

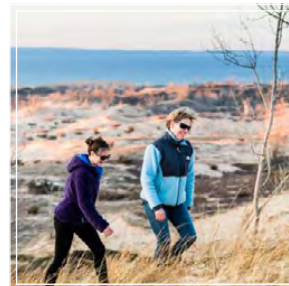
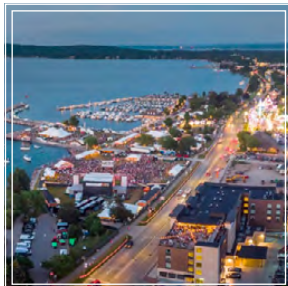


TRAVERSE CITY

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

MICHIGAN, USA

MAY 2025





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This Strategic Planning process was designed to identify focus areas and actions that are important to the community over the next five years.

Stakeholder engagement was a priority element, and the desire was to gather extensive input in an open and transparent manner. The engagement work has included stakeholder interviews, two community surveys, a two-day Think-Tank, focus group sessions, community visioning sessions and updates, and a strategic round-table work session. There have been regular community updates via e-newsletters, in-person sessions and presentations at Commission meetings.

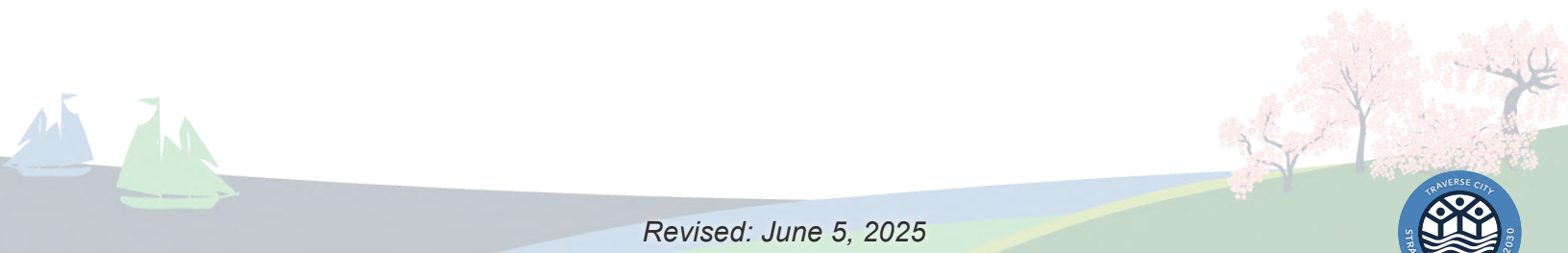
The findings from this planning process can be used to help inform future priorities for the City and the Commission. Over the coming years, this will help shape City goals and objectives and will help guide new investments and planning decisions.

These reports and the associated data analysis are available on the project portal:

lab2.future-iq.com/traverse-city-strategic-action-plan/

REPORT PREPARED BY:

future→iQ®
Create Future Intelligence®



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This planning work has identified a range of existing and emerging issues that are important to the community and has highlighted areas where the community would like to see new or additional attention. Some of these areas have been previously identified in Commission goals and objectives, and some are new priorities. Some highlights include:



STRONG DESIRE TO PROACTIVELY MANAGE URBAN DESIGN AND STRENGTHEN PLACE-MAKING

Throughout the planning process, there has been considerable interest and support in taking a much more intentional approach to guiding urban design, including corridor developments and establishing stronger guidelines to protect and enhance the charm of the community.



DEEP INTEREST IN CONTINUING TO DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMY AND REDUCE RELIANCE ON TOURISM

There is strong support to continue to diversify the economy, with particular interest in building the manufacturing sector to provide more year-round well-paid jobs. The current manufacturing resurgence in the country offers an opportunity to attract some new investments to the city and region.



CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Traverse City has a long history of commitment to environmental sustainability. This commitment continues, with support for the idea of broader County-wide sustainability planning and applying best practice solutions to reduce and mitigate climate impacts.



EMERGING HIGH PRIORITY ISSUE AROUND AVAILABILITY OF CHILD CARE

The availability of childcare has been flagged as one of the most important and urgent current issues. This is an area where people would like to see action taken to address, and it is seen as a constraint for young families.



NEED TO CREATIVELY AND AGGRESSIVELY TACKLE THE HOUSING ISSUE

The issue of availability and affordability of housing has been repeatedly raised as a concern, and how it is pricing locals and families out of the community. There is also concern about losing the year-round population from the core neighborhoods, and people support creative ways to bring this back to year-round residential areas. Housing was also seen as an impediment to attracting and retaining people in the local workforce.



EMERGING INTEREST IN DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM APPROACH

There is growing discomfort with some residents about the potential negative impacts of tourism and over-tourism. Taking a sustainable tourism approach was seen as a way to help manage destination impacts, and move away from more destination marketing.



Community engagement was a central theme to the planning process. The aim was to gather wide and deep community input, to help shape and prioritize key actions to include in the Strategic Action Plan.

1.0 | INTRODUCTION

In October 2024, the City of Traverse City embarked on a strategic planning process to deliver a 5-year Strategic Action Plan.

Key to this process was the desire for extensive community and stakeholder engagement and input. This engagement was very successful with over 1,500 individuals participating in the Traverse City Strategic Action Plan over the seven months process. This engagement ascertained where Traverse City is and where it could evolve by 2035.

The strategic planning community engagement process began in October 2024 and ended in May 2025, with the production of this final Traverse City Strategic Action Plan. This report represents the analysis of the engagement outcomes and outlines how the accumulated data has informed the identification of a preferred future and key strategic action areas. All information pertaining to the Traverse City Strategic Action Plan project can be viewed on the unique project portal at lab2.future-iq.com/traverse-city-strategic-action-plan/.



1.1 | OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAVERSE CITY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN PROCESS

One of the overarching principles in the planning process was to create a community-driven process, where the community ideas and thoughts could be drawn into identifying a vision and future strategic direction.

The objective of the strategic planning process is to build on the current success and incorporate new actions to maintain this success over the next 5 years.

This planning process has had a specific and deliberate focus on community engagement. The intention was to provide residents and city staff with numerous opportunities to contribute to the creation of the plan and help identify and prioritize key strategic actions. Some of the specific steps through the planning process were:



Understanding key drivers that are shaping the future of Traverse City. This included examining emerging trends, developments and shifts in societal expectations and desires.



Exploring different plausible future scenarios and examining their implications for the future. This allowed residents to consider what represented their preferred future, and to gather insight into the appetite for change.



Formulating key strategic themes, which were presented as Strategic Pillars. These represent the broad focus areas that the community identified as important in shaping the future direction of the community.



Identification and prioritization of a range of strategic actions that support the Strategic Pillars. This was intended to identify new actions or priority areas, that the community judged as having the greatest impact on shaping the preferred future.



Future Insights

- The City of Traverse City leadership team recognized the importance of strong community engagement with residents, staff and other partner organizations. Over the seven-month planning cycle, people were offered numerous opportunities to contribute ideas and help shape the actions. This makes the plan stronger, and more reflective of the community aspirations and priorities.
- Traverse City is at the center of an important and growing region. It is also the center of a high visitation tourism economy, which brings additional dynamics and stresses to local communities and infrastructure. Considering the future trajectory of the community was an important part of this planning work.



The focus of the Traverse City Strategic Action Plan has been on in-depth community and stakeholder engagement that focuses on the future of Traverse City, looking out to 2035.

2.0 | HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report lays out the findings from each key step in the Strategic Action Planning process. The process moved from a background analysis and exploration, through to identifying key priorities for the future of Traverse City. This work represents robust ‘future thinking’ regarding where stakeholders and community members considered possible future directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions for Traverse City. The process then drilled down deeper into what people saw as the optimal or preferred future. This understanding helped lay the groundwork for illustrating how the preferred future can be reached. The preferred future identified through this process presents a compelling and enticing vision for how Traverse City could evolve looking out to 2035. However, a vision needs actions, and this report provides a summary of the key focus areas and actions identified by the community.

Steps in the Process

Introduction, Timeline, Setting the Context & Objectives

Community Engagement

Creating Plausible Future Scenarios and Identification of a Preferred Future

Determining the Strategic Pillars & Key Actions

Creating a Roadmap to the Future

Sections of the Report

Introduction
(Sections 1 & 2)

Community Engagement Methodology
& Outcomes (Section 3)

Future Strategic Direction
(Section 4)

Strategic Action Pillars Framework
(Sections 5 - 6)

Prioritization of Actions & Next Steps
(Sections 7 - 9)



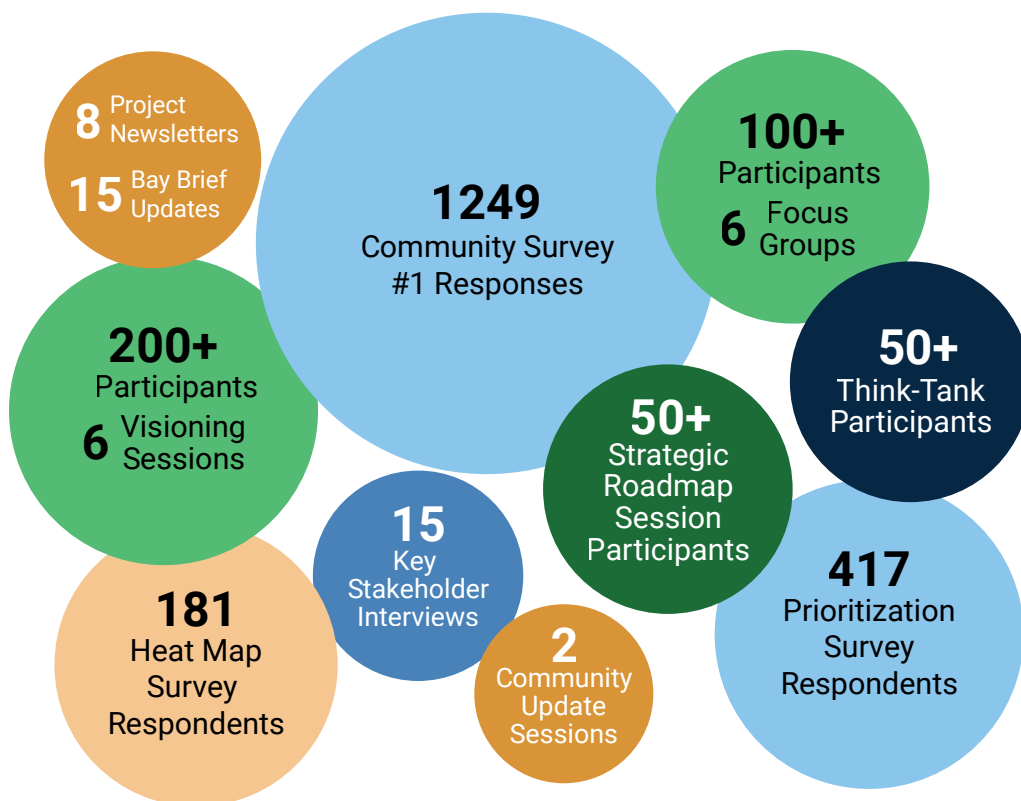
3.0 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY & OUTCOMES

The Traverse City Strategic Action Plan has been built on extensive community and stakeholder input. This engagement was an integral and central design feature of the planning process.

