

City of Black River Falls
PLAN COMMISSION – AGENDA

Wednesday – October 2, 2024 – 5:30 PM
City Hall – 101 S. Second Street, Black River Falls, WI

To participate remotely, join Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88028477671?pwd=4dhniMlhpd2a82FDfXW8ZEaU7cksw.1>

Or Dial: 1-312-626-6799

Meeting ID: 880 2847 7671

Passcode: cityhall

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Summary of the Comprehensive Plan stakeholder meeting held 9/9/2024
4. Comprehensive Plan survey report summary
5. Review and finalize goals for each Comprehensive Plan element – Action
6. Schedule public hearing for Comprehensive Plan – Action
7. Adjourn

Posted: September 10, 2024

Summary of Stakeholders Meeting

The stakeholder meeting had an excellent turnout and generated valuable feedback. Attendees broadly agreed on the key issues facing the City, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Low median income and lack of good jobs**
- **Housing issues:** low supply and quality of existing stock
- **Housing affordability:** while home values have increased less than in other areas, they remain unaffordable for many given the available amenities
- **Stagnant/declining population growth:** an aging population is putting strain on local resources and services

Other important concerns included the lack of available childcare, which is a significant factor influencing where people choose to live and work. We also requested that anyone with relevant data share it with us for inclusion in the plan. The school district has already expressed interest in contributing.

Another issue raised was the lack of a central resource hub for community information. Many people feel they are unaware of available services, such as parks and other amenities, due to a reliance on word of mouth. One potential objective for the plan could be to create a central website to consolidate this information.

The hospital shared its need to prepare for a growing elderly population and expressed interest in supporting alternative aging options, with an example being the Reedsburg Area Center. They are also exploring renewable energy initiatives, noting their partnership with Eeneration has yielded a significant return on investment.

There were also concerns about the City's challenges with implementing ideas, such as improving collaboration between governments and organizations and expanding the industrial park. Stakeholders voiced a strong desire for more action, not just discussion.

Another topic of conversation focused on how best to address the City's challenges, many of which are interconnected. For example, low median income affects housing affordability, but if higher-paying jobs are available, will people choose to live in the City? Conversely, if we focus on improving housing, will residents work elsewhere? A clear direction will need to be decided.

Additionally, there was widespread consensus that the plan should include specific, measurable objectives, rather than broad, general statements. For example, instead of saying, "We encourage housing of all types," stakeholders expressed a preference for setting concrete targets like, "We want to see 100 new housing units built by 2040."

Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan Survey

The City of Black River Falls conducted a survey in August and September 2024 to gather community input in support of the city's Comprehensive Plan. The survey was designed to identify community priorities and satisfaction levels with existing services, providing valuable insights to guide future planning efforts.

The survey was promoted through the City's website, social media, word of mouth, and other local channels to encourage broad participation. A full list of the survey questions can be found in the appendix of the Comprehensive Plan, and detailed survey results are available for download in .csv format via a link in the plan.

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate various issues on a scale ranging from "Extremely important" to "Not at all important." The rating scale was as follows:

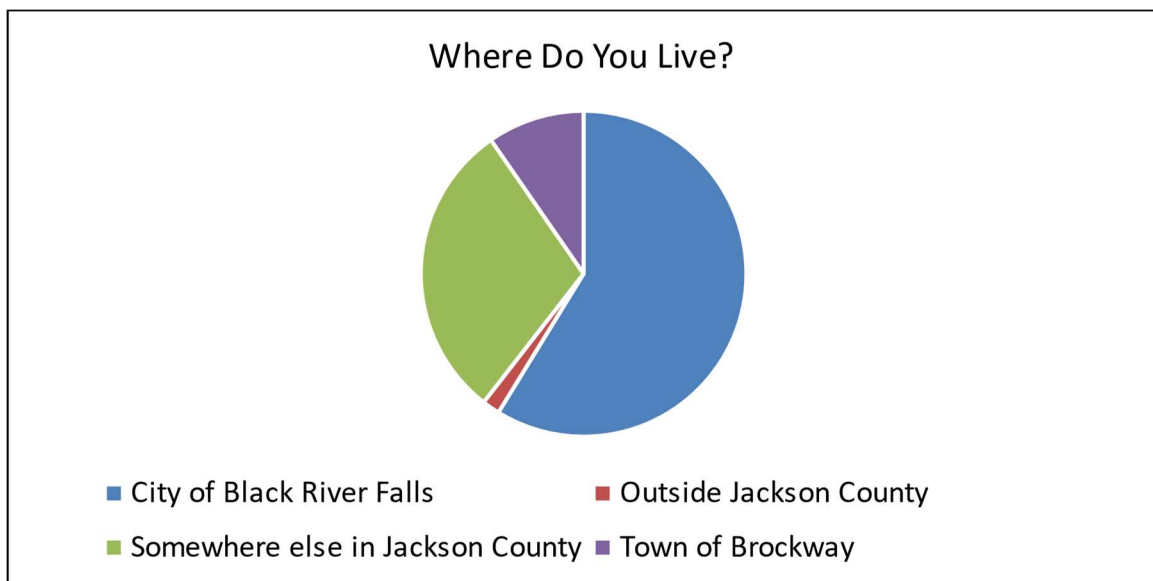
- 5 = Extremely important
- 4 = Very important
- 3 = Moderately important
- 2 = Slightly important
- 1 = Not at all important

These ratings were then converted into numerical values, with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. The averages (means) of these ratings were calculated to report results in tables and to summarize the key findings of the survey.

In addition, respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with existing services using the same scale and methodology. This is noted in the relevant sections where satisfaction is evaluated.

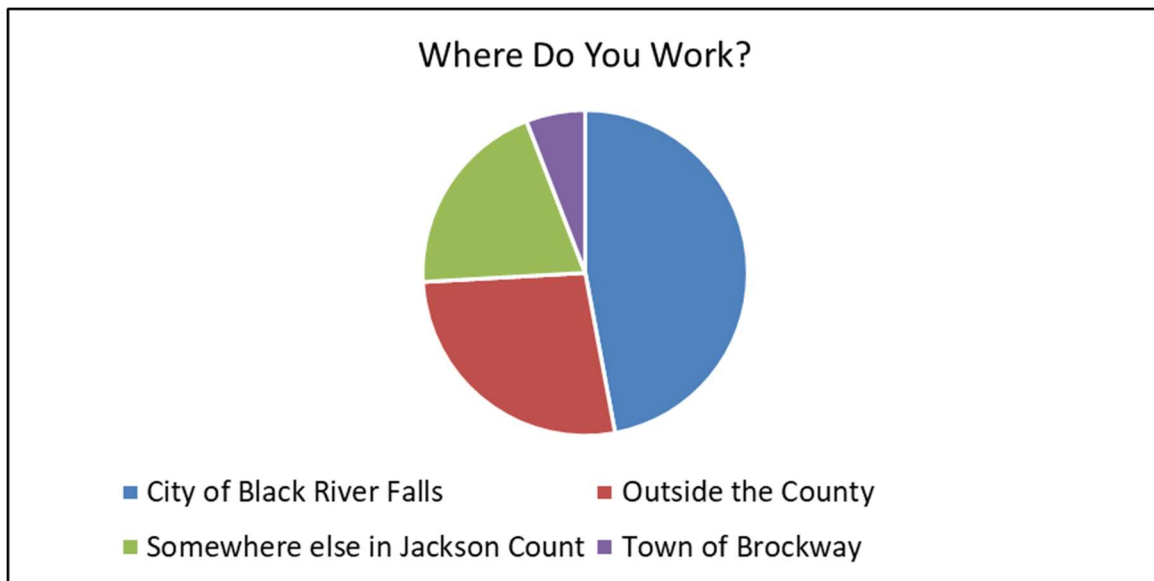
Demographic Overview:

A total of 114 people participated in the City of Black River Falls Comprehensive Plan Survey. Of these, 59% (67 respondents) reside within the city limits, 10% live in the Town of Brockway, and 30% live elsewhere in Jackson County. Among city residents, Ward 3 was notably underrepresented, with only 9% of respondents from that ward, while other wards accounted for at least 26% each.



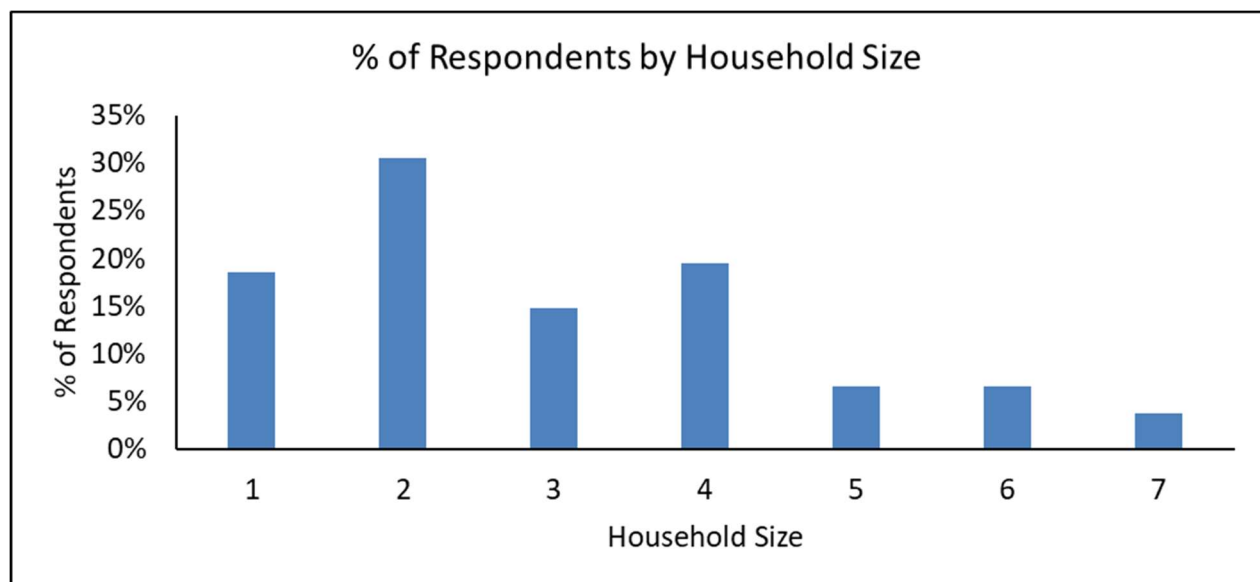
Employment:

Most respondents (70%) work full-time, with retirees making up 18% and part-time workers 7%. Unemployment and student representation were minimal. Work locations varied significantly: 48% of respondents work in Black River Falls, 27% outside Jackson County, 20% elsewhere in Jackson County, and 6% in the Town of Brockway. Even among city residents, only 51% work in the city, with 30% working outside the county and 17% within Jackson County.



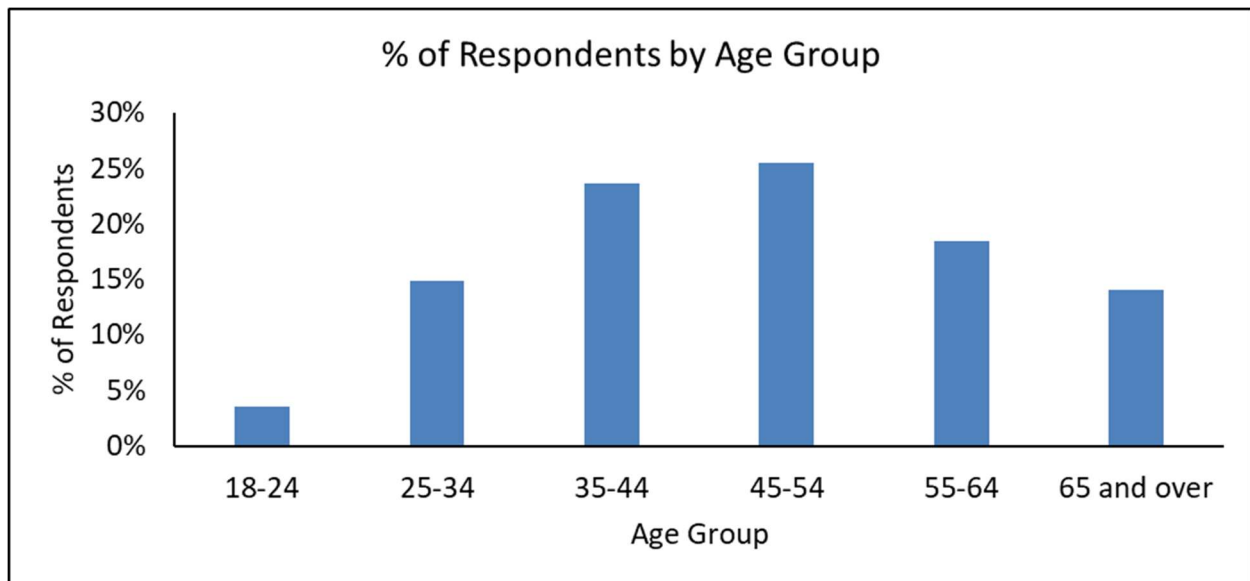
Housing:

Homeownership is prevalent, with 80% of respondents owning their homes, 17% renting, and 4% staying with friends or family. On average, respondents live with 2.96 people, with homeowners averaging slightly more (3.00) than renters (2.63). Those staying with friends or family reported an average household size of 4.00. Household sizes also varied by location, with 2.75 people per household in the City of Black River Falls, 4.00 outside the county, 3.36 elsewhere in Jackson County, and 2.9 in the Town of Brockway. Within the city, Ward 2 had the largest households (3.18), while Ward 4 had the smallest (2.43).



Age Distribution:

The age distribution was fairly representative across all age groups. The only underrepresented group was those aged 18–24, comprising 4% of respondents. Every other age group had at least 14% representation, with the largest group being 45–54 years old (25%).

**Additional Property and Business Ownership:**

About 26% of respondents own additional property, primarily recreational land (64%) or income property (14%). Additionally, 15% of respondents are business owners.

Community Observations and Recommendations:

Survey respondents were asked which attributes the City of Black River Falls should prioritize. There was broad consensus that nearly all areas are important to support. Even the lowest-ranked issue, volunteerism, was still considered very important.

The top five priorities, with the highest average scores, were:

1. Education
2. Quality of life
3. Health care
4. Job opportunities
5. Affordable housing

These priorities remained consistent across various demographics, including whether respondents lived in the city or their specific ward. However, there were some predictable variations by age group. For respondents aged 35-44 and 45-54, education ranked as the top concern, while for those aged 55-64 and 65+, health care emerged as the most important issue.

Overall, respondents indicated that nearly all community attributes need attention, but these five areas clearly stood out as the most pressing concerns.

Community Observations	Average Importance Rating
Education	4.6
Quality of Life	4.6
Health Care	4.5
Available Job Opportunities	4.5
Affordable Housing	4.4
Housing	4.3
Business Support	4.3
Child Care	4.2
Natural Resources	4.2
Economic Opportunities	4.2
Property Taxes	4.2
Community Engagement	4.1
Recreational Opportunities	4.0
Volunteerism	3.8

Housing Issues and Recommendations:

Respondents were asked which housing issues the City of Black River Falls should prioritize. While there was less consensus compared to other community priorities, the lowest-scoring issue, mobile homes, still received a 2.4 out of 5. The top five areas of focus were:

1. Affordable housing
2. Public sewer and water
3. Parks and public lands
4. Development near existing services
5. Apartments and multi-family housing

Responses varied more by demographic than geography, with the largest differences between renters and homeowners. Renters generally favored stronger support for all housing issues, particularly affordable housing and apartments, while homeowners expressed lower levels of support across most areas. Homeowners, in particular, showed less support for mobile and manufactured homes compared to the overall response.

