

Town of Hertford



FY 2023-2024 Strategic Plan

Adopted September 11, 2023

Introduction

This strategic plan creates a single, forward-focused vision that clearly communicates the goals and priorities of the Town of Hertford to our residents, staff, and external partners. It is used to prioritize efforts, effectively allocate resources, and align management and staff to the Town's overall goals. According to the UNC School of Government, strategic planning is one of the most effective tools to improve organizational performance and sustainability in local government. In establishing this plan, the Hertford Town Council provides a framework for the Town Manager to organize budgets and projects on an annual basis to ensure consistent progress is made against major goals and initiatives over a much longer period of time. A clearly articulated strategic plan creates an increased sense of responsibility at all organizational levels while providing a clear and objective standard to which residents can hold their elected officials and government staff accountable.

The Town of Hertford Strategic Plan was initially created by the Town Council and Town Manager based on formal and informal inputs from our residents and other stakeholders. The Plan is a living document and will be updated periodically as the Town's needs and desires evolve moving forward.

Mission

Grow Hertford into a first-class community to live, work, play, and visit through increased economic opportunity for residents and businesses, improved housing, and more accessible youth programs, while maintaining an affordable cost of living.

Values

- We are one community of many voices, all with the same right to be heard and respected
- We are one community of many needs, all of which must be met for our shared success
- We must provide residents with opportunities to escape the cycle of poverty
- We must invest in and protect our youth to guarantee the future of our Town
- We must ensure every dollar we spend is put toward the item of greatest positive impact
- We must regain the public trust by speaking truth, being transparent, and listening always.

SWOT Analysis

Based on Town of Hertford Economic Development Strategic Plan (2018) with Updates (2022)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful waterfront & River • Historic properties • Preserved Historic S-Bridge span • Retirees ready to engage • Beautiful architecture • Modern library • Ground transportation assets (ICPTA) • Affordability • Colleges and universities are nearby • New Art Gallery/Artistic community • Natural resources • New Youth Center • New Assisted Living Facility 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distressed Housing • Absentee owners • Gateways need attention • Broadband access is poor • No community college campus in Perquimans • Out migration • Low employment opportunities • Low skilled workforce • Lack of medical professionals • Aging / failing infrastructure
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once-in-a-generation federal infrastructure funding opportunities • Connectivity with Hampton Roads Region • Partnerships with colleges and universities • Collaboration with County and other nearby partners • State Theater Property • New I-87 improvements • HarborTown Project & Albemarle Loop • Marketing plan update • Waterfront development potential • Opportunity Zone designations • Marine Industrial Park 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town has a limited footprint for growth • New I-87 may bypass Hertford, route unknown • Flat tax base (may change after next round of reassessments) • Economic downturn may discourage external investment and limit borrowing opportunities • Retail growth outside of Town threatens to reduce business customers and visitors

STRATEGIC GOALS

- 1. An attractive historic waterfront community for tourist and residents**
Preserve our historic housing stock and commercial spaces, improve, and maintain existing public spaces and provide a new community gathering space to attract tourism and citizens to our downtown.
- 2. A finance plan to identify funding for current projects and guide Town finances into the future.**
Identify grant opportunities, create financial policies, identify current assets, prepare, and follow rate studies, refinance debt, and explore partners to create a financial plan to fund community improvements and establish a culture of growing within means.
- 3. Best practice administration operations**
Utilize technology, personnel evaluation system, and merit pay to enable staff to excel and improve operating efficiencies.
- 4. A well-maintained Infrastructure and best practice utility operations**
Provide quality utilities and utility services in an efficient manner. Establish a level of service to be achieved through staffing, a Capital Improvement Plan for infrastructure repair, and use of technology.
- 5. A well-informed citizenry and visitors**
Improve communications to guide visitors and keep citizens informed.

ACTION PLAN

1. **An attractive historic waterfront community for tourist and citizens**
Preserve our historic housing stock and commercial spaces, improve, and maintain existing public spaces and provide a new community gathering space to attract tourism and citizens to our downtown.

a. **Objective: Repair and improve street surfaces in the river front and downtown (following underground and infrastructure repairs)**

Strategies:

1. *Conduct a pavement condition study to prioritize repairs and quantify the costs*
2. *Develop an annual or bi-annual budget repair and resurfacing program*
3. *Prepare a Request for Proposal to bid the project*
4. *Select a vendor/award contract*

b. **Objective: Repair, improve, and install sidewalks in the river front and downtown (following underground and infrastructure repairs)**

Strategies:

1. *Select a firm to design, bid, and manage the project*
2. *Select a vendor/award contract*
3. *Close out grant*

c. **Objective: Create a community gathering space**

Strategies:

1. *Identify a well located property*
2. *Develop a plan for the space*
3. *Identify funding to develop the plan*
4. *Bid the construction of the plan*
5. *Select a vendor/award contract*

d. **Objective: Improve housing stock and appearance of town**

Strategies:

1. *Secure Code Enforcement services through hiring staff (planner/code enforcement), sharing with another community or contracting*
2. *Budget to enforce codes and carry out clean up as needed*
3. *Enforce nuisance and junk car ordinances*
4. *Enforce minimum housing standards*
5. *Place liens on property for town expenses due to non-compliance*
6. *Coordinate with county on foreclosures to collect or secure the ownership of the property*