The engagement and data-driven methodology progressively focused the discussion on emerging key themes and stakeholder aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive at a 'point of consensus' that represented the shared vision for the future, and a comprehensive strategic plan – with actions - that propels the region towards that preferred future.

A key feature of the engagement and planning process was the amount of participation at key engagement sessions. These engagement opportunities were also supported by a robust communication effort, with a dedicated project website portal, regular e-newsletters and socials media posts.

The Traverse City Strategic Action Plan involved a wide, deep, and transparent engagement process with over 1,500 people providing high quality input.



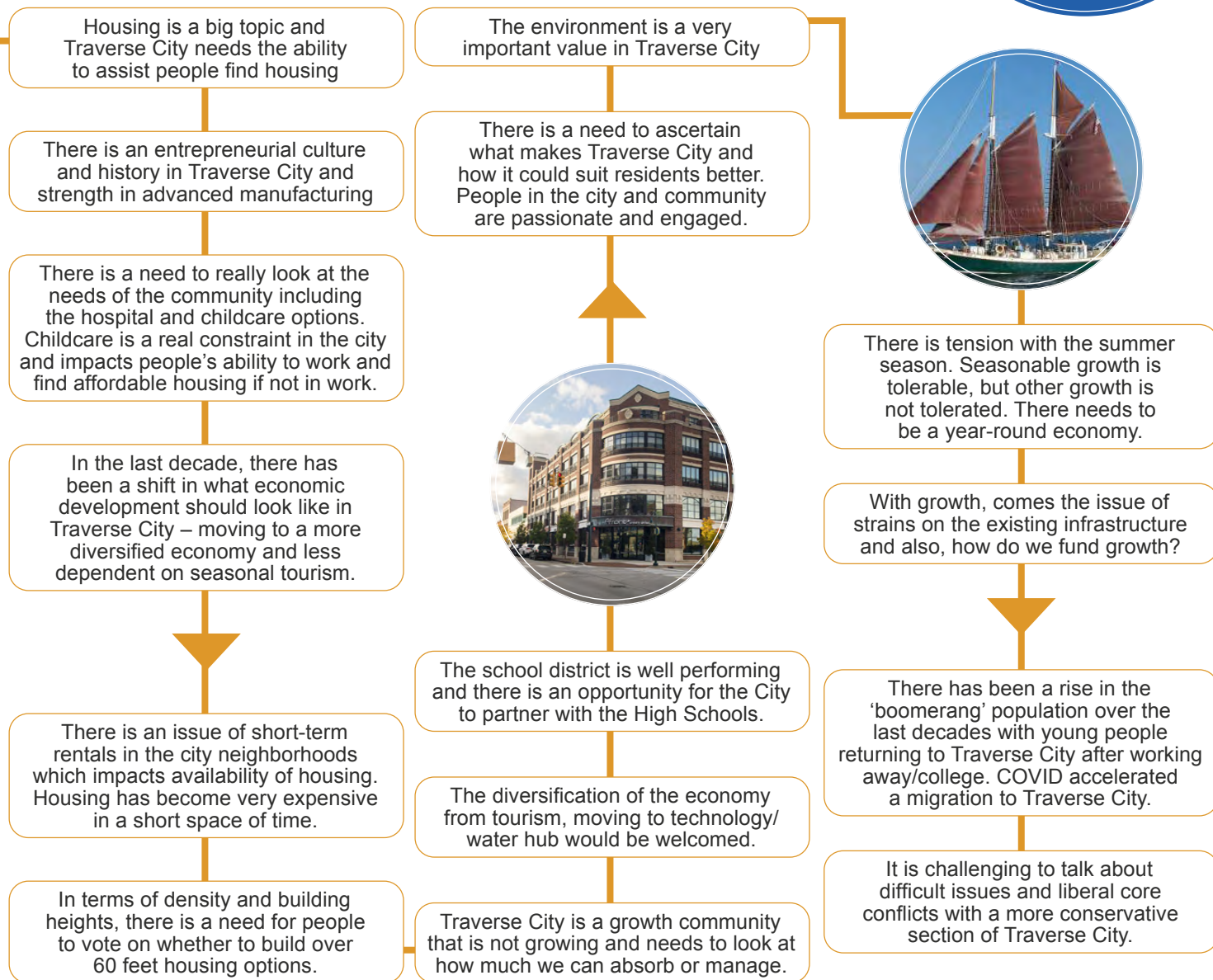
Data Insights

- In total, over 1,500 people had input into this planning process. This included significant resident input, in both virtual surveys and in-person sessions. Overall, people appeared to really appreciate the opportunity and generously provided their insights and perspectives.
- People were able to offer input in a variety of ways, including online surveys, workshops, Think-Tank sessions and focus groups. This was complemented by more informal sessions with community visioning sessions with residents, interviews with organizational and business stakeholders, and presentations at service groups.

3.1 | INITIAL SITUATIONAL SCAN – INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS

In May and June 2024, the project team held a range of interviews and discussions with City of Traverse City Staff and other local and regional organizations. These discussions explored issues that helped frame the engagement process starting with community and stakeholders.

These interviews and discussions were very valuable in providing an initial context to the challenges and opportunities that Traverse City faces, prior to the community engagement.



Key Insights

- The Traverse City area is a community that is rapidly changing and growing. This has implications across many dimensions such as social fabric, infrastructure and economy. There is a sense that the community is at a cross roads on a range of important issues.
- Across the region and City there are many effective organizations, with very capable leadership. These leaders are very mindful of the issues and challenges and are seeking solutions that suit the unique character of Traverse City.



3.2 | TRAVERSE CITY FUTURE THINK-TANK

Approximately 50 people attended the Future Think-Tank, held at the Governmental Center, Traverse City over 2 days to work on four plausible futures for Traverse City, looking out to 2030.

A key part of the engagement methodology was the Think-Tank held in early October. This was the first significant stakeholder engagement event and kicked off the discussion about the future direction of the community.

To identify the preferred future of Traverse City, looking out to 2035, stakeholders and community members participated in the two-day scenario-planning future Think-Tank. The six-hour Traverse City scenario-based Think-Tank event was conducted over two days on October 8 and 9, 2024. Approximately 50 people attended including key business, education, government, non-profit stakeholders, and community members.

Traverse City participants worked through the scenario planning process to produce 4 plausible futures for Traverse City, looking out to 2035. These scenarios became a 'testing ground' for future stakeholder input in the survey and focus groups.

More information on the content and outcomes from the Future Think-Tank can be found in Section 4 of this Strategic Action Plan and also in the Traverse City Future Think-Tank report that was released in December 2024 and can be viewed at lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Traverse-City-Think-Tank-Report.pdf.



Key Insights

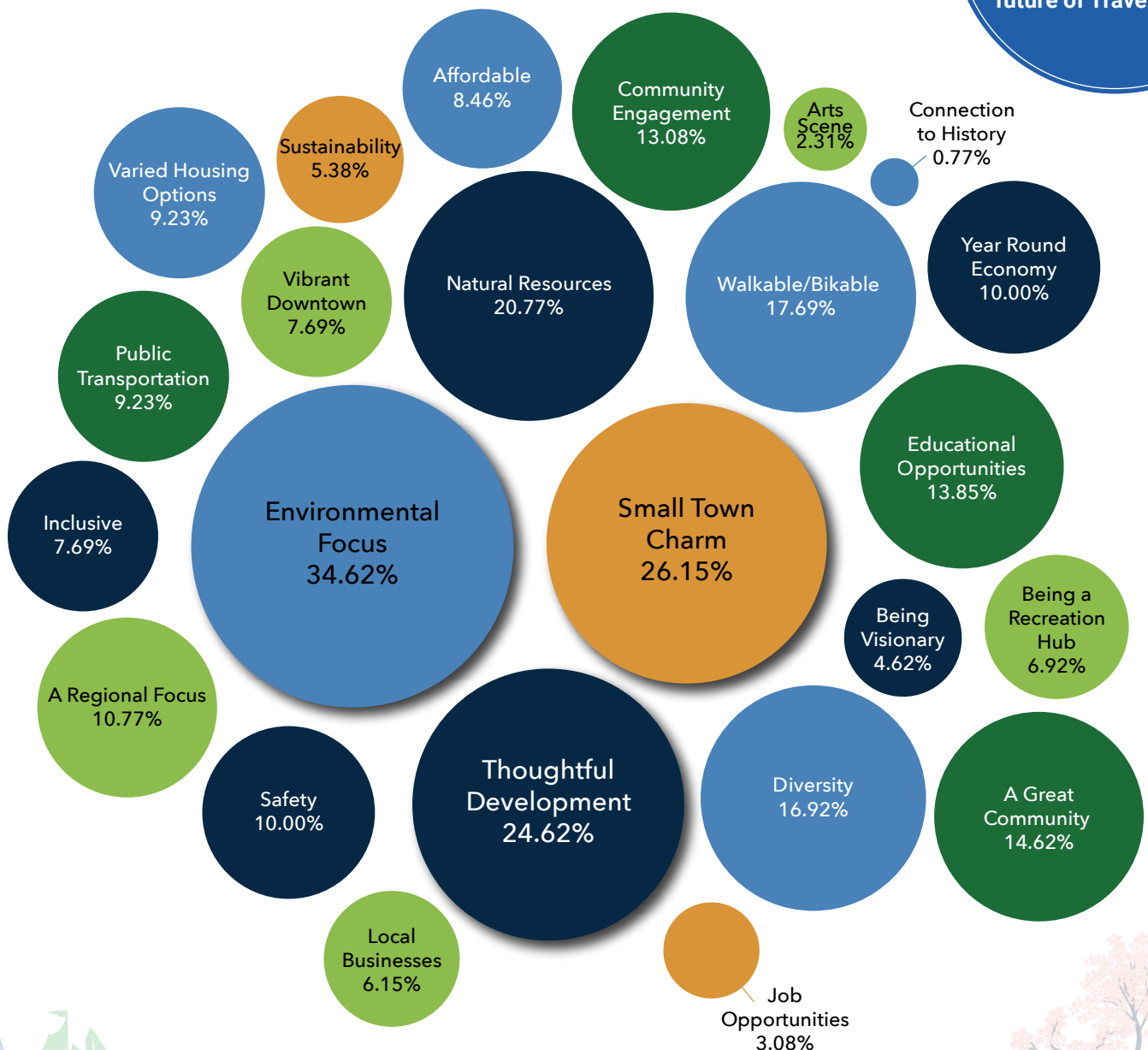
- The Think-Tank process highlighted several key future splitting themes. One of these was around how development is managed and guided. There was a recognition that the intensity of development in Traverse City is reshaping the character of the community, and there is potential to more intentionally and proactively guide urban design.
- The demographic makeup of the community was discussed. It was identified that there are some encouraging signs of new younger families moving into the city, but this is also having impacts on housing prices as people with more income or resources move in from more expensive urban locations. Maintaining a healthy demographic was seen as important, and there was appetite for finding ways to support more year-round residents and not lose vital family housing to seasonal rental markets.
- The natural environment was a common point of discussion, and residents are very interested in environmental sustainability. They are also very concerned about potential impacts of climate change on the natural landscape, and also how it might drive more people to move to locations like Traverse City.

Following on from the Traverse City Future Think-Tank, six Community Visioning sessions were held between November 11 and 14, 2024 with approximately 200 participants.

These workshops were highly interactive 60-minute sessions discussing the preferred future generated from the Traverse City Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank and issues facing the future of the city. Participants discussed their reactions to the scenarios and completed a short survey that explored their view about desirable values and attributes of Traverse City.

The well attended Community Visioning sessions enabled community members to discuss the Think-Tank and issues facing the future of Traverse City.

'WHAT VALUES AND ATTRIBUTES SHOULD TRAVERSE CITY RETAIN OR DEVELOP?'



The Traverse City Strategic Action Plan Community Survey ran from January through February 2025. The survey received 1,249 responses. With a mix of ranking questions and open-ended questions, this survey intended to ascertain the community and stakeholders' views on the following topics:

- Satisfaction with living in Traverse City
- Current community dynamics within Traverse City
- Traverse City vision and values
- Traverse City's current direction and speed of change
- Development trajectory and community direction of Traverse City

The results from the Community Survey can be viewed on the project portal at lab2.future-iq.com/traverse-city-strategic-action-plan/survey1/dv/.

Respondents were asked 24 questions which can be viewed in the Community Survey results on the project portal. These results can be filtered and analyzed in terms of age groups, ethnicity, how long people have lived in Traverse City and where people live in Traverse City. The full range of responses can be viewed at lab2.future-iq.com/traverse-city-strategic-action-plan/survey1/dv/.

'WHAT CHANGES MOST CONCERN YOU ABOUT TRAVERSE CITY'S FUTURE?'

Below are the **top 15 key sentiments**, their **frequency** of mentions, and a brief **narrative**.



3.4.1 | ANALYSIS OF OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES BY AGE GROUP

The open-ended responses were analyzed to explore sentiments and themes. There are notable differences by age groups. The 60+ year age group respondents represented just over half the total responses, which is a slight over-representation in the survey sample. The under 39 year age group is under-represented in the survey sample.

Age Group	Key Sentiments	Key Difference	# Survey Respondents
19-29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated calls for more affordable housing and protection of natural spaces. Concerns about climate change, pollution, and loss of green areas. Emphasis on creating more job opportunities beyond tourism/service sectors. 	This group shows the strongest emphasis on environmental protection and economic opportunity, with progressive outlooks on growth.	34 (3%)
30-39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noted concerns about development near water, pollution, and maintaining character. Strong support for childcare access, family-oriented amenities, and managing short-term rentals. Desire for balanced growth that keeps Traverse City livable for families. 	The most family-focused age group , advocating for policies that support children, affordable living, and safe neighborhoods.	158 (13%)
40-49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns around neighborhood overdevelopment and rising costs. Continued emphasis on housing availability and preserving the city's appeal. Advocacy for master planning and investment in long-term infrastructure. 	Most aligned with regional planning , community structure, and managing sprawl effectively.	207 (17%)
50-59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Express worry over increased cost of living and potential cultural shifts. Desire to preserve greenspace and reduce traffic. Mixed sentiments on development: support for infrastructure but concern over losing local feel. 	This group shows the highest concern about affordability and tourism growth disrupting long-time residents.	203 (16%)
60-69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong emphasis on controlling short-term rentals and protecting affordability. Preference for intentional development that aligns with Traverse City's values. Concerns about infrastructure and housing stability. 	Balanced view of growth, but with an increasing focus on stabilization rather than expansion .	294 (24%)
70-79	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on community character, protecting natural beauty, and avoiding crowding. Call for better infrastructure maintenance and walkability. Concerned about losing community identity to external development pressures. 	This group is more conservative toward development , preferring to reinforce what exists over expanding.	293 (24%)
80+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want to preserve Traverse City "as it is" with minimal change. Support for senior services, healthcare, and easy access amenities. Worry about losing sense of community due to pace of change. 	Most resistant to change , prioritizing comfort, preservation, and protection of long-held values.	56 (4%)



3.5 | STRATEGIC ROUND-TABLE AND FOCUS GROUPS

The 6 Focus Group sessions would inform the final six Strategic Pillars for this Strategic Action Plan.

Following on from the Community Visioning Sessions, a Strategic Round-Table and six Focus Groups were held during January and February 2025, to explore in greater detail the topics that had been generated to date in the process.

Six topics were identified as being critical to the future of Traverse City. Each topic was studied in a 90-minute session with experts and interested parties participating. The topics would form the basis of the Strategic Action Pillars, which are outlined in Section 6.

The topics were identified as:

- Proactively manage urban design
- Strengthen place-making and neighborhood character
- Fostering a regional collaborative approach
- Building economic systems and amenities
- Supporting environmental sustainability
- Building thriving year-round economy



Key Insights

- The Focus Group sessions helped identify key issues, objectives and actions under each of the Strategic Pillars. The discussions were very productive and surfaced actionable ideas and highlight points of tension about the future direction of the community.
- Concerns about the pace and type of development was a reoccurring theme. There is a concern the community is losing its natural small-town charm, and that over-tourism could further degrade the resident experience of living in the community. This was balanced by a very strong affinity and affection people have for the community.
- The discussions were solution based and explored residents ideas about how to achieve the right balance and enhance the community.

4.1 | SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE FOR TRAVERSE CITY – FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION

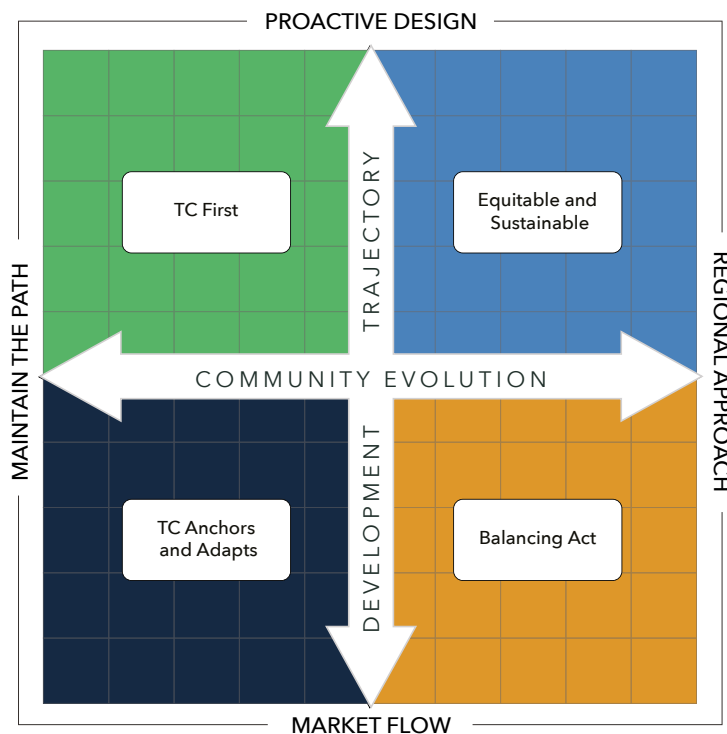
The scenarios developed during the scenario planning process at the Think Tank were used as a framework to discuss future possible outcomes and implications for strategies for the City of Traverse City.

The scenario framework created four different future scenarios, with varying degrees of change and trajectory. The scenarios were created using the scenario matrix framework, which was built around the two macro themes of Community Evolution and Development Trajectory. This framework was used throughout the community engagement work and survey to identify a preferred future and help inform the strategic action plan. For more details on the Traverse City Strategic Action Think-Tank, please refer to the published in-depth [Think-Tank Report](#).

The scenario development process at the Think-Tank allowed community members to examine the implications and consequences of different plausible future directions for Traverse City, looking out to 2035.

Proactive urban design shapes the future. There is investment in expanding business diversity and innovation capability, to build a year-round economy. The focus is on regional collaboration and integration, that helps manage resources, utilities, and climate adaptation.

The City focuses on local and internal issues. The community fabric is allowed to naturally change and evolve as the population demographics and ownership patterns shift, and as the tourism and visitation economy grows.



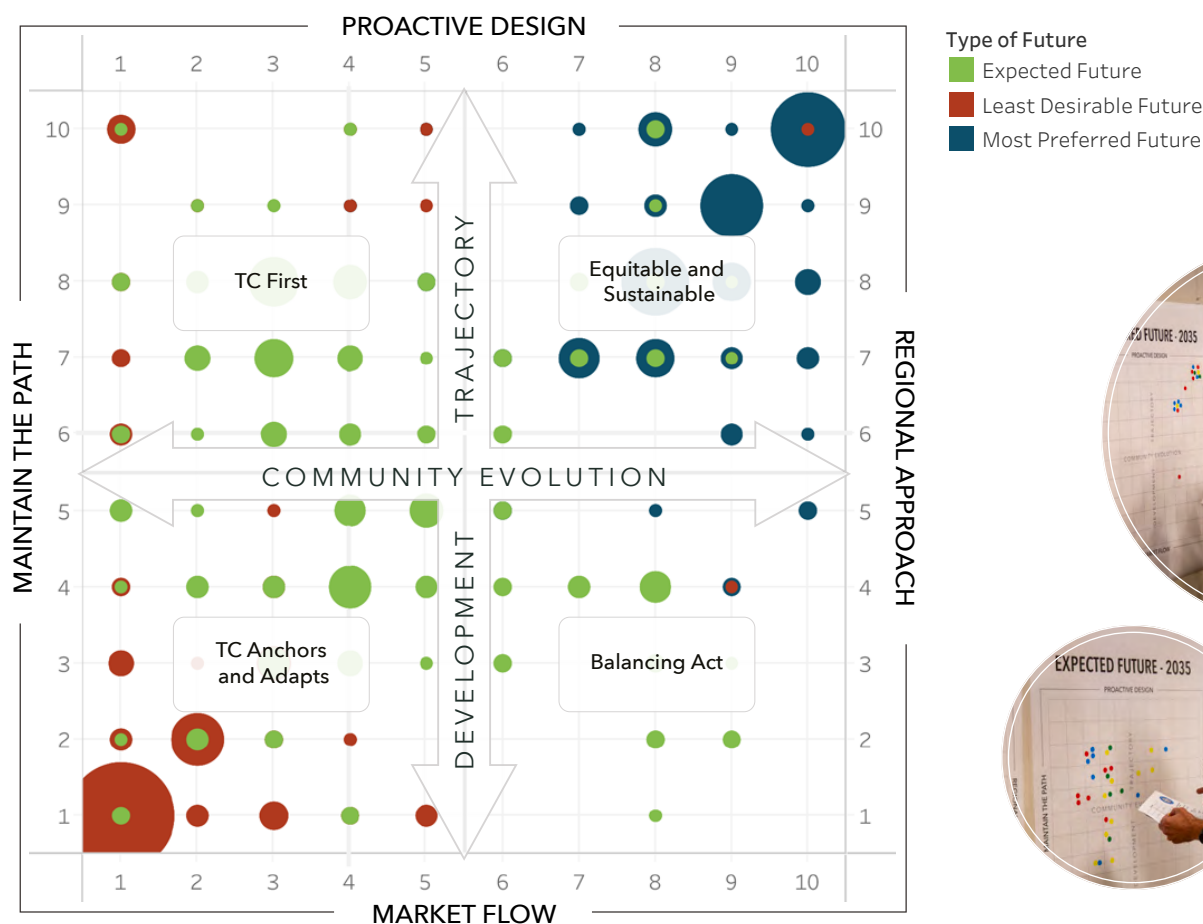
The community intentionally invests in designing and building the socio-economic systems and amenities to create a 'complete community'. A strong regional leadership approach helps amplify the City influence and heft.

Development patterns and housing availability is primarily driven by emerging market needs and forces. City planning and infrastructure investment responds as the needs arise, including making adaptations and upgrades as climate impacts occur.

4.2 | IDENTIFYING AND VALIDATING THE PREFERRED FUTURE

During the Traverse City Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank, four different future scenarios were created. The scenarios were created using the scenario matrix framework, which was built around the two macro themes of Community Evolution and Development Trajectory. An in-depth scenario planning process over two days enabled the development of four potential future scenarios. For more details on the Traverse City Strategic Action Think-Tank, please refer to the published in-depth [Think-Tank Report](#).

The scenario development process at the Think-Tank allowed community members to examine the implications and consequences of different plausible future directions for Traverse City against a backdrop of Macro Trends and the key drivers that are impacting Traverse City now and looking out to 2035.



Key Insights

- Throughout the process community members repeatedly identified the upper right quadrant as the preferred future. In fact, most responses are in the extreme upper right, which reflects a high appetite for change and even a sense of urgency.
- This result has been validated in multiple ways throughout the engagement to ensure it is reflective of the community aspirations.
- The preferred future represents the most change, and a significant investment in intentionally planning and designing the future. It also represents a changing role for City leadership, as there is a greater emphasis on building regional collaboration.



4.3 | THE PREFERRED FUTURE FOR TRAVERSE CITY IN 2035 – ‘EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE’

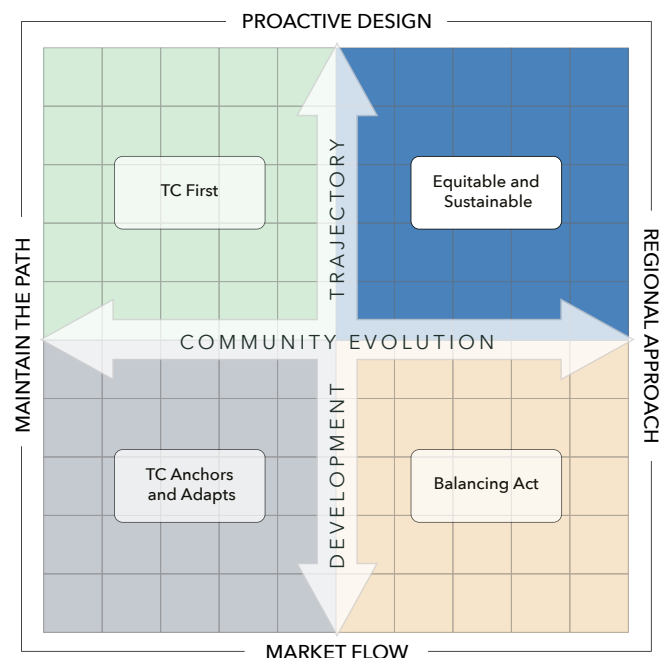
The preferred future, generated from the work carried out in the Future Think-Tank and following sessions, was Scenario B – Equitable and Sustainable.

This future is one where proactive urban design shapes the future. There is investment in expanding business diversity and innovation capability, to build a year-round economy. The focus is on regional collaboration and integration that helps manage resources, utilities, and climate mitigation and adaptation. The community intentionally invests in designing and building the socioeconomic systems and amenities to create a ‘complete community’. A strong regional leadership approach helps amplify the City influence and heft.

The preferred future was used to help define the strategic plan framework, which is designed to focus on the building blocks to make that future a reality.

SCENARIO SNAPSHOT | FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

- The region grows as communities come together to strategize and increase the regional population.
- Climate change, housing, transportation, and other issues are dealt with regionally.
- The City of Traverse City leads a regional collaborative effort to maintain influence statewide.
- All voices are brought to the table to help make decisions and influence outcomes.
- The transition to a year-round economy strengthens regional economic resilience.

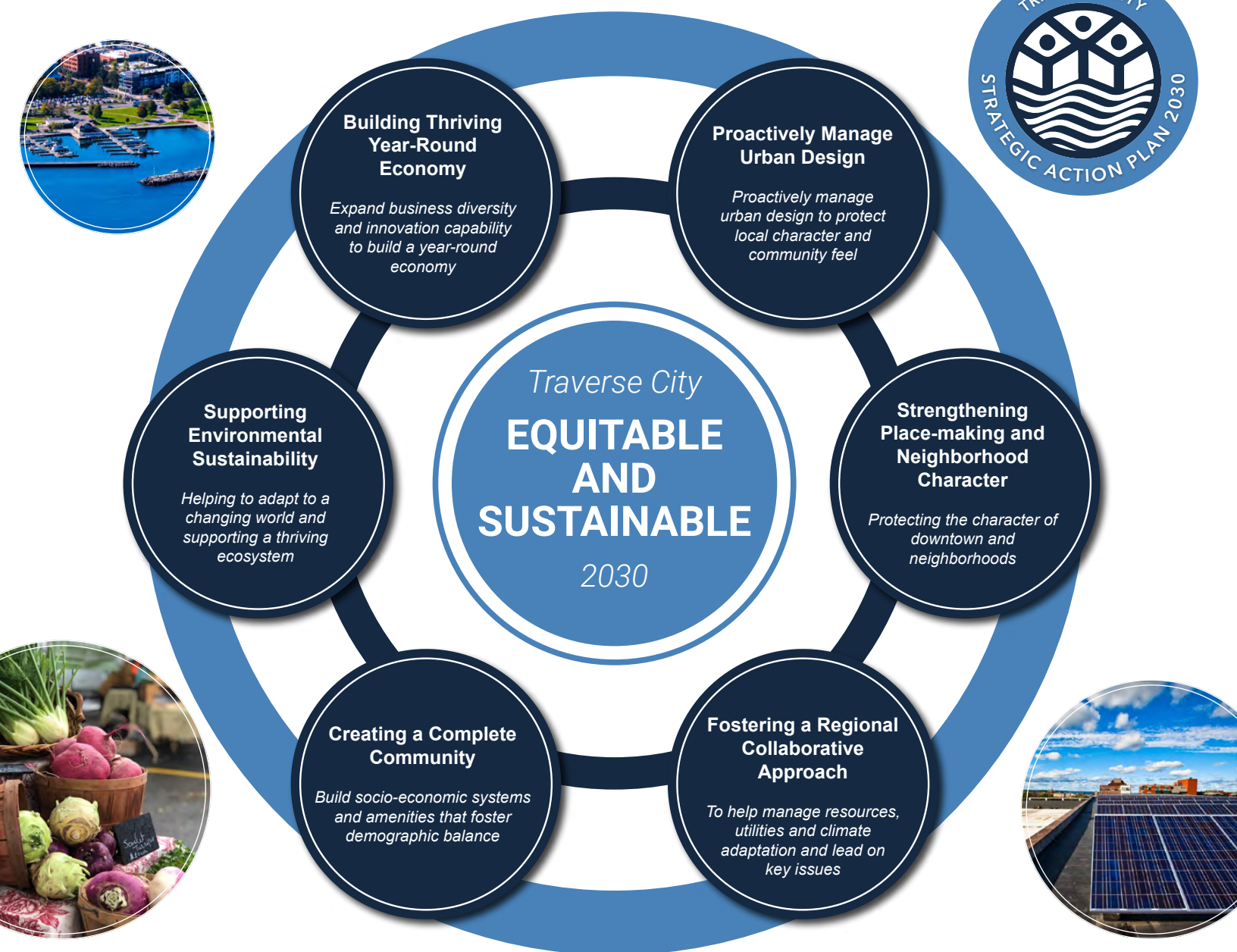


5.0 | STRATEGIC PILLARS FRAMEWORK

The preferred future was used to help define the strategic plan framework, which is designed to focus on the key strategic areas that will make that future a reality. These key focus areas are called the Strategic Pillars.

Each of the Strategic Pillars are supported by a series of key actions that can be achieved in the short to medium term and will produce long term results. They are intended to produce systemic and catalytic shifts that will drive the future economic growth, community reputation and character of Traverse City. These objectives have been designed to build the future pathway to the preferred future. The time-frame for the Strategic Pillars and Actions was 2030. This creates five years of actions, that support the longer 2035 vision established in the Think-Tank process.

The Strategic Pillars are the big focus areas identified through the stakeholder engagement work. Traverse City community members, City staff and additional stakeholders helped to shape these focus areas and their supporting objectives.



Pillar called 'Creating a Complete Community' was renamed following feedback at the Future Summit in May 2025.



5.1 | PROACTIVELY MANAGE URBAN DESIGN

High Level Objective: Proactively manage urban design to protect local character and community feel.

5.1.1 | IMPORTANCE OF PROACTIVELY MANAGING URBAN DESIGN

Throughout the engagement process, the importance of this topic was highlighted through the Community Survey, Leadership interviews, the Think-Tank and Focus Groups. In the Community Survey, almost 74% of respondents felt that to ‘Proactively manage urban design to protect local character and feel’ was extremely important to help shape the future development of Traverse City. Furthermore, Community Survey respondents were overwhelmingly in support of the focus being on ‘Proactively guiding and managing development and urban design.’ There is significant innovation occurring in urban design, where cities are looking at creating more walkable environments that better connect people to nature and to each other. Traverse City appears to have the appetite to pilot or test some very innovative models.

The concept of proactively managing urban design is intriguing for a city the size of Traverse City. Residents expressed a strong desire to have design actively influence the streetscape and building developments in the future.



Future Insights

- Emerging trends in city and urban living, such as aging population and increasing work-from-home options, is changing the way people live and relate to their neighborhood spaces and local recreation spaces. There is an increasing social appetite for more connection, to avoid loneliness and isolation, and to enrich people’s social lives.
- Traverse City could reimagine some of the city spaces to create more gathering and connection ‘third places’.

5.1.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The key actions areas have been drawn from the focus group discussions, and aggregate ideas shared by the community in the surveys and workshops.

Action 1: Proactively design the future of key corridors

There was a strong interest in creating corridor plans for key areas such as 14th Street, East Eighth Street (east of Boardman Avenue), and South Garfield Avenue. These areas offer the opportunity to provide additional community experiences and smaller scale local commercial nodes, and to relieve some of the pressure on the downtown area. Residents highlighted the need to get the scale and building design right, to create the desired intimate experience.



Action 2: Create localized building design guidelines

There was a strong sentiment that establishing design guidelines could help preserve and enhance neighborhood character and reflect key historic design features. These guidelines could be developed on a neighborhood basis, in collaboration with residents. The approach is intended to help new buildings blend better into the overall neighborhood aesthetics.



Action 3: Explore people-centric street design

Many of the residents offered ideas about creating a more people-centric, and less car-centric street design approach. There is an opportunity to re-imagine 'Traverse City street design' that encourages more walking and biking options, and reduces the impact of noise and visual impact of vehicle traffic. This could also include topics such as examining street-tree selections, lane width, periodic closures and vehicle speeds.

Action 4: Intentionally create more community connection points

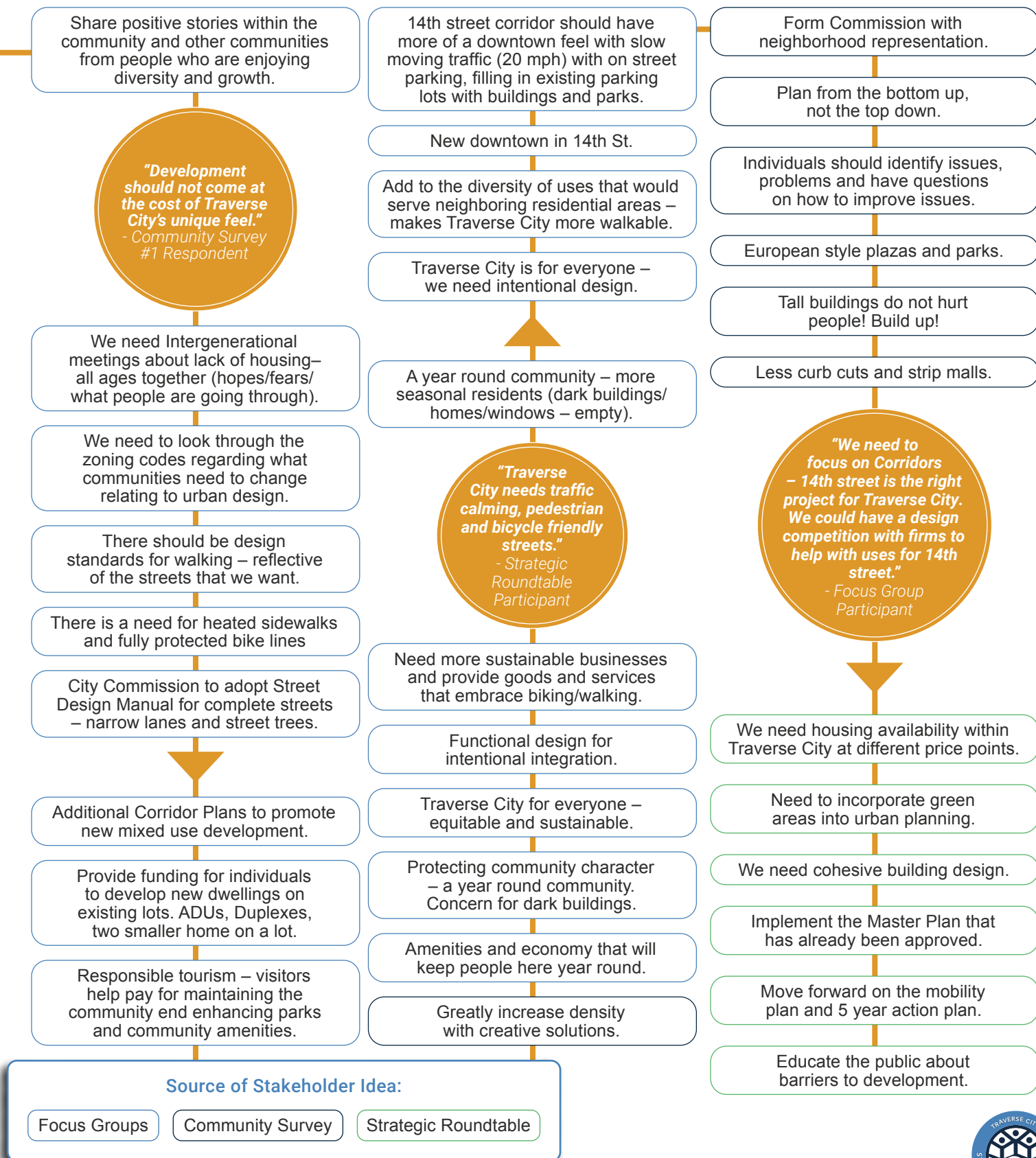
There has been considerable interest in the idea of designing more local community connection points, intentionally linked by trails and walkways. There could be small plaza areas, pocket parks and commercial nodes, that help foster the casual interactions of locals and could be used to host small occasional events.



Bold Idea: Create a unique Traverse City 'people-first design model'

The sentiment from residents was that this pillar is where bold thinking and innovation could be applied. Some people suggested flipping planning models 'on their head' and create a 'Traverse City model' where design of housing, roads and public spaces is focused primarily on people's experience and enjoyment. In discussion, there was considerable appetite for a more European style of urban design, that is focused on walkability and smaller scale neighborhood connection points. This idea was raised multiple time in different engagement steps. This is an idea that could be bold and transformational for residents, and offer a car-free option, at least for three seasons of the year.

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Equitable and Sustainable'.





Strengthening
Place-making
and
Neighborhood
Character

5.2 | STRENGTHENING PLACE-MAKING AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

High Level Objective: Protecting the character of downtown and neighborhoods.

5.2.1 | IMPORTANCE OF STRENGTHENING PLACE-MAKING AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Traverse City has a long history of investment in place-making, and pride in its character and history. There is resident desire to extend this work into the neighborhoods.

People in Traverse City are proud of their city and also of the downtown and their specific neighborhoods. This has been conveyed through all aspects of the engagement process. Currently there are 13 Neighborhood associations, albeit some are more active and engaged and influential than others. There is also zoning currently in place with guidelines for design. There are strategic leases for downtown businesses (i.e. retail store fronts, coffee shops, and food establishments) which will enhance the downtown appeal and attraction. The Community Survey respondents noted that improvements in the downtown area, including more walkability and public spaces would generate enthusiasm among residents and visitors. Furthermore, Community Survey respondents were overwhelmingly in support of a focus on 'Strengthening place-making and neighborhood character'. This was reiterated at every point during the engagement process with key ideas being generated, which feature in the 'Ideas from the Community' section of the report.



Future Insights

- Place-making can be a very powerful planning tool for cities to create the right scale and sense of intimacy. Activating community spaces with small festivals, public art and 'pop-up events' can create the sense of vibrancy and activity that can create destinations and connection points.
- Traverse City residents are proud of the sense of place, and the character of the iconic areas. There is a clear desire to protect and strengthen this character, and a fear that key parts of the community will become over-developed.



5.2.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The key actions areas have been drawn from the focus group discussions, and aggregate ideas shared by the community in the surveys and workshop.

Action 5: Bring an 'experience-based' approach to place-making efforts across the city

The character and the experience of various community spaces is very important to residents. This is reflected in a desire for intimate community scale and enhancing the 'small-town feel'. An intriguing approach would be to identify the desired charm and character people are seeking in specific community places, then explore how spaces, buildings, trees and art can help amplify the desired experience.

Action 6: Empower and elevate the role of the neighborhood associations

The neighborhoods are becoming well defined in Traverse City, and a number have functioning neighborhood associations. Elevating the support and role of these associations could help residents have a more direct role in shaping the character and evolution of their neighborhoods. Convening the associations together on a regular basis could help foster innovation and strengthen the relationship with the City.

Action 7: Intentionally create gathering and social spaces for locals

Attractive tourism destinations often face the challenge of residents feeling 'squeezed out' in high visitation periods. There is the potential to intentionally create community social and amenity spaces, that are orientated to locals rather than visitors. For example, areas around community spaces that are outside of the tourism hot spots (like library or schools) can be enhanced with dog parks, recreation areas and social spaces, that can offer a haven for locals in busy visitation periods.

Action 8: Enhance multi-modal connectivity between neighborhoods and community places

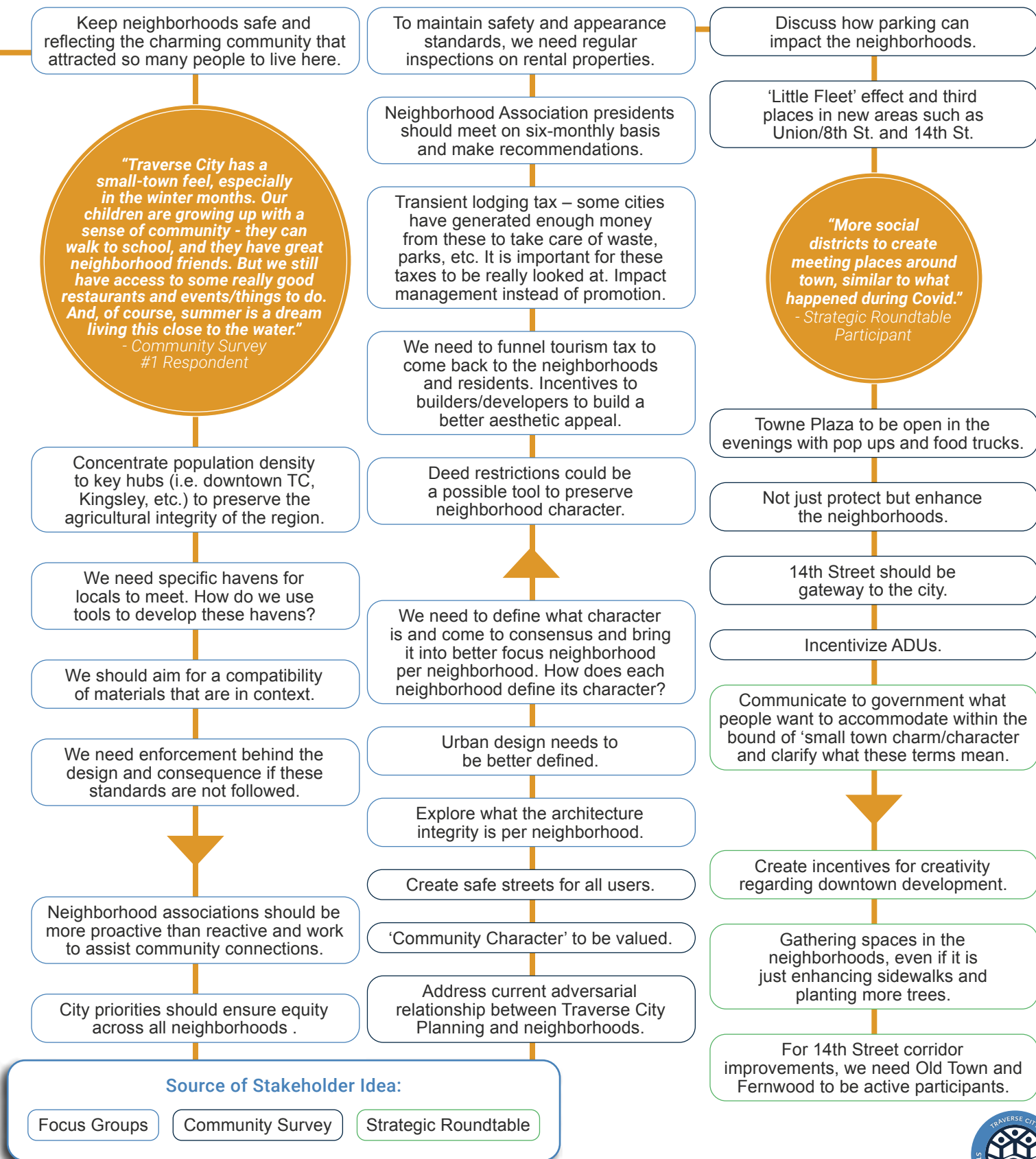
Tourism communities like Traverse City can experience an intensity of traffic and congestion that erodes the ease of living and livability of the local community. Enhancing the multi-modal connectivity, including walkable and bikeable options, could better connect the neighborhoods to community spaces and offer another way to reduce the dependence on cars, and navigate the traffic congestion.

Bold Idea: Build a fully connected city-wide trail network.

Develop and build a fully connected city-wide trail and bike network that allows residents to access key community destinations, and to connect neighborhoods together in a different way.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Equitable and Sustainable'.



5.3 | FOSTERING A REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Fostering a
Regional
Collaborative
Approach

High Level Objective: To help manage resources, utilities and climate adaptation and lead on key issues.

5.3.1 | IMPORTANCE OF FOSTERING A REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Throughout the engagement process, the importance of this topic was highlighted through the Community Survey, Leadership interviews, the Think-Tank and Focus Groups. In the Community Survey, almost 73% of respondents felt that to 'Foster a regional collaborative approach to help manage resources, utilities and climate adaption and lead on key issues' was extremely important to help shape the future development of Traverse City. It was also noted that there is a lot of work currently being carried out between Traverse City and regionally to foster and build this regional collaboration, including the 10 county regional planning of Networks Northwest, BATA, Traverse Connect, TART, MPT/TTIC (Leelanau Grand Traverse and Traverse City), Regional healthcare via Munson hospital, the Airport, TCAPS, MSH Water Quality, the Traverse Bay Intermediate School District and via the Grand Traverse County Funding levels. While Traverse City is doing well with current partnerships across the region, there was a perception that even more can be done, which could help accelerate progress on key issues.

A regional collaborative approach has been a key focus area throughout the engagement process. Community members are keen to see Traverse City take on a leadership role in helping convene groups to work together on the grand challenges.



Future Insights

- Greater region-wide collaboration will help provide better access to services and new efficiencies and quality in service delivery. When asked what changes in Traverse City would most excite residents, many respondents noted that stronger partnerships with surrounding communities to address housing and infrastructure are welcomed.
- Any of the biggest challenges in the region, such as housing and transportation, will require inter-government solutions, and public-private partnerships. Building these collaborative approaches will help spur new solutions and accelerate outcomes.

5.3.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The key actions areas have been drawn from the focus group discussions, and aggregate ideas shared by the community in the surveys and workshop.

Action 9: Map the current collaborations across the region

Build understanding of the current collaborations and relationships, and between sectors of the regional economy to explore gaps, opportunities and identify where success is occurring. Understanding the current successes in collaboration can help encourage institutions to continue to do the hard work of finding common ground, aligning plans and sharing resources.



Action 10: Convene organizations in the region to identify needs and solutions

Engage major institutions from across the wider region to identify the needs and resources required. This will involve more cooperative planning with a common vision between all regional jurisdictions with an initial focus on infrastructure, housing, connectivity, utilities and transportation. The current housing challenges and shortages is an ideal place to start - as this is an urgent and shared issue in the region.



Action 11: Explore the potential for shared Government services

Identify and deliver shared services and infrastructure, ultimately providing better value to residents across the region. The region is a mixture of governments, including cities, townships and municipalities. They all have services to deliver and key roles to play, however people are looking for increased coordination and efficiency of service delivery. An increased collaboration model offers a way to continue to explore ways to identify and deliver shared services, ultimately delivering better value to residents across the region.

Action 12: Create a leadership team to advocate for the region

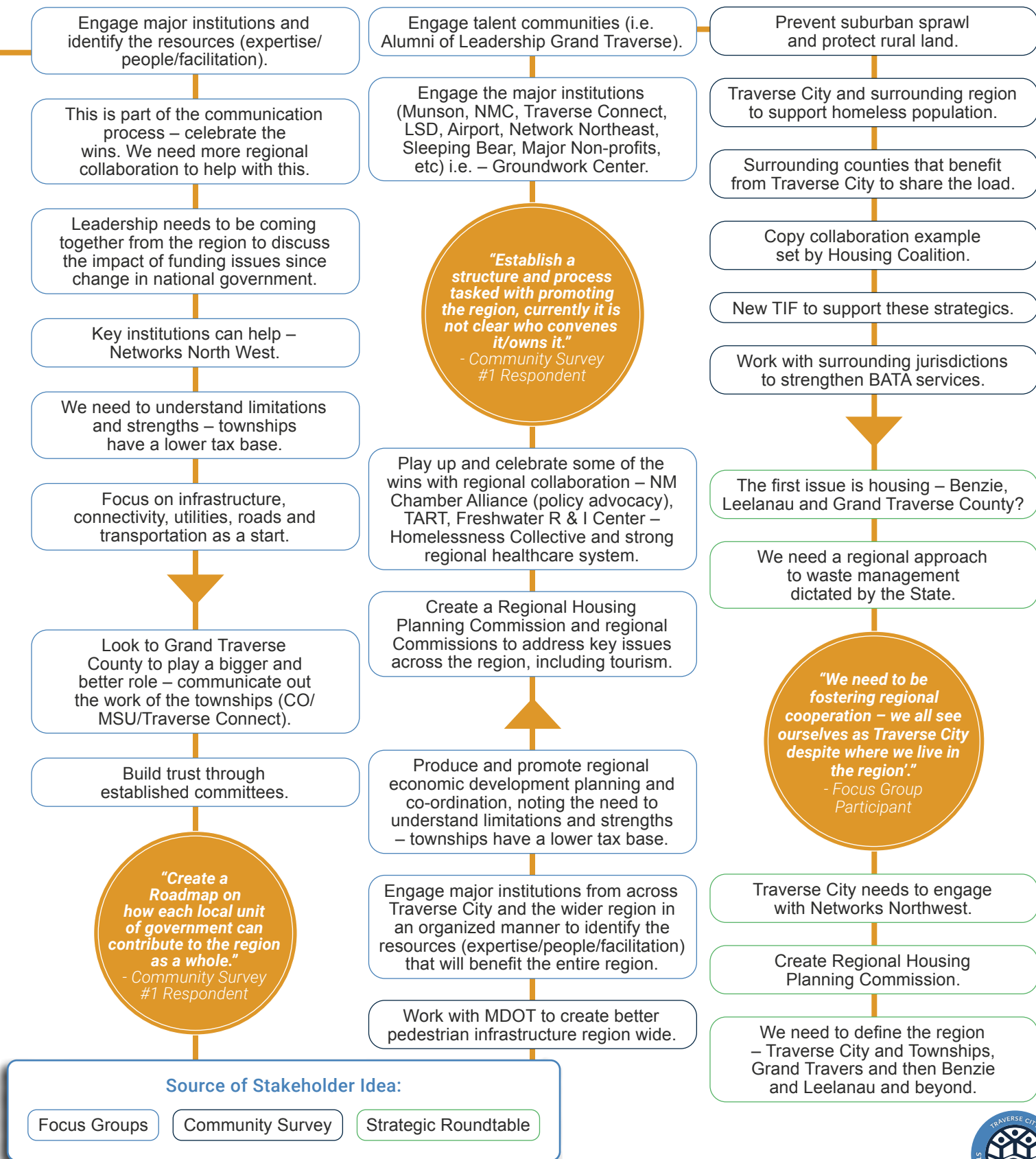
Draw together key leadership entities to advocate for the region at a State and Federal level. Create a Roadmap on how local government and parts of the region can contribute to the region as a whole. This leadership team should draw from a cross section of municipalities, County and key groups.



Bold Idea: Convene a leadership group to address the housing crisis.

Throughout the engagement, examples were repeatedly shared of where there are economic and service gaps because there are open jobs that can't be filled, including key positions in the healthcare and education sectors. A major contributing reason is there is not enough available housing. This is an important issue to address in a bold and urgent manner. The housing topic has been previously identified in Traverse City Commission Goals and Objectives, and remains a priority issue.

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Equitable and Sustainable'.



5.4 | CREATING A COMPLETE COMMUNITY

High Level Objective: Build socio-economic systems and amenities that foster demographic balance

5.4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A COMPLETE COMMUNITY

Traverse City is known for its diverse and progressive community. It is a place that people want to move to, remain living in, return to and visit. A high response rate from all engagement parts of the process discussed how much people love Traverse City and the individual neighborhoods that exist within Traverse City. Housing was the key issue that emerged during the process, regarding affordable housing and overall housing options. It was noted that surrounding townships are providing a lot of the new housing because they have more available land, and that the city is exploring ways to limit or balance short term rentals with the desire for full time residents. However, there is concern about the community becoming less appealing and affordable for young families, and residents were keen to find creative ways to build a balanced and vibrant demographic profile.

Many people are keen to retain a balanced community demographic. This will require addressing the housing affordability and availability issues.



Future Insights

- There is a desire to ensure that Traverse City has a diverse and attainable housing market, which is necessary for attracting and retaining a strong workforce as well as for young families and young professionals.
- Many members of the community have expressed that they would like to keep Traverse City as Traverse City. This would include ways to accommodate socially and culturally the various demographics that live in the city.
- As tourism is a key element in Traverse City, which bring visitation pressures, there is a need to find ways to maintain the quality of life for the Traverse City resident. Many people spoke about gathering spaces or havens for the community, that would help maintain the social fabric and community feel of the city.

The key actions areas have been drawn from the focus group discussions, and aggregate ideas shared by the community in the surveys and workshop.

Action 13: Encourage more full-time residents living in core neighborhoods

A key concern for residents was the 'loss' of family homes to short-term rental or seasonal residents, creating 'dark windows'. Residents are keen to see approaches that encourage more full-time residents, especially in the traditionally family home neighborhoods. This can bring vibrancy to the neighborhood, and help ensure the school enrollments stay at healthy levels.



Action 14: Host summits to showcase best practice solutions to socio-economic challenges

Across the country, numerous cities, counties and organizations are experimenting with new and novel approaches to tackling systemic issues such as housing affordability and availability, childcare, and homelessness. Best practice examples from this broader work should be showcased, to help spark innovation, creative local ideas and action.



Action 15: Promote Social Equity within Traverse City

As the demographics in the community change, there are new needs and issues. It is proposed to develop an action plan to more intentionally support the needs of underserved groups, including age-in-place communities.



Action 16: Develop a plan to boost childcare capacity in Traverse City

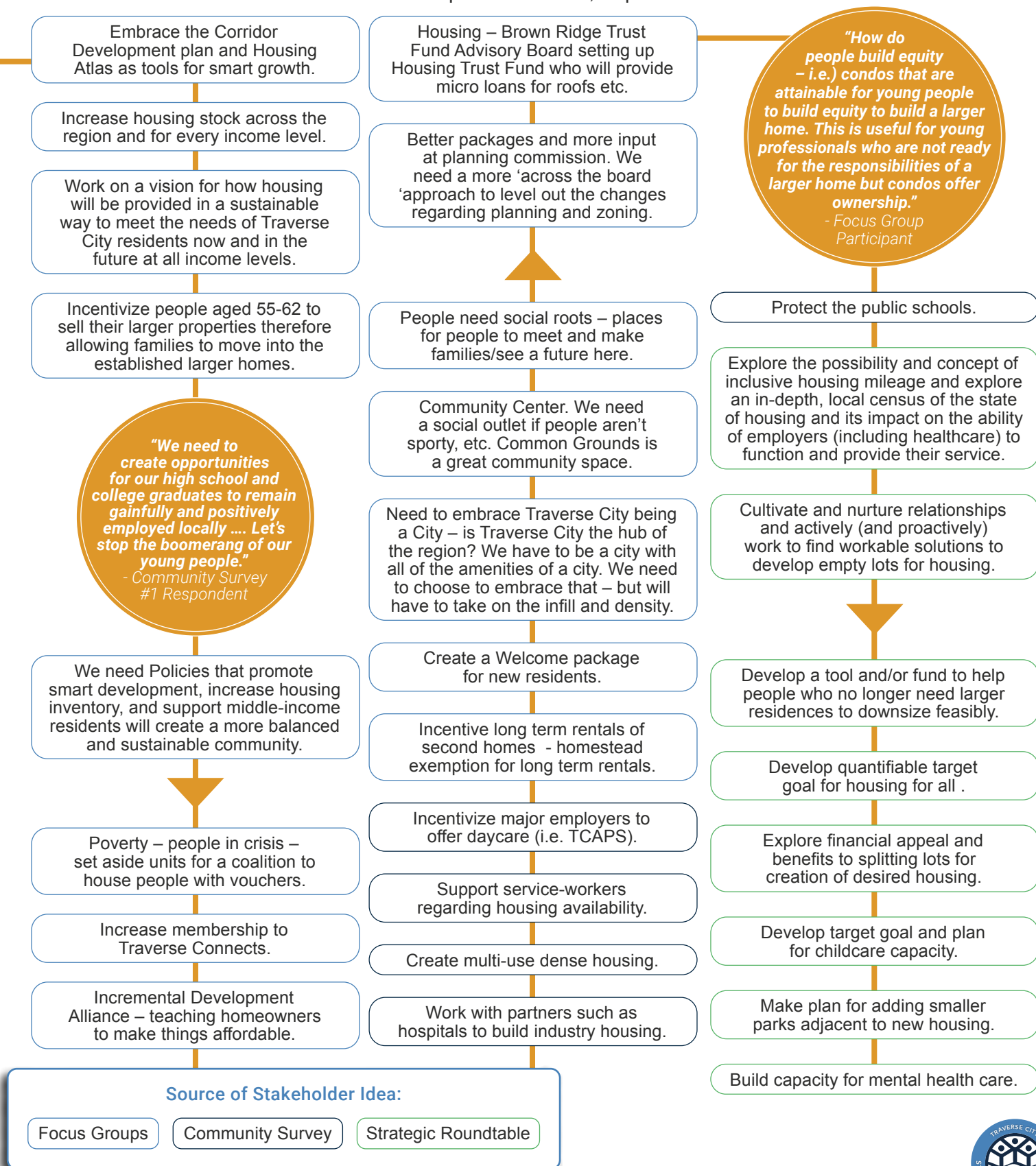
Develop a target goal and plan for childcare capacity in Traverse City, which would increase accessibility of childcare for young families who are in the workforce and help those who struggle to meet the cost of childcare. The lack of childcare was seen as a key constraint for a lot of working families, which in turn makes it challenging for young families to live in the community.

Bold Idea: Find innovative ways to address childcare shortage.

The shortage of childcare was highlighted as a key issue in the engagement sessions. This issue needs a bold and innovative approach to create a breakthrough in the supply. This could be a topic for immediate focus.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Equitable and Sustainable'.



5.5 | SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

High Level Objective: Helping to adapt to a changing world and supporting a thriving ecosystem

5.5.1 | IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

It was noted throughout the Community Survey, Focus Groups and the meetings with leadership that Traverse City is focused on environmental sustainability. There is a clear desire in the community to pursue environmental and sustainability practices. Adjustment to climate change, and the mitigating impacts of extreme weather events, such as extreme heat, fires and floods, are seen as urgent issues to address. Throughout the planning process, environmental sustainability was seen as the overall driver of community health. It was also consistently highlighted that people choose to live in Traverse City due to its natural resources which is why this is an important messaging tool.

Traverse City has the potential to be a model for how communities can reduce their environmental impact. This resonates with the values expressed by the community.



Future Insights

- The younger population cohorts (under 40) in the survey expressed greater concern and interest in issues associated with environmental sustainability, and concerns about the future impacts of climate change.
- There appears to be appetite in the community to continue and expand the efforts to address sustainability steps and programs. In particular, there was interest in how to embrace some of the emerging technologies and systems that allow houses to be fully electrified, and therefore using 100% renewable energy sources for heating and operating.



5.5.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The key actions areas have been drawn from the focus group discussions, and aggregate ideas shared by the community in the surveys and workshop.

Action 17: Develop a comprehensive region-wide sustainability plan that focuses on climate mitigation and adaptation

Create a city and county-wide plan to help anticipate where climate impacts might occur and build in mitigation and offset strategies. This should also include the pathway to zero-carbon and other established goals.



Action 18: Research and replicate best sustainability practices from other similar cities

Explore and apply best practice from across the United States and Europe regarding incremental changes that are demonstrably achievable. This could include ideas from similar cities, and also ideas from across all types of cities. This should cover practices across all scales, from individual homes to neighborhood and city levels.



Action 19: Embed environmental education initiatives at visitor interface locations

Build broad awareness and promote Traverse City as an ambitious 'living laboratory' for environmental sustainability. Make this visitor-facing, so they can appreciate the community values and become active contributors to the vision.

Action 20: Explore novel ways for the visitation economy to help fund sustainability measures

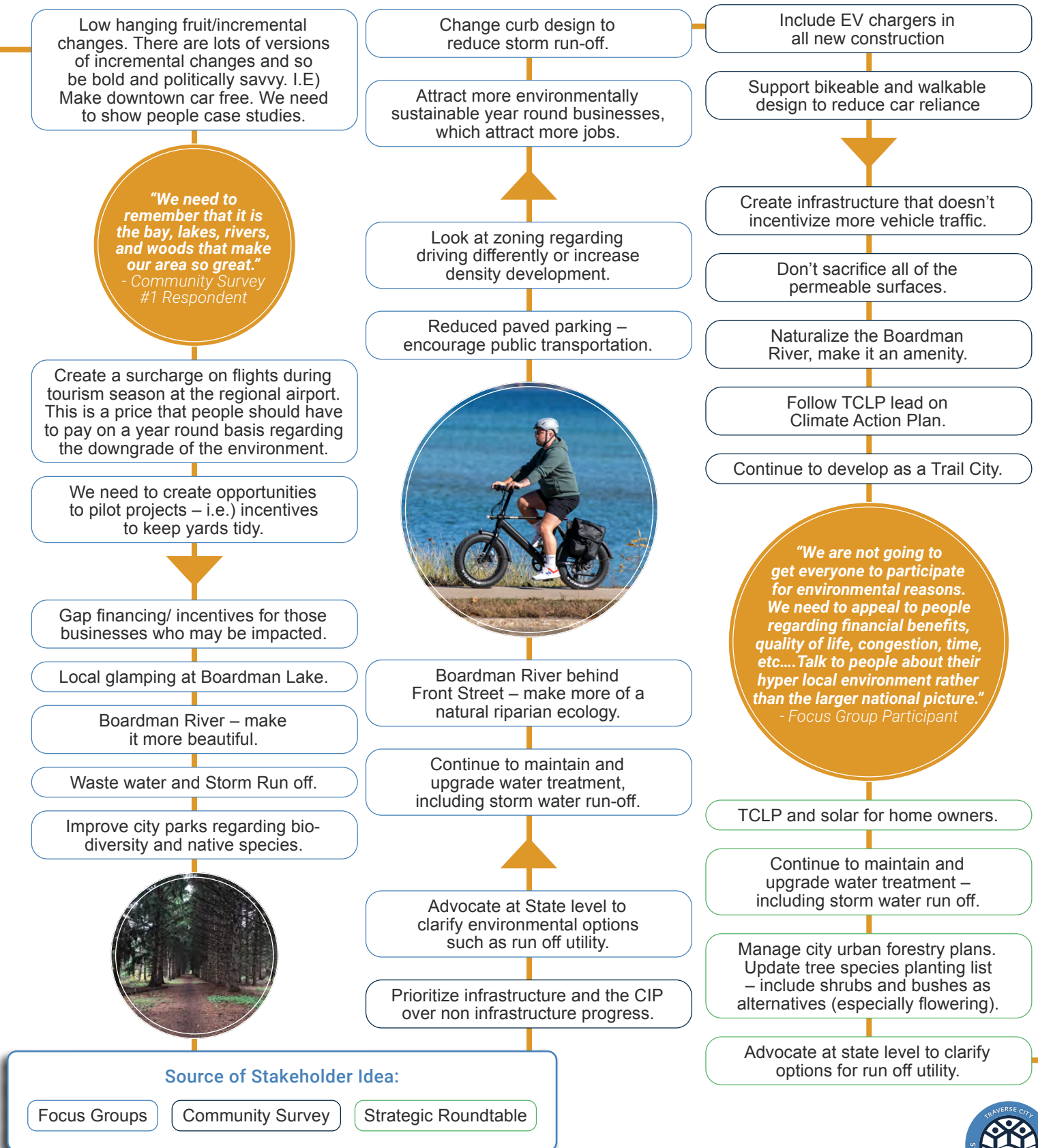
Examine the potential for ideas like airport surcharges and 'tourism taxes' to help fund local environmental offsets and initiatives. There is a 'sea-change' occurring in many tourism destinations, where there is a pivot from destination promotion to destination impact management.



Bold Idea: Pilot electrification of houses as a demonstration project.

There is a need to pilot projects that demonstrate the ability and capacity to reduce environmental impact at a local level. There is the existing local capacity and technology to establish an innovative electrification project, to show how houses can be completely powered by renewable electric technology. This issue has been previously included in Traverse City Commission goals and objectives, but has been primarily focused on government buildings. There is an opportunity to bring that thinking to residential homes, allowing people to see how they can contribute directly on their own properties.

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Equitable and Sustainable'.



5.6 | BUILDING THRIVING YEAR-ROUND ECONOMY

High Level Objective: Expand business diversity and innovation capability to build a year-round economy

5.6.1 | BUILDING THRIVING YEAR-ROUND ECONOMY

Traverse City is well known for its exceptional outdoor recreational offerings. Throughout the engagement process, many spoke about the need to create a year-round economy with tourism in the winter. Also, in the Community Survey, respondents were excited about economic diversification beyond seasonal tourism. Almost 61% of Community Survey respondents felt that it was extremely important to expand business diversity and innovation capability to build a year-round economy. With post COVID options to work remotely, this could improve a year-round economy for Traverse City.