Interestingly, geographic location had less impact on responses than whether respondents rented or owned their homes.

Housing Issues	Average Importance Rating
Affordable Housing	4.3
Public Sewer and Water	4.1
Parks and Public Lands	3.8
Encouraging Development in Proximity To Existing Services	3.5
Apartments/Multi-Family	3.5
Proximity To School, Services, and Retail	3.3
Zoning and Land Use	3.3
Housing Density	3.2
Manufactured Home	2.9
Accessory Dwelling Units (Second Housing Unit on Existing Property)	2.8
Tiny Homes	2.5
Mobile Homes	2.4

Business and Economic Development:

When asked about priorities for business development in the City of Black River Falls, respondents identified the following top five areas:

1. Healthcare
2. Education and job training
3. Technology
4. Tourism and recreation
5. Retail and service industries

There was broad agreement on these priorities, with minimal variation across different demographics or geographic areas. One notable area with a low level of support was for mining, which received a score of just 2.3, indicating limited community interest in encouraging mining activities.

Business Sectors	Average Importance Rating
Healthcare	4.4
Education/Job Training	4.1
Technology	4.0
Tourism and Recreation	3.9
Retail and Service	3.9
Light Industrial	3.7
Professional Services	3.6
Renewable Energy	3.6
Shipping and Distribution	3.5
Heavy Industrial	3.3
Industrial Parks	3.2
Tenured Employment at Mid-Range Businesses	3.0
Mining	2.3

Public Transportation Priorities:

Respondents were asked to identify which public transportation issues the region should focus on. The top five priorities were:

1. Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) services
2. Senior, veterans, and medical transit services
3. SMRT Regional Bus Transit System
4. Bike and pedestrian trails
5. Bike and pedestrian routes

There was very little variation in responses across both geography and demographics, with these issues consistently ranked as top priorities by respondents from all wards and both within and outside the city.

Transit Priorities	Average Importance Rating
ADRC (For Seniors and People With Disabilities)	4.2
Transportation Services (Senior, Veterans, Medical Transit, etc.)	4.1
S.M.R.T Bus Regional Transit System	3.5
Bike/Pedestrian Trails	3.3
Bike/Pedestrian Routes	3.3
Ride Hailing Services (Uber, Lyft, Taxis)	3.2
Bus (Regional/National)	3.1
Ride Sharing	2.9
Rail Transit	2.6

Street and Transportation Priorities:

Respondents were asked to identify which street and transportation areas the City of Black River Falls should prioritize. The top five issues were:

1. Seasonal maintenance (snow, erosion, potholes)
2. Local/city streets
3. Infrastructure (bridges, culverts, etc.)
4. Sidewalks and trails
5. Traffic controls and safety

Multi-use trails for ATVs received notably low support, with an average score of 2.6. There was very little variation in responses across both geography and demographics, with these issues consistently ranked as top priorities by respondents from all wards and both within and outside the city.

Transportation Priorities	Average Importance Rating
Seasonal Maintenance (Snow, Erosion, Potholes)	4.4
Local/City Streets	4.3
Infrastructure (Bridges, Culverts, etc.)	4.2
Sidewalks and Trails	3.9
Traffic Controls and Safety	3.9
State and Federal Highways	3.6
Parking	3.5
New Street Construction	3.0
Multi-Use (ATVs)	2.6

Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Priorities:

Respondents were asked to identify which agricultural, natural, and cultural issues the City of Black River Falls should prioritize. The top five issues were:

1. Lakes, rivers, and waterways
2. County or community parks
3. Land conservation (erosion, flood, storms)
4. Wildlife and game
5. Forests

While there was strong support for most areas, recreational ATV trails received notably lower support. There was very little variation in responses across both geography and demographics, with these issues consistently ranked as top priorities by respondents from all wards and both within and outside the city.

Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Priorities	Average Importance Rating
Lakes, Rivers, and Waterways	4.2
County Or Community Parks	3.9
Land Conservation (Erosion, Flood, Storms)	3.9
Wildlife and Game	3.8
Forests	3.8
Farmland Preservation	3.8
Cultural and Historic Landmarks	3.7
Wetlands	3.6
Land Conservancies	3.6
Bike and Pedestrian Trails	3.5
State Parks	3.5
Recreational ATV Trails	2.9

Utilities and Community Facilities Quality:

Respondents were asked to rate the current quality of utilities and community facilities in the City of Black River Falls. The top-rated services were:

1. Natural gas
2. Trash collection
3. Electricity

Areas noted for improvement included TV service, landline phone, and internet. However, these services were still rated as "Average," indicating they are not viewed as poor. There was broad agreement on these ratings among both city residents and those living outside the city, with no significant variation across wards within the city.

Utilities and Community Facilities	Average Service Rating
Natural Gas	3.9
Trash Collection	3.8
Electricity	3.8
Recycling	3.5
Cellular Reception	3.3
Solid Waste/Landfill	3.2
TV Service	3.2
Landline Phone	3.1
Internet	3.1

Renewable Energy and Environmental Priorities

Respondents were asked to identify which renewable energy and environmental issues the City of Black River Falls should prioritize. The top three priorities were:

1. Drinking water
2. Solar projects
3. Agricultural pollution prevention

There was little variation in responses based on demographics or whether respondents lived inside or outside the city. However, within the city, Ward 3 residents placed a significantly higher priority on these issues, with a median score of 4.2 across all categories, compared to 3.6 for respondents overall. Ward 3 also showed more emphasis on the hydroelectric system and less on solar projects.

Mining received very low support across the board, with a score of 2.2, reflecting a consistent lack of interest in mining throughout the survey.

Renewable Energy and Environmental Priorities	Average Importance Rating
Drinking Water	4.6
Solar Projects	3.6
Agriculture Pollution Prevention	3.6
Hydroelectric Systems	3.6
Distribution (Power Lines)	3.6
Carbon Emissions	3.1
Wind Projects	3.0
Mining	2.2

Support for City Environmental Initiatives

The survey asked respondents how they felt about the City supporting various initiatives. The top five initiatives with the most support were:

1. Water conservation and treatment
2. Recycling
3. Pollution reduction
4. Renewable energy
5. Encouraging development near existing infrastructure

Initiatives with notably lower support included electric vehicle usage and charging options, as well as residential requirements for EV charging, both of which scored below 3.

Support for environmental initiatives varied slightly by geography. City residents expressed more support for these issues compared to those living outside the city. Within the city, Wards 3 and 4 showed stronger support than Wards 1 and 2.

Environmental Initiatives	Average Importance Rating
Water Conservation and Treatment	4.0
Recycling	3.9
Pollution Reduction	3.7
Renewable Energy	3.7
Encouraging Development to Existing Development	3.6
Runoff Reduction	3.6
Sustainable Building Design	3.6
Solar Power	3.5
Commercial Building Codes Requires Energy Efficiency	3.5
Reduce Carbon Emissions	3.3
Residential Building Codes Require Energy Efficiency	3.2
Electric Vehicle Usage and Charging Options	2.6
Residential Requirement for EV Charging	2.2

Key Issues for Future Development

Respondents were also asked to identify the issues they believe will have the most positive impact on development in the City of Black River Falls over the next 10 years, with the option to select up to four. The five most commonly selected issues were:

1. Cost of living
2. Education
3. Employment and jobs
4. Child care
5. Housing development

There was minimal variation in responses across different demographics or geographic areas, indicating broad agreement on these priorities for the city's future growth.

Issues	# of Responses	% of Responses
Cost Of Living	55	46%
Education	54	45%
Employment/Jobs	47	39%
Child Care	45	38%
Housing Development	44	37%
Health Care	34	28%
Business Development	28	23%
Recreation/Tourism	28	23%
Infrastructure	21	18%
Finding Qualified Employees	20	17%
Internet Access	18	15%
Community Engagement	17	14%
Streets	16	13%

Community Feedback: "Big Idea" for Black River Falls

Residents of Black River Falls were asked to share their "Big Idea" for the city. The responses highlighted a wide range of perspectives, with a focus on several key areas for improvement:

1. **Infrastructure:** Many respondents emphasized the need for upgrades to roads, bridges, and public facilities. Suggestions included enhancing street maintenance, improving walkability, and expanding bike trails.
2. **Business Development:** Residents called for more diverse business opportunities, including new retail stores, restaurants, and local job creation. There was also strong interest in supporting small businesses and attracting new industries to boost the local economy.
3. **Community Safety:** Enhancing public safety was a common theme, with suggestions for increased police presence, better traffic control, and improved lighting in public areas to make the city safer for all residents.
4. **Quality of Life Improvements:** Respondents expressed a desire for more recreational facilities, parks, and community events. Ideas included adding more family-friendly amenities, improving access to green spaces, and creating more opportunities for community engagement.

Draft Goals for the City of Black River Falls Comprehensive Plan

Land Use: "The City of Black River Falls will ensure a balanced and sustainable approach to land use, prioritizing the preservation of natural resources, promoting smart growth principles, and fostering a diverse mix of residential, commercial, and industrial developments that reinforce the community's unique character and sense of place. We will promote innovative zoning and land management policies that protect open spaces, encourage infill development, and create vibrant, walkable neighborhoods that enhance the quality of life for all residents."

Housing: "The City of Black River Falls will provide diverse, high-quality housing options that are affordable, accessible, and sustainable, meeting the needs of residents across all income levels and life stages. We will prioritize the development and preservation of safe, energy-efficient housing that enhances neighborhood stability, supports long-term growth, and ensures that all residents have access to safe and affordable housing that meets their needs now and into the future."

Transportation: "The City of Black River Falls will develop a safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible transportation network that accommodates all modes of transportation, including vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit. We will integrate transportation planning with land use and economic development, ensuring that our infrastructure supports the mobility needs of residents, businesses, and visitors while enhancing access to regional markets and promoting sustainable practices."

Economic Development: "The City of Black River Falls will foster a vibrant, resilient economy by attracting and retaining businesses that diversify the local economy, create high-quality jobs, and expand the tax base. We will leverage our strategic location, natural resources, and cultural assets to promote tourism, entrepreneurship, and sustainable economic growth while enhancing the quality of life for residents and positioning the City as a regional hub for commerce and innovation."

Utilities and Community Facilities: "The City of Black River Falls will ensure the provision of high-quality, reliable utilities and community facilities that meet the needs of a growing population while protecting the environment. We will invest in infrastructure improvements, including water, sewer, stormwater management, and energy systems, that support sustainable growth and foster resilience against future challenges. Our public facilities, including parks, libraries, and emergency services, will be accessible, well-maintained, and responsive to the community's evolving needs."

Intergovernmental Cooperation: "The City of Black River Falls will actively engage in collaborative partnerships with neighboring municipalities, Jackson County, and state and federal agencies to pursue mutually beneficial initiatives. We will seek opportunities to share resources, align development efforts, and address regional challenges in a cooperative and transparent manner. Our goal is to ensure that the City remains a key stakeholder in shaping the future of the region through strong intergovernmental relationships."

Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources: "The City of Black River Falls will preserve and protect its rich agricultural heritage, natural landscapes, and cultural resources, recognizing their critical role in maintaining the City's character and environmental health. We will promote sustainable practices in agriculture, forestry, and resource management, ensuring the conservation of sensitive ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and water resources. At the same time, we will celebrate and protect the City's cultural and historic assets, promoting them as key drivers of tourism and community identity."