7. *Determine options for housing displaced tenants*
8. *Determine goals for housing improvement (meet minimum standards, for sale, outside appearance only, etc.)*
9. *Develop criteria to use code enforcement fee debt forgiveness to incent housing improvements and guarantees to meet goals*
10. *Amend code enforcement fee debt forgiveness policy to match new goals*

e. Objective Develop plan for utilization of foreclosed properties

Strategies:

1. *Identify properties most likely to be foreclosed and become town property*
2. *Decide best use of individual and combined properties*
3. *Develop plan (single family, duplex, condos) for each property to achieve town goals*
4. *Identify and partner as needed with developers or builders to buy improve and sell properties*

f. Prevent further deterioration of and improve commercial buildings

Strategies:

1. *Investigate a Demolition by Neglect (DBN) ordinance*
2. *Seek County building and standards help enforcing the DBN ordinance or minimum standards*
3. *Budget funds to enforce the ordinance (town make repairs)*
4. *Adopt and enforce the ordinance or minimum standards*
5. *Consider using tax back grants like those used for industry to incent improvements*
6. *Façade grants are an option if money is available*

g. Develop amenities for citizens and tourists in the Downtown and River Front

Strategies:

1. *Identify locations for electric car charging stations*
2. *Secure funding for electric car charging stations*
3. *Review and amend zoning ordinances as needed to allow murals*
4. *Create guidelines for murals (content, area where they are allowed, approval process, artist selection process, etc.)*
5. *Identify and secure rights for murals*
6. *Select artists*
7. *Paint murals*
8. *Work with new cable provider to provide free Wi-Fi downtown*
9. *Secure/manage parking using leases and purchase to avoid inefficient use by owners/others*

10. Provide public restrooms downtown

h. Objective: Secure and improve vehicle and pedestrian access through Barrow Alley

Strategies:

1. *Secure right of way as needed*
2. *Engineer and install utilities necessary for future growth. Create an alley improvement plan to allow paving for cars and safe pedestrian access to the Church parking lot*
3. *Identify funding for the improvements*
4. *Seek bids for the improvements*
5. *Select a vendor/award contract*

i. Objective: Continue to Implement the Community and Waterfront Plan

Strategies:

1. *Design extension of retaining wall and boardwalk*
2. *Identify funding*
3. *Bid project*

j. Objective: Continue Harbor Town Project

Strategies: See Harbor Town Project Plan for action steps

1. *Accommodate fast ferries at town dock*
2. *Accommodate dinner boat*
3. *Temporarily utilize a barge at the town dock*
4. *Use the S-Bridge once it is in place*

k. Objective: Bury overhead wires to improve appearance

Strategies:

1. *Develop a co-bury agreement with new cable provider*
2. *Develop a plan/policy to install conduit everywhere we dig for water/sewer and stormwater pipes*

l. Objective: Recruit a hotel to the Waterfront

Strategies:

1. *Identify suitable sites and discuss with owners*
2. *Identify hotel developers in the region and meet with them*

2. A finance plan to identify funding for current projects and guide town finances into the future.

Identify grant opportunities, create financial policies, identify current assets, prepare, and follow rate studies, refinance debt, and explore partners to create a financial plan to fund community improvements and establish a culture of growing within means.

a. Objective: Refinance Debt

Strategies:

- 1. Identify and select firms that work with local government on refinancing and financial plans*
- 2. Select and contract with a firm*
- 3. Review financing proposal and take action*

b. Objective: Create a system to secure and manage grants

Strategies:

- 1. Hold a funding summit*
- 2. Utilize Albemarle Commission grant services*
- 3. Contact NCLM about services to manage ARP funds*
- 4. Utilize CERRI services*
- 5. Identify grant services through engineering services assisting with utility infrastructure*
- 6. Develop and use a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to better inform the financial plan*
- 7. The grant process will be ongoing as projects are identified and planned*

c. Objective: Effectively utilize existing resources

Strategies:

- 1. Inventory all town owned property*
- 2. Identify properties that are and will be needed for town operations*
- 3. Establish a value for the properties considered to be excess*
- 4. Establish a plan (in-house or broker) to market/sell the properties*
- 5. Consult the Development Finance Initiative at the UNC School of Government concerning selling or developing the large parcel owned by the town on the water*
- 6. Send DFI existing demographic, market, and other studies from their scope of work. Use DFI to study possibility of location new school and housing on town property*
- 7. Bring amended DFI proposal to council for action*

d. Objective: Develop Financial Plan

Strategies:

- 1. Utilize a finance firm to develop a financial plan incorporating potential grant funding, financing and selling assets*
- 2. Complete Utility rate study and incorporate into financial plan*
- 3. Complete water and sewer assessments and incorporate project needs into plan*

e. Objective: Establish a culture of having and following best financial practices

Strategies:

- 1. Review and update or create policies and procedures to guide debt limits, fund balances, utility rates and purchasing*

3. Best practice administration operations

Utilize technology, personnel evaluation system, and merit pay to enable staff to excel and improve operating efficiencies

a. Objective: Utilize smart meters in utility systems

Strategies:

- 1. Continue to implement the plan to install and utilize electric smart meters for the electric system*
- 2. Identify smart water meter providers*
- 3. Identify radio read user towns and verify their satisfaction*
- 4. Interview providers to determine the system that best fits current billing software or reading needs*
- 5. Secure a bid(s) for the system*
- 6. Identify funding for purchase and installation*
- 7. Award contract*
- 8. Notify/inform citizens of impact and possibilities*

b. Objective: Using GIS to create a better system for cemetery recordkeeping

Strategies:

- 1. Continue conversion from paