



City of
Berlin
Wisconsin

**STRATEGIC
PLAN**
SUMMARY REPORT



April 2026

Dear Mayor Burgess and Administrator Balcom,

I am pleased to present the 2026-2029 Strategic Plan and Summary Report to the City of Berlin. This plan embodies the organization's goals, commitment to measurable outcomes, and dedication to delivering high-quality services to the community. While maintaining our focus on core public services, the Strategic Plan places special emphasis on key organizational objectives and provides a framework for proactive decision-making.

Arriving at the updated Vision, Mission, and organizational goals required months of diligent work, including gathering data from the community, interviewing stakeholders, and distilling the wealth of information collected. It has been an honor to support Berlin in this significant endeavor. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Board and staff members who contributed their time and effort to this process.

Yours Truly,

Cory Poris Plasch
President / CEO
CP2 Consulting

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Executive Summary

Beginning in March of 2025, the City of Berlin engaged in a strategic planning process. The process generated strategic goals covering 2026-2029.

The plan consists of four strategic goals, identified as the issues of greatest importance to the City over the next four years. Each goal has an associated outcome, key outcome indicator, and performance target. These were determined through a facilitated process including board and staff and incorporating stakeholder feedback from focus groups and an internal stakeholder survey.

As part of the strategic planning process, the Vision and Mission were evaluated. The City chose to update their Vision and Mission. A cross-functional team of staff helped to further develop the Strategic Plan by identifying initiatives to achieve the Strategic Goals. This team will continue to work to develop and implement project plans for each initiative and create a communication plan to ensure that staff understand the overall goals, as well as being able to meaningfully incorporate action steps to achieve those goals into their overall responsibilities.



Vision and Mission

VISION STATEMENT

Berlin successfully balances a rural, small town feel with abundant opportunities for growth and community connections.

MISSION STATEMENT

Berlin values the past while purposefully planning for the future, delivering safe, reliable, and professional services that improve the quality of life for the community.



The Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Planning Process seeks to answer five questions:

1. Where are we right now? (Plan Development)
2. Where do we want to be? (Plan Development)
3. How do we get there from here? (Plan Implementation)
4. How will we know when we get there? (Plan Implementation)
5. Are there changes in the future external environment that we need to consider?

DEVELOPMENT

Where are we now?

Scan the Environment
Conduct Internal and External Analysis
(SWOT)
Develop a Strategic Profile
Identify Strategic Challenges

Where are we going?

Define Our Mission
Articulate Core Values
Set a Vision
Identify Key Intended Outcomes

IMPLEMENTATION

How will we get there?

Develop Initiatives
Define Performance Measures
Set Targets and Thresholds
Spread Throughout Organization

How will we know?

Create Detailed Action Plans
Establish Accountability:
Who, What, When
Identify Success Indicators

Assessing the Current Environment

The Strategic Planning Process began with a meeting between the consultant and Berlin staff. The meeting included a review of strategic planning principles, a discussion of organizational value proposition, the status of vision and mission statements, and a tutorial on preparing an Environmental Scan. The session concluded with a timeline for the planning process, assignments for preparation of the Environmental Scan, and a process for conducting the stakeholder outreach.



Stakeholder Engagement

To answer the question **“Where are we now?”**, the Strategic Planning Process began with gaining an understanding of the operating environment. This is the first activity in developing a Strategic Plan as internal and external forces, dynamics, and constraints must be considered to arrive at the most effective strategy.

ASSESSING THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDED:

- A community survey
- Focus groups
- Environmental Scan

As environmental factors change over time, they need to be evaluated and incorporated into the strategic thinking and planning process using current data. As a result, the focus groups were limited in scope and consisted of businesses, nonprofits, residents, students, and employees of the City. Each focus group discussed what participants saw as strengths of Berlin along with opportunities for change.

The results of these efforts were presented to the Berlin Board at the first Strategic Planning Session on August 5, 2025. They are summarized below along with links to the complete results.



