

Rochester Vision 2050

Synthesized Feedback / Priority Areas / Potential Partners

Vision in Action Requirements – *Roger Mader*

Implementation of civic recommendations requires several key attributes to come to fruition and benefit constituents. We can observe this in traditional civic services (eg schools, first responders, roadworks) and special initiatives (eg Destination Medical Center).

These programs and services may be exclusively provided by city government, or may represent public & private partnerships, non-governmental agencies, or multiple tiers of government including county, state, interstate, federal and international partnerships.

Critical elements include

- **Mandate** – a call to action that receives support sufficient to elevate the initiative to sustained attention and activity.
- **Leadership** – an individual or body who sets direction, ensures action and takes responsibility for results.
- **Plan** – a clear set of actions and timelines that can be delegated or assigned, measured, reported and remediated.
- **Resource** – capable and sufficient funding, staff, and supplies required to fulfill the plan.
- **Governance** – an oversight body and rules to ensure effectiveness and that the initiative serves intended stakeholders per its mandate.
- **Sustainability** – all of the preceding elements are able to be renewed and evolve across the necessary timeframe, with insurance and alternatives to protect against unplanned disruption.

The Rochester Vision 2050 results provide the first steps in clarifying a mandate. The recommendations that follow begin by providing planning recommendations.

The Mayor and steering committee have clarified the mandate for each of these sections, discussed leadership needs to move the concepts forward and identified groups that should be informed of the findings, and begun to research for sources of support in current programs within the city or beyond that might offer resources to proceed.

Next steps include sharing the information with City Council, City Staff and the community more broadly, and seeking to gain understanding, support and action regarding identified future desires for the city.

Housing

- Most of the comments are around the need for decent and affordable housing – both rental and ownership. I tried to read most of the comments that were in the graphs and nearly all of them said something to the effect of “we need more truly affordable housing.” I know the City and its partners are actively working on this.
- One of the comments/ideas that had three responses was to provide grants or loan assistance for people to improve their houses – which is a product that the City and the County already offer jointly. Perhaps a PR campaign around this already existing opportunity would be helpful? <https://www.rochestermn.gov/departments/community-development/construction-development-resources/residential-development/single-family-rehabilitation-loan-program>
- Homelessness was mentioned many times. I know that the Any Path Home collective effort will really be ramping up in 2025, so that will be an effort that can be communicated back to the community.

While this vision feedback represents new community engagement on the topic of housing, the issues it raises are not new. We have long recognized the challenges of housing affordability, availability, and stability in Rochester. What this latest feedback does is reinforce and validate the concerns we have been working to address. Rather than treating this as a signal to shift course, it should strengthen our collective resolve to stay the course on solutions that are already in motion.

Recognizing Our Community’s Work in Progress

One important factor in interpreting this feedback is that many of our most significant housing initiatives—including the Rochester Area Housing Coalition—are still in their early stages. It is natural to feel a sense of urgency and the temptation to respond with new initiatives in reaction to the feedback. However, meaningful progress requires patience, persistence, and trust in the long-term efforts we have already committed to.

Instead of diverting attention toward new efforts, this is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to making Rochester’s shared vision for housing a reality. The Rochester Area Housing Coalition has laid a strong foundation, and we must continue to support this collaborative work.

Supply-Side and Demand-Side Solutions

The affordability of housing is driven by both supply-side and demand-side factors, and effectively addressing this challenge requires a two-pronged community wide approach.

1. Supply-Side Solutions: Increasing the Availability and Affordability of Housing

These solutions fall within the domain of the Rochester Area Housing Coalition, focusing on expanding and preserving housing stock to meet community needs.

- Expanding affordable housing supply by continuing efforts to develop rental and ownership opportunities for low- and middle-income residents.
- Zoning and land use policy improvements that encourage flexible zoning, mixed-use development, and alternative housing models (e.g., ADUs, duplexes, triplexes).
- Housing stability and tenant protections through expanded eviction prevention, rental assistance, and housing counseling programs.
- Support for developers and nonprofit housing organizations by enhancing financing tools, incentives, and partnerships to accelerate construction and rehabilitation of affordable units.

The Rochester Area Housing Coalition is actively engaged in these strategies, and this feedback should serve as a reminder of why their work is so important and deserves continued investment and patience.

2. Demand-Side Solutions: Strengthening Economic, Educational, and Health Pathways to Affordability

While increasing the supply of affordable housing is critical, a person's ability to afford housing is tied to their income, job security, and overall well-being. This means addressing the economic and social factors that shape housing demand. Like the supply side, our community has recently implemented significant cross-sector initiatives that could be bolstered by an explicit connection to Vision 2050.

- **Economic Growth & Workforce Development (Chamber, RAEDI, DMC, etc.)**
 - Strengthening job creation and career pathways so wages keep pace with housing costs.
 - Supporting small businesses, entrepreneurship, and workforce development programs to improve economic mobility.
 - Ensuring that ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households have pathways to financial stability.
- **Education & Workforce Preparedness (Cradle 2 Career, Higher Ed, Public Schools, etc)**
 - Expanding early childhood education, K-12, and post-secondary training to ensure long-term economic security.
 - Investing in apprenticeships, technical education, and career-connected learning to increase earning potential.
- **Health & Well-Being (Coalition for Community Health Integration)**
 - Recognizing that housing and health are interconnected, ensuring access to mental health services, addiction recovery, and chronic disease support.
 - Expanding supports for food security, childcare access, and transportation, all of which contribute to financial stability.

By addressing both housing supply constraints (through the Housing Coalition) and economic stability factors (through workforce, education, and health initiatives), we create a more holistic, long-term approach to affordability and resilience.

Strengthening the Commitment to Rochester's Housing Vision

I encourage you to share the findings from the Rochester Vision 2050 process with the Rochester Area Housing Coalition and other community coalitions and seek to formalize their commitment to Vision 2050. By making this information accessible to those directly working to address housing challenges directly or indirectly, we can:

- Ensure alignment between community feedback and ongoing initiatives.
- Encourage transparency in how housing strategies are progressing.
- Reaffirm collective commitment to the work already underway.

A formal reaffirmation of the City's and the Coalition's commitment to making the shared housing vision a reality would send a strong message—not just to those working on solutions, but to the broader community looking for leadership and action and to those who shared their feedback through this process.

The feedback gathered through Rochester Vision 2050 reinforces what we already know: housing affordability is a critical issue, and our community expects us to take action. But it is not a new issue, and the strategies to address it are already underway. Rather than shifting focus to something new, we must trust the process, work to strengthen existing collaborations, and remain committed to our long-term approach. By explicitly connecting and integrating supply-side efforts with demand-side economic and educational strategies to Vision 2050 we can

bolster these efforts rather than dilute them and together ensure that Rochester becomes a place where everyone has a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

Education

Overall Priority • Most supported answers – Funding for Education ranked 3rd (79%) only behind Youth & Childcare 1st (80%) and Community Events 2nd (82%) • For top investment priorities, out of 10 total categories, Education ranked 2nd only to Housing	Key Themes • Increased Investment/Funding was the topmost cited area • Improved Quality Results
Observations • “Youth” and “Education” answers together would result in the overall most supported survey answers • 72% of student respondents plan to stay in Rochester (or are undecided). Of these, they report a personal connection to the community, family or consider Rochester a good place for their future. Proximity to Mayo Clinic also important.	
Key Ideas for City Action • Prioritize focus on education and build strong partnerships between city leaders and community education leaders • Proactively assist education leaders on criticality of strong education funding rationale to educate the public • Prioritize early childhood needs, issues and investments	Key Ideas for Community Partners • Increase funding by the public by heavily educating them on needs and outcomes • Increase quality results • Increase teacher pay and skills • Decrease class size • Ensure a strong curriculum • Focus on ALL students achieving high results • Focus on: STEM, arts/sports, trades • Increase Early Childhood investments and outcomes

