

Chapter 1: Opportunities and Challenges Strategic Plan Framework

Strategic planning is the process by which leaders of an organization determine what it intends^[1] to be in the future and how it will get there. A strategic plan serves as a community's roadmap and is used to prioritize initiatives, resources, goals, and department operations and projects. Strategic planning helps your local government realize its long-term vision by setting up goals and objectives in a systematic, incremental manner. Simply put, it makes you take a look at what's going on today, where you want to be tomorrow and which steps you will need to take to get there^[2].

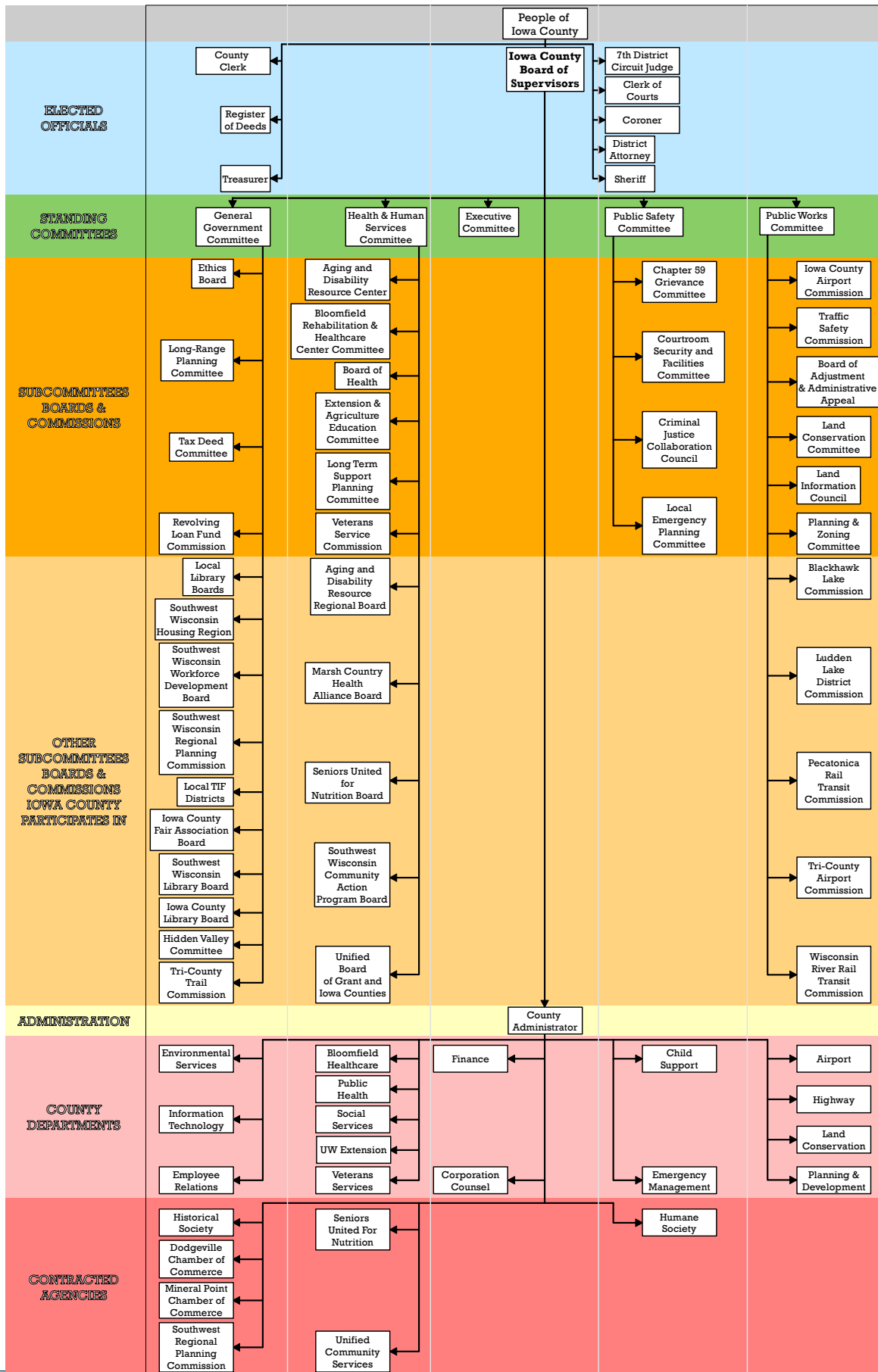
During early 2021, the Richland County Board of Supervisors participated in four strategic planning conversations, facilitated by the Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWWRPC). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings were held via Zoom. Meetings were open to the public, and invitees included all 21 members of the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator.

The schedule and topics were as follows:

- January 27 – Core values, stakeholders, mission, and vision
- February 10 – Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and Political, Economical, Social and Technological (PEST) analyses and development of strategic initiatives^[3]
- February 24 – Organizational capability and goal development
- March 10 – Capital facility investments and plan implementation

SWWRPC also conducted one-on-one interviews with individuals who provided additional input into county issues. Citizen and municipal insight was also acquired through community planning work running concurrent to the strategic planning process. All materials for these meetings are retained in the SWWRPC office and available upon request^[4]^[5].

Figure 1. Organizational Chart of Richland County Administration and Government



Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities will address the challenges ~~mentioned above~~ identified in this plan, and form the basis for ~~actions recommended~~ actions in this plan.

- **Effectiveness** – *Implement operational efficiencies to reduce the costs and free up revenue.*
- **Growth** – *Work to increase the county's population and tax base fund services in a balanced manner. Richland County must find a balance between infrastructure, workforce, housing and population.*
- **Focus** – ~~*Scale back or eliminate discretionary services that cannot provide sustainable revenue to cover their costs. Evaluate our discretionary services in order to focus resources on providing services with sustainable revenue.*~~
- **Improvement** – *Create a culture of continual improvement to sustain progress. Tasks that bring in younger families to live and work in Richland County.*

Framework for Decision-Making

The county will have to make several hard decisions in the coming years, and it's beyond the ability of this document to detail each step in that process. However, it ~~will~~ can serve as a guide during the decision-making process. Prioritizing future investments should be informed by the following criteria.

Core Values

The county's *practices must be tethered to its principles* if it is to have some coherent strategy moving forward. Core values form the basis for decisions, since they bind decision-makers to their decisions. The County Board provided the following core values during the planning process:

- **Integrity** – Engage in county work with honesty and transparency in all proceedings. Meet commitments. Value the multitude of experiences on the board and the diversity of opinions this brings to decision-making.
- **Public Service** – Serve the county professionally and with competence. Be efficient and objective in decision-making. Focus on doing work that is relevant to both current and future generations of county residents.
- **Accountability** – Assume ownership of decisions. Be diligent and follow-through on projects. Be responsive to the needs of county residents as a whole, while recognizing the intrinsic value of every person. Make decisions that plant seeds of success for the future.
- **Open-minded** – Govern in a collaborative manner, unbiased by personal interest. Listen to the needs of residents, while being aware of future demands on county services.

Mission and Vision

~~The following Mission and Vision statements were drafted during the Strategic Planning process. Due to the nature of current challenges facing the county,~~

Mission: Richland County will think strategically and anticipate the future, ensuring that the decisions made today will have lasting value and provide fiscal solvency. The needs of individuals will be respected while recognizing responsibility to the community as a whole. Vital community involvement in decision-making is encouraged by providing a venue for citizens who care to contribute to the betterment of the county.

Alternate Mission Statement: Richland County will foster a stable and adequate tax base such that services to the community are financially sound. With this base, the county will strive to continually improve its wisest use of tax revenues to provide services for the common good.

Vision: Richland County will be a leader for resilient vibrant rural counties and a place where people love life, enjoy work, and are empowered to raise thriving families.

Alternate Vision Statement: To achieve a resilient local economy where housing, jobs and population are in balance, and natural resources and amenities are preserved such that Richland county is a good place to live now and far into the future.

Focus^[7]

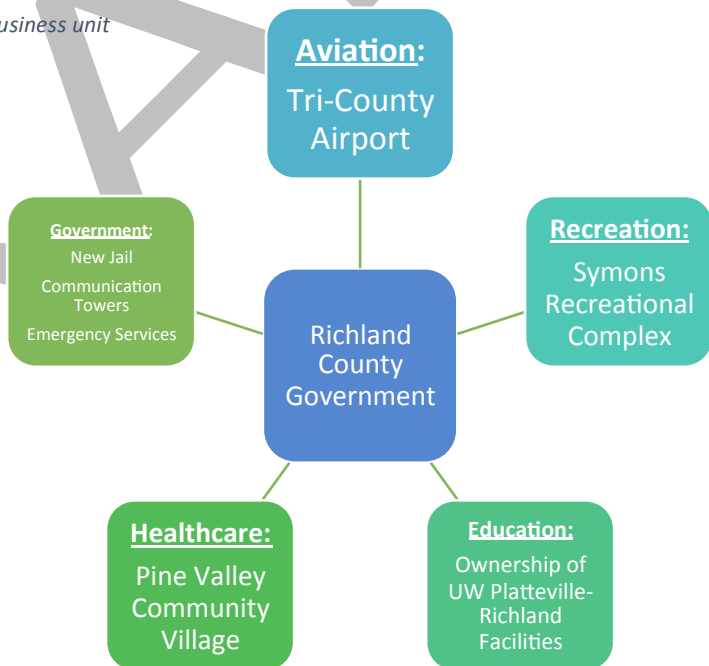
~~The defining problem for the Richland County Board of Supervisors is the need to choose which services and enterprises it will financially support. Continuing inherited practices and commitments challenge the ability to plan for future commitments and needs.~~ The county must focus its efforts on the needs of the future.

The current challenge stems from several factors outside of the county's control, including:

- Stagnating population growth, evidence for which is found in census data, population projections, school enrollment trends, and reports on the county's bond rating (Appendix B).
- State-imposed levy and debt limits.
- Inherited contractual agreements and investments for discretionary enterprises and services.

The "Business" of the County^[8]

Figure 1 – Richland County Long-term capital needs by business unit



The primary causes of the county's financial issues stem from an inability make hard choices and focus its efforts through intentional action. It must choose which discretionary services to abandon, while simultaneously investing in community and economic development efforts to grow its population and tax base. Failure to focus will result in budget deficits, inability to pay competitive wages, and deferred maintenance of critical functions and facilities.

In addition to its ~~government-statutory~~ function, Richland County is currently in the "business" ~~aviation, recreation, healthcare, and education~~ Tri-county Airport, Symons, Pine Valley and UW Platteville-Richland by way of its support or ownership of facilities used in these sectors (Figure 1). Maintenance debt services expenditures associated with discretionary enterprises compete for the same levy funding as statutorily required ~~mandatory~~ services, and impact the county's ability to fully fund its core operations.

~~•—thriving families.~~

"At the core, strategy is about focus, and most complex organizations don't focus their resources. Instead, they pursue multiple goals at once, not concentrating enough resources to achieve a breakthrough in any one of them"

- Richard Rumelt, Good Strategy/Bad Strategy

Considerations

When facing difficult decisions, the county ~~will~~should answer the following questions to prioritize investments:

- For each discretionary enterprise, ask the question: *If we weren't already doing this, would we start doing it today?*
- What action or objective is within the county's *sphere of control*?
- What is the next *proximate advantage* that will allow the county to make progress towards a larger goal?
- What is the *economic return to the tax payer* associated with this project?
- What is the *social or public good* associated with this project, and *would it cease to exist* if funding was cut?
- Are services able to be effectively *provided by another* party or organization?
- *Is the service we're providing mandated*, and if so, *is the means of service provision mandated*? If the means of service provision is not mandated, *is there a more effective way of providing the service*?
- Is the project *a lever for creation of additional value or resources*, or *an impediment to service and innovation*?
- How might the county *premeditate actions of other parties* in order to improve its position?
- For discretionary enterprises, *are both the operational and capital outlays affordable over the next 20 years*?