Environmental Scan

The City of Berlin drafted an Environmental Scan providing a comprehensive overview of the community's demographic trends, financial position, municipal operations, and strategic considerations for long-term planning. The City benefits from a strong sense of community, active local events, and a full range of municipal services. The scan highlights key challenges, including limited revenue growth tied to low net new construction, infrastructure maintenance needs, workforce recruitment and retention pressures, and rising employee benefit costs. Overall, the document positions Berlin to use data-driven insights to guide strategic priorities, ensuring sustainable service delivery and community vitality through 2030 and beyond.

STATISTICS TO CONSIDER

- 2025 total City budget expenditures: \$6,666,834
- General property tax levy: \$2,434,092
- Median household income: \$49,637
- Population under age 18: 22.4%; age 65+: 16.9%
- Racial composition: ~89.8% White, 13.1% Hispanic/Latino, growing diversity
- City governed by Mayor and Common Council, with professional administration managing operations
- Full-service municipal structure including police, fire (paid-on-call), EMS, public works, utilities, library, and senior center
- Active community engagement through year-round events (farmers market, festivals, parades, car shows)
- Strong park and recreation presence supported by multiple public facilities
- Significant city-owned property portfolio supporting operations and development

External Stakeholder (Community) Survey Results

An External Stakeholder (Community) Survey was conducted from June 20 to July 25, 2025. External Stakeholders refer to individuals or groups who are outside the organization but are affected by the actions of the organization and the quality of life in the community. These include, but are not limited to, businesses, neighborhoods, residents of all ages, historically excluded populations, special interest groups, educational facilities including K-12 schools and higher education, and other taxing jurisdictions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The survey had 299 responses, with 85% indicating they are a resident of Berlin.
- When asked what they liked best about living in Berlin, the top three answers were: grew up here and/or have family in the area (55%), parks and recreation areas (32%), and peaceful community (28%).
- Respondents ranked the following as Essential for quality of life in Berlin: public safety (81%), schools (69%), affordability/cost of living (64%), local stores and shopping (52%).
- A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the following services / features in Berlin: parks and park facilities (80%), fire and emergency medical response (65%), quality of life (59%), police (57%).
- When asked the most important things for a strong and healthy community, the top four responses were: high-quality schools (60%), a sense of safety and security (46%), employment opportunities (39%) and high-quality City services (28%).
- Respondents ranked the following as Essential to the future of Berlin: a safe community (84%), a good place to raise a family (79%), high-quality schools (74%), affordable City services (68%).
- A majority of respondents marked Yes to the following statements/questions:
 - "I would support up to \$50-100 in additional property taxes per year on an average home to fund pool repairs and ongoing maintenance." (Yes, 57%)
 - "Would you be willing to pay an additional \$20 per vehicle, per year to fund road repairs?" (Yes, 52%)
- A majority of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with the following statements:
 - "A high-quality school system is an important factor in the success of the community." (89%)
 - "The City should invest in projects and programs that enhance the quality of life for all community members." (84%)
 - "The City should invest in creating jobs and growing local businesses." (84%)

Focus Group Results

As part of the City's strategic planning process, focus groups were conducted on August 19, 2025. The four Focus Groups included: employees; residents; businesses; nonprofits and community faith leaders.

A Focus Group is a small-group discussion, guided by a trained facilitator, used to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions about a designated topic. The interaction enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences. The facilitator's role is to gather information in an impartial and confidential manner, manage the pace of the discussion, and ensure that everyone has a chance to participate. The process included a set of questions and follow-up discussion within the small group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Berlin has a small-town feel while maintaining convenient access to the amenities of nearby larger communities.
- The City's sense of community is strong, with residents consistently describing it as welcoming, supportive, and rooted in tradition.
- Parks, the library, and community events are highly valued and contribute to the quality of life.
- At the same time, participants noted that Berlin lacks a clear identity and would benefit from stronger direction and a shared vision for the future.
- Economic development emerged as a top priority, including attracting businesses, expanding industry, and creating jobs to attract and retain residents.
- The appearance of downtown and other areas of the community was an area of concern, including vacant buildings, property maintenance, and the need for more consistent code enforcement and beautification efforts. Residents also noted visible deterioration of streets and infrastructure.
- Housing availability and quality were consistently cited as barriers to growth and support of workforce needs.

Focus Group Results, cont.

- Residents noted declining retail and service options, especially the absence of a grocery store.
- Several groups discussed the perceived erosion of trust between the City, residents, and businesses, and expressed a desire for improved transparency, communication, and engagement.
- Participants would like to see expanded amenities and recreation options for youth and families.
- Finally, the City's natural assets, especially the river, are seen as underutilized and present an opportunity to enhance recreation, tourism, and community connection.



Understanding the Environment

An integral part of the Strategic Planning Process is a SWOT Analysis, which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It provides a situational overview of the environment in which strategic planning takes place and allows a systematic examination of factors impacting the community. **Strengths and Weaknesses** examine the internal operating environment, while **Opportunities and Threats** evaluate the external operating environment.

To provide ample opportunity for reflection, a SWOT survey was distributed to the Board Members and staff prior to the Strategic Planning session. During the Strategic Planning Retreat, the SWOT data was reviewed to determine key themes and strategic issues.



SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Dedicated staff
- Caring elected officials
- Great location
- Great public parks
- Outside community support

WEAKNESSES

- Weak financial position
- Staffing issues
- Outdated codes/red tape
- Aging facilities
- Lack of cohesion between council / community / staff

OPPORTUNITIES

- Growth: housing, economics, activities
- Promote: bedroom community, location
- Attract: families, businesses, events
- Automated services: campground, parks and shelter, website

THREATS

- Distrust
- Economics / finances
- Lack of growth
- Lack of support / involvement
- Loss: grocery store, industry, downtown

Strategic Issues

- Updated codes
- Staff capacity- workforce
- \$
- Civic engagement/pipeline
- Lack of business cohesiveness
- Retirements- workforce
- Community fatigue/need for change/education
- Aging facilities
- Growth needed
- Need for increased local biz
- Need for common identity/vision
- Different housing mix
- Roads
- Infrastructure
- Lack of future planning

SWOT Analysis (cont.)

The Strengths and Opportunities groups combined to discuss how internal strength coupled with external opportunities could be enablers of success.

The Weaknesses and Threats groups combined to discuss how internal weaknesses coupled with external threats could be challenges to success.

Finally, the groups combined, and all participants reviewed the key themes. A list of strategic issues was determined, and included economic development, partnerships, staffing, infrastructure, water, diverse revenue streams needed, public safety, technology, commercial development and housing.

The most important organizational priorities were finalized taking into account information gathered throughout the process, including the Environmental Scan.

Through this analysis, four Strategic Goals were identified: Investment in Community, Reliable Infrastructure, Engaged Community, and Workplace of Excellence.

Participants then were divided into cross-functional groups. They determined desired Outcomes (what success looks like), Key Outcome Indicators (how to measure progress toward success), and Performance Targets (a measurable goal achieved by a defined date) for each Strategic Goal.



Targets by Strategic Goal

GOAL Investment in Community

OUTCOME

TARGET

Increased Development

- __ # of development agreements approved within TIDs by __ (date)
- # of new build construction permits increased by __ # by __ (date)

KOI: # of new build permits, # of development agreements approved within TID 17

Diversified funding

- Increase the number of grants applied for by __ % by __ (date)

KOI: Grants

Revitalized downtown

- # of building permits for improvements increased by __ % by __ (date)
- Support creation of BID / Chamber / Friends