The goal should be not only a greater diversity of businesses, but a greater number of businesses in current sectors to increase competition, which will give employees options and can support more competitive wages for employees.



Future Insights

- A greater diversity and number of businesses will also encourage high school and college graduates to remain in Traverse City without the need to leave the area in search of employment and career paths.
- Build the 'Traverse City Brand' to attract the future workforce and ascertain the industries that Traverse City needs to attract and the skills that they need. The future workforce is predicted to focus more on skills than roles, with more expertise needed in technological roles.

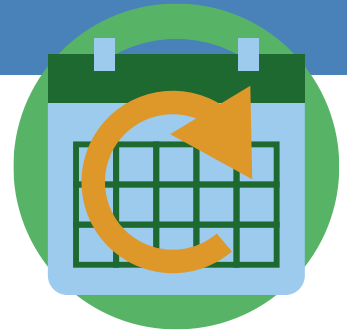


5.6.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The key actions areas have been drawn from the focus group discussions, and aggregate ideas shared by the community in the surveys and workshop.

Action 21: Embrace Sustainable Tourism approaches to moderate seasonal nature of tourism

Adopt a destination impact management approach built on the philosophy of sustainable tourism that addresses local community and environmental impact. For Traverse City to adopt an intentional sustainable approach, this will mean moving from a destination marketing approach to destination impact management.



Action 22: Strategically market Traverse City to the future remote workforce

Continue to build the 'Traverse City Brand' to attract the future remote workforce. This target group is likely to be recreation orientated and drawn by the lifestyle and character of the community. They could also be important new demographics in the community, representing younger age groups.

Action 23: Explore the potential for recreation and resource related products and businesses

The Traverse City brand could be leveraged for business creation that is associated with outdoor recreation and resource management. An example is the higher-end products that are appealing to the recreation market, such hiking gear, equipment, water bottles and accessories.



Action 24: Build on the specialized advanced manufacturing sector

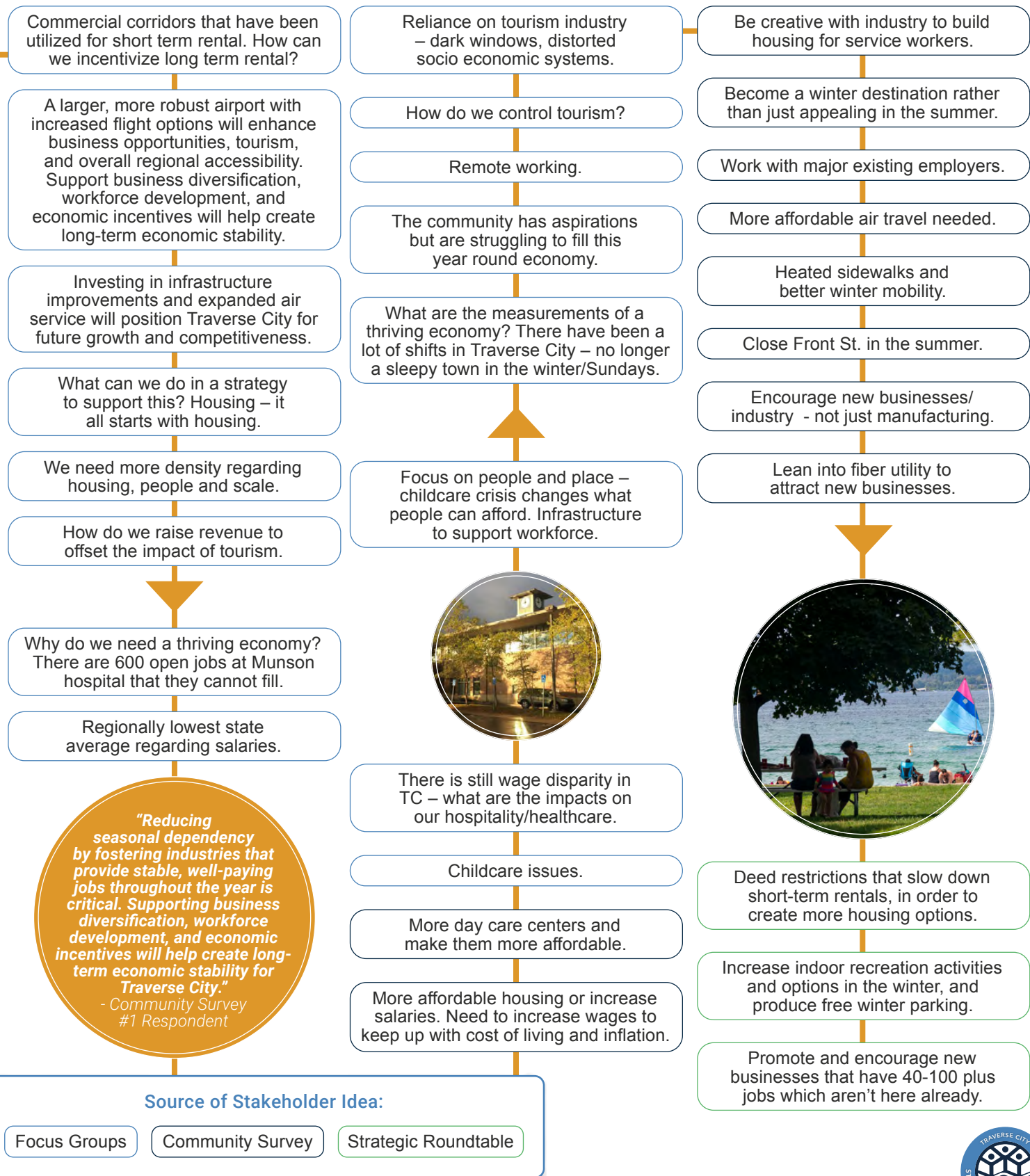
There is a 'window' of time to capture some of the reshoring manufacturing that is occurring and will likely accelerate. This will help reduce seasonal tourism dependency through fostering industries and businesses that provide stable, well-paying jobs throughout the year. Traverse City already has a strong advanced manufacturing base which could be expanded. This could also include a water-related industries hub, creating a unique location for technical and specialty businesses.

Bold Idea: Embrace a sustainable tourism model approach

Across the world, visitation dependent economies are increasingly exploring the idea of sustainable tourism, and focusing on the impact on destinations and residents. This includes changing the focus to 'quality over quantity', and more experienced-based approaches where local values and community interests are put first. This is a challenging pivot for many destination communities, but is showing promise as a way to avoid heading further into over-tourism situations.

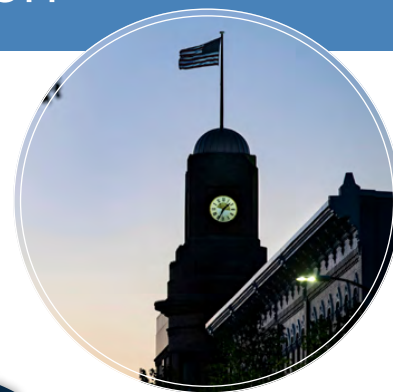


The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Equitable and Sustainable'.



6.0 | DYNAMIC SYSTEMS-THINKING APPROACH

The framework for action developed through the strategic planning process has identified a set of six key Strategic Pillars that will help the City of Traverse City pivot its trajectory towards the 'Equitable and Sustainable' scenario. This framework is the culmination of engagement and input via survey, in-person events and deliberation by the focus groups. The resulting overall framework creates the basis of the roadmap to the future and the guiding vision that will inform future planning efforts by the City of Traverse City.



Ranking of pillars based on their potential positive impact on Traverse City over the next five years. SCALE: 1= lowest; 6= highest



* This pillar was renamed to 'Creating a Complete Community' after feedback at the Future Summit.

7.0 | PRIORITIZATION OF ACTIONS

The 24 actions were prioritized against dimensions of 'Future impact on Traverse City;' 'Need to be bold and innovative'; and 'Urgency for implementation'. The darker the color, the higher the average score. This provides a way to sort the highest priority actions, based on community input and perspective.

Pillar	Action	Impact	Boldness	Urgency
PILLAR 1: Proactively manage urban design	Proactively design the future of key corridors			
	Create localized building design guidelines			
	Explore people-centric street design			
	Intentionally design more community connection points			
PILLAR 2: Strengthening place-making and neighborhood character	Bring an 'experience-based' approach to place-making efforts			
	Empower and elevate the role of the neighborhood associations			
	Intentionally create gathering and social spaces for locals			
	Enhance multi-modal connectivity between neighborhoods & places			
PILLAR 3: Fostering a regional collaborative approach	Map the current collaborations across the region			
	Convene organization in region to identify needs and solutions			
	Explore the potential for shared Government services			
	Create a leadership team to advocate for the region			
PILLAR 4: Creating a Complete Community	Encourage more full-time residents living in core neighborhoods			
	Host summits to showcase solutions to socio-economic challenges			
	Promote social equity within Traverse City			
	Develop a plan to boost childcare capacity in Traverse City			
PILLAR 5: Supporting environmental sustainability	Develop a sustainability plan that focuses on climate mitigation			
	Research and replicate best sustainability practices from other cities			
	Embed environmental education at visitor interface locations			
	Explore new visitation economy funding for sustainability measures			
PILLAR 6: Building thriving year-round economy	Embrace Sustainable Tourism approaches to moderate seasonal nature of tourism			
	Strategically market Traverse City to the remote workforce			
	Explore potential for recreation and resource products & businesses			
	Build on the specialized advanced manufactured sector			



8.0 | NEXT STEPS - ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE

The findings from this planning process can be used to help inform future priorities for the City and the Commission. Over the coming years, this will help shape City goals and objectives and guide new investments and planning decisions.

This Strategic Planning process was designed to identify priority focus areas and actions that are important to the community over the next five years. It has successfully accomplished this aim. Some of the ways this planning framework can be used over the coming years will include:

- Identifying **new initiatives and focus areas** for City staff and Commissioners attention and deliberation.
- Informing **future planning decisions** and helping to refine planning priorities, guidelines and approaches.
- Guiding future Commission **goals, objectives**, and informing investments and **budget priorities**.
- Reframing the role the Commissioners and City **leadership take in a regional context**.

The community has identified they have appetite and interest in bold and innovative solutions on a number of high impact areas, that are seen as urgent to address.

The community of Traverse City has shown a healthy appetite for change going forward. This is the first step toward the preferred future 'Equitable and Sustainable,' that will guide the City's future planning efforts.





9.0 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & MORE INFORMATION

Community members and stakeholders have engaged in this strategic action planning process with great enthusiasm and commitment. Their passion and interest have ensured discussions are open, thoughtful, and reflective of the myriad of perspectives that exist within Traverse City. This dedication is also reflective of the deep commitment participants have to the future of Traverse City.

Additionally, extra appreciation is extended to Elizabeth Vogel (City Manager, The City of Traverse City), Colleen Paveglio (Communications Director, The City of Traverse City), Deborah Allen (Assistant City Manager, The City of Traverse City) and Benjamin Marentette (City Clerk, The City of Traverse City). Weekly project calls held with this team have ensured that the project has been organized, seamless and thorough.

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lab2.future-iq.com/traverse-city-strategic-action-plan/



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