Justice

- According to the citywide survey results, Safety was identified as an unthemed area in response to the initial question, “What is needed to create the very best Rochester by 2050?” In reviewing the data on pages 10, 11, 20, and 41 it became clear that **justice** was a more accurate word to describe people's responses when looking for greater “safety” in our city.
- The safety of our community goes beyond preventing crime; it is also about creating an environment where people feel secure, valued, heard, and involved. All individuals have the right to feel safe in their neighborhoods, schools, and daily interactions. This sense of safety is vital to the social and economic vitality of our city. Because of this, most of the answers and comments regarding safety focused on justice and what our city can do to improve the justice system over the next 25 years.
- With this in mind, below are several recommendations that deserve consideration and further study in the hope of enhancing both justice and safety in Rochester.
 - Continue to grow Public Services (Fire, Police, EMT, Social Service) by creating internships and mentorship opportunities for youth and underserved community members. Implement programs that explore careers in these and other service areas. This will not only help bring awareness and interest to these career options but it will also provide opportunities to build stronger relationships and community ties. This would allow relationships to be built between public safety professionals and Rochester's youth and young adults as they offer career advice, provide guidance on decision-making, and stand as positive role models. This proactive engagement will help build trust and understanding and it will have a powerful influence on many lives. Continue to summer partnership with the Rochester Public School Safe Nights Program.
 - The City of Rochester should continue the practice of reviewing departments, policies, statutes, and ordinances to eliminate bias and prejudices; and to ensure there are enough checks and balances in place to guarantee equity for all. The City has implemented a well-planned review system and should continue to monitor its progress.
 - Restorative Justice Practices: It is suggested that an exploration of Restorative Justice Models be conducted. This is where offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and repair harm. For certain crimes, this can provide meaningful alternatives to traditional incarceration.
 - Provide opportunities for citizens to learn about our Constitution and the Justice System and how they influence our lives. This could include citizenship and community service, volunteering, and opportunities to serve in Rochester and Olmsted County.

Culture and Arts

- 6th highest "top investment priority" at 39%; above healthcare and below natural resources
- Top 5 themes within this area
 - More Arts for Youth
 - Art in Public Spaces
 - More Arts Funding
 - Community Engagement through the Arts
 - Celebrate Cultural Diversity
 - Note - support local artists was also in the 80s, as the above were
- Key Recommendations - Venues, Events, and Art (both physical structures and programmatic needs)
 - More museums
 - More activities for children, including at Arts Center
 - More concerts in fall/winter/spring like do in summer
 - Ways to learn about other cultures through art
 - Increase funding and resources for the Arts
 - Support local artists
 - Other venues such as an amphitheater, a Performing Arts Center, etc...
- Overall observations - words like "welcoming," "love," and "enjoy" were common
- I spent a lot of time reviewing these materials, which I found quite interesting and inspiring. I can hear the voice of Rochester residents being expressed. And I appreciated the methodology and presentation materials via the GroupSolver Dashboard.
- As we are working on the 5-year update to the DMC Development plan, these insights will play an important foundational role. Especially as you found so many ways of involving and engaging a broad cross-section of the community.
- My sense is that the next stage of work, once these results are shared more publicly, is to talk about what lies at the intersection of the various categories presented in the analysis. We probably can't tackle every idea or suggestion but should be able to determine overlap between certain groupings, say Housing, Infrastructure, and Economic Vitality. Or Education, Culture and Arts, and Sustainability, for example.
- Trying to think about these as a more meta-level. Then working to align public policy, public funds, organizational commitments, etc.
- I guess my comments are less about the findings, I accept them as the best representation of our community aspiration, and more about how we organize to work toward long term solutions.

Economic Vitality

- Housing, encouraging industry expansion and business development (creation of new, expansion of current), and support of small business are all priorities for Rochester.
- Support of small business includes creating an easy, yet responsible, experience to create/maintain a small business in Rochester.
- Creating new “tools in the toolbox” to encourage development in both new and current businesses/employers is an opportunity for Rochester.
- Diversification of our economy is desirable.

Infrastructure

- A more robust (very frequent, nearly 24hr for portions and consistent), low/no cost to users transit system that connects the whole city with downtown.
- Roads/Bike Routes/Sidewalks
- Maintain roads, sidewalks, bike paths after they are built.