KOI: # building permits

GOAL Reliable Infrastructure

OUTCOME

TARGET

Improved and repaired streets

- ≥\$1M invested in streets annually

KOI: \$ invested

Upgraded water and sewer

- ≥\$1.2M invested in water and sewer annually

KOI: \$ invested

Diversified project funding

- Increase grants applied for by __ % by __ (date)

KOI: # grants applied for

Targets by Strategic Goal (Cont'd)

GOAL Engaged Community

OUTCOME	TARGET
Vision for Berlin understood	• Comp plan visioning done by 12/26 <i>KOI: Visioning complete</i>
Well informed community	• Produce at least one piece of educational content monthly • Increase engagement by __ % by __ (date) • Create testimonial campaign by __ (date) <i>KOI: # educational topics addressed; engagement</i>
Sustainable pipeline for public service	• Information packet explaining commitment for committees and boards available by __ (date) • Interest list compiled for each committee and board completed annually <i>KOI: Information packet available; interest list compiled</i>

GOAL Workplace of Excellence

OUTCOME	TARGET
Reduce vacancy time	• Time to fill decreased by __ % by __ (date) <i>KOI: Time to fill</i>
Increased retention	• Increase retention rates by __ % by __ (date) <i>KOI: Retention rates</i>
Improved processes	• __ # of processes evaluated annually <i>KOI: # of processes evaluated</i>
Increased organizational resilience	• Evaluate __ % of SOPs for accuracy annually • Cross-train __ % of identified critical roles by __ (date) <i>KOI: # of SOPs evaluated; % of roles cross-trained</i>

Strategic Plan Implementation

Implementation is the final step in the Strategic Planning Process and consists of staff developing Initiatives to support the Strategic Goals determined during the Strategic Planning Process.

The following Initiatives will be reported on regularly, showing the measurable progress the City of Berlin is making towards their Strategic Goals and associated Performance Targets.

Goal: Investment in Community

- Downtown Revitalization & Placemaking Program
- Strategic Economic Development & Business Attraction
- Diversified Funding & Investment Strategy
- Community-Driven Development & Housing Investment

Goal: Reliable Infrastructure

- Street Rehabilitation & Maintenance Program
- Water & Sewer System Modernization
- Diversified Infrastructure Funding Strategy
- Integrated Capital Planning & Project Coordination

Goal: Engaged Community

- Civic Talent Pipeline & Volunteer-to-Leadership Pathway
- Modernize Citywide Communications
- Build Strong Neighborhood and Community Partnerships
- Promote Transparency & Open Government

Goal: Workplace of Excellence

- Build a High-Performance, People-Centered Culture
- Strengthen Talent Development & Workplace Capacity
- Foster an Innovative, Empowered, and Efficient Work Environment
- Prioritize Employee Well-Being, Satisfaction, and Support

Strategic Planning Session Participants

The strategic plan was developed with the hard work and dedication of many individuals. The Berlin Board and Staff led the way, taking time out of their schedules to commit to long-term thinking. They defined a direction and a set of outcomes that are important to the community stakeholders with whom they partner and serve.

City Council & Staff

Catrina Burgess
Mayor

Terry Przybyl
Aldersperson (Wards 1 & 7)

Victoria Hill
**Aldersperson & Council
President (Ward 2)**

Kristina Boeck
Aldersperson (Ward 3)

Samantha Stobbe
Aldersperson (Ward 4)

Joshua Nigbor
Aldersperson (Ward 5)

Melissa Sorenson
Aldersperson (Ward 6)

Jessi Balcom
City Administrator & Clerk-Treasurer

Chief Doug Dewhurst
Fire Chief

Chief Brian Pulvermacher
Police Chief

Brian Malnory
Utility Superintendent

Scott Zabel
Streets Superintendent

Tim Ludolph
Zoning Administrator

Evan Vandenlangenberg
EMS Director

Chris Kalupa
Library Director

Debra Thiel
Deputy Clerk-Treasurer

Consultant

Cory Poris Plasch, President, CP2 Consulting

