between departments to eliminate operational gaps and achieve better organizational alignment.
- Establish a single social media account for the entire City (rather than department accounts) and one distributor of press releases.
- Continue sending welcome packets to new City residents with information on garbage pickup, sidewalk responsibilities, winter parking rules, etc.

Key Takeaway: Communication is foundational to successful City operations. Reducing departmental fragmentation is a prerequisite to efficiency.

Goal/Strategy Three: Maximize partnerships that will allow the City and other local and regional entities to deliver services together that are not achievable independently.

Narrative: Partnerships are more than just occasional meetings. Meaningful and mutually beneficial partnerships produce action. For local governments and other organizations with a mission to improve the community, this means pooling resources and manpower to solve problems and deliver tangible results to the greater community.

Objectives for Goal Three

- Jefferson County is the City's most important external partner, with both elected officials and Staff in leadership positions actively assisting their counterparts at Jefferson County and vice versa.
- Collaborate with other regional governments and organizations to implement the recommendations of the Jefferson County Housing Needs Assessment .
- Establish and maintain productive relationships with all utility providers in the region, resulting in clear two-way communication and advance notice of all public and private projects affecting the right-of-way.
- Partner with local school districts and regional universities to offer City internships to students and continuing education opportunities for City employees.
- Expand relationships with regional not-for-profit groups to become familiar with their missions and the challenges they encounter. Create shared interest short-term and long-term goals together and identify potential sources for funding.
- Host an Annual Infrastructure Summit. Initially meet as a group to create/update contacts and present a framework for maintaining open communications with the various stakeholders (DANC, NYSDOT, Jefferson County, Spectrum, Verizon, National Grid, Slick Fiber/Westelcom)
- Sustain and expand the Watertown Fire Department's collaborative initiatives with partners, including but not limited to, the shared Fire Academy model with Jefferson Community College and the Fort Drum Fire Department as well as the mutual aid and operational partnership with the Fort Drum.
- Always keep communication channels accessible with Fort Drum, which is the economic engine of the region, and the City's contiguous towns, which share services and infrastructure with the City.

Key Takeaway: Cooperation and a shared vision between the City of Watertown and Jefferson County is crucial to both entities.

Goal/Strategy Four: The City must prioritize infrastructure projects to provide the highest return on investment possible.

Narrative: With limited financial resources to undertake street reconstructions and other major infrastructure projects, the number of street reconstructions and comparable projects the City is able to undertake is finite. This makes it essential to get the biggest “bang for our buck” when selecting and implementing these projects. It is also crucial to avoid costly rebuilds and duplicative work on the same corridors twice in a limited timeframe.

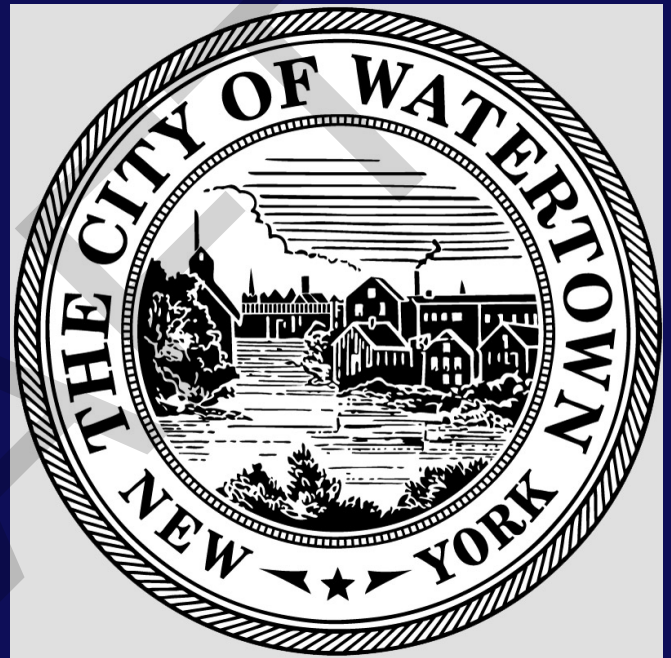
Objectives for Goal Four

- Maintain a holistic street conditions matrix based on empirical data, and use that matrix to inform which street reconstructions are programmed for upcoming budget years, with an emphasis on infrastructure affecting health outcomes (water and sewer).
- Reconstruct one street per year based on the matrix, addressing the most critical needs as part of a single project each year, with Main Street East, Leray Street and Sherman Street as priority reconstructions, as well as an emphasis on improvements in the Western Outfall Trunk Sewer (WOTS) footprint.
- Reconstruct the Newell/Engine/Howk Street corridor, as identified by the Street Prioritization Matrix, to allow the burgeoning commercial, residential and recreational uses to grow in harmony with the adjacent Department of Public Works campus while guaranteeing DPW’s ability to operate effectively.
- Understand and fulfill the City’s regional responsibilities as the service hub of the North Country and home to regional critical infrastructure, such as Samaritan Medical Center, Jefferson Community College, the Industrial Park and Public Safety Complex.
- Strategically install underground fiber conduit as part of projects requiring excavation.
- Conduct proactive demolitions of blighted and condemned structures as grant funding allows.
- Evaluate opportunities to power more City buildings self-sufficiently so that the City can sell more hydropower to the open market (e.g. solar panels on the roofs of City buildings where possible).
- Adhere to prescribed lifecycle management of City vehicles, including Fire, Police and DPW, to reduce the risk of failure during critical operations and avoid deferring inflationary costs into the future.
- Aggressively identify and pursue grant opportunities to fund City projects, lessening the direct burden on local taxpayers.

Key Takeaway: Maintaining current data on all City infrastructure is a crucial tool for spending strategically on City projects that will maximize benefits to citizens, businesses and essential service providers.

All four goals have clear relationships to customer service and a tieback to efficiency. The people of Watertown are our customers, and we owe them the best customer service possible. The fourth goal focuses on spending taxpayer money (the money our customers pay us to provide them with a livable community) as effectively and efficiently as possible.

This plan is the formal policy blueprint for delivering this outcome to our customers.



Conclusion



City of Watertown
NEW YORK



CDBG Demolition Projects Update

SEPTEMBER 14, 2026 WORK SESSION



City of Watertown
NEW YORK

405 Arsenal Street



383 Flower Avenue East



All Roads Lead to Watertown





405 Arsenal Street - Demolition

- This project is proposed to be added to the 2024 Annual Action Plan (AAP).
- One project in the 2024 AAP was under budget (531 Bradley St. demolition)
- One project in the 2024 Annual Action Plan (518 Pine Street Transitional Housing SRO) is not moving forward.
- Total available for this demolition project: \$53,890





405 Arsenal Street Demolition

- 2024 Annual Action Plan Amendment – Next Steps
 - Draft the plan amendment documents
 - Public Hearing – October 5
 - 30-Day Public Comment Period
 - City Council Approval – October 19 or November 2
- Project Implementation – Next Steps
 - Finalize Environmental Review (95% complete)
 - Develop specifications and contract documents
 - Bidding and award – Late Fall
 - Demolition – Early Spring





383 Flower Avenue East Demolition

- This project was included in the City's recently adopted 2026 Annual Action Plan.
- Awaiting CDBG grant agreement with HUD for overall grant funding.
- Total budgeted for the project: \$50,000





383 Flower Avenue East Demolition

- Project Implementation – Next Steps
 - Asbestos testing
 - Completion of environmental review
 - Develop specifications and contract documents
 - Bidding and award – Late Fall
 - Demolition – Early Spring