Natural Resources

- First, the loudest message coming through in the results is that residents are **concerned about development pressure removing green spaces** in existing parts of the city (especially the city core) and **potential public green spaces** in areas yet to be developed. It is understandable that these comments came in against a backdrop of Mayo's announced "Unbound" project and various housing and commercial development projects announced, one after another. It is evident that there is a fairly wide public interest to counterbalance the individual economic interests that accompany all of these development proposals. In particular, as the city entertains proposals for development on two riverfront sites, it seems there may be ways to **include public-access green (or quasi green) spaces within those sites**.
- There is acute hunger for **more and varied park facilities and experiences**. Some of the suggestions: an **arboretum or garden-centered development** (I think here of the Rose and Rock Gardens in Minneapolis), one featuring **native plants**, more **trails and identified routes for biking and hiking**, including through the downtown area.
- And finally, there is a category that is near and dear to my heart: **making better use of the parks we already have**. Suggestions: **Plant more trees**, manage **geese** (and their waste), somehow address the **homeless presence**, expand **programming for children and families**. (One comment read, "I love Quarry Hill!", which I think speaks to the programming there as much as, or more than, the park itself.) The phrase **"safe and clean"** resonated through many of these individual responses.
- Continuing this category, I'm going to merge some personal insights with some of the results I saw in the verbatims. The parks could use some **more attention and care** to make them more user-friendly. **Wastebaskets** seem few and far between. (And how often are they emptied?) **Public restrooms** are open only a few months of the year. Nearby related service industry offerings are hit-and-miss: Where can you easily **rent a bike or skates?** Where can you **buy an ice cream cone** and sit on a bench with your kids? Or a **hot cocoa after ice skating?** (I see some potential overlap here with the comments on economic diversification and a desire for "vibrant neighborhoods with fun restaurants and retail.")
- One comment read, **"Clean up Silver Lake,"** referring, I believe, to the water quality, but Silver Lake Park overall seems to offer a huge opportunity for improvement. The trails have trip hazards and some stretches are covered with water for weeks at a time in the spring thaw. The concrete fishing pier -- don't get me started -- and the beautiful stone arch bridges lead ... nowhere. Other cities offer a higher level of visitor experience in their signature parks.

Healthcare

Best, Most Supported Ideas Rochester and Partners Can Work On

- Healthcare, though not identified by survey participants as a priority in an open-ended question, was ranked 7 of 10 when identified in a multiple choice question. Two areas led in priority as local problems: Affordability and Access.
- There were few specific ideas from survey participants for the City of Rochester to work on related to Healthcare barriers. Survey participants' comments suggested that the City of Rochester should be responsible to make these barriers known to Mayo Clinic and collaborate with local partners who have direct healthcare responsibility to work together to find solutions. More specific needs are identified below in Healthcare Affordability and Access. OMC was specifically named as a potential partner, and references were made to organizations that work with poor/uninsured persons. There are issues identified in the survey that would be of value to a local assessment of healthcare needs.
- Other suggestions to address affordability and access included:
 - work with Mayo to improve/broaden access to primary care for local people
 - strengthen the focus on equity in healthcare locally
 - establish more free clinics located in areas with low income persons
 - establish pop-up clinics.
- Though healthcare is not a direct responsibility of cities, this identified need could support the City of Rochester working with responsible entities to address local affordability and access more proactively for the wellbeing and healthy future of our community..
- The City has led efforts to create equity in our community. Equity related to healthcare could fit with that initiative.
- Free and pop-up clinics are available in Rochester, though I am unaware of any organization doing an assessment of their adequacy to cover the need for care.
- Some respondents acknowledged that healthcare is not a City responsibility.

Healthcare as a Priority

- Related to the open-ended question, "What is needed to create the very best Rochester by 2050," out of 654 responses there was no specific category "Healthcare" named. Several priority areas relate closely to healthcare such as childcare, housing, and support of the homeless.
- Related to the multiple choice question, "Which of the areas should be the top investment priorities to create the best future for Rochester?," Healthcare was ranked 7th of 10 areas identified by survey participants. In a range of 63%-31% for the 10 areas ranked, Healthcare received 36% support. Survey participants' healthcare comments in the survey made a high priority of the lack of affordability/access for those who were poor.

Healthcare Affordability and Access

- In the theme of Healthcare, 157 responded. More than 80% identified and commented on
 - two factors related to Healthcare that were of highest importance: Affordability and Access. The most important was Affordability; most Access comments were based in lack of affordability. Most of the theme comments as well as the focus of the word cloud (1) were related to the healthcare affordability needs of the poor, uninsured, mentally ill and immigrants. The next highest priority comments related to the need for "all persons" to have access to affordable healthcare.
 - Several comments noted the added local tax burden of supporting Mayo's infrastructure and expansion needs,
 - and the responsibility of Mayo to provide adequate primary care resources to local people. The survey identified a lack of primary care resources locally.
 - Additional comments related to maintaining a positive relationship with Mayo Clinic as a critical partner in our economy.
- (1) "Word Cloud" words related to Affordability: affordable/high cost/cheaper/ lower price/ what can be done?/ less expensive/better prices/ without insurance/ too high/ climbing costs/ can't afford/more access if no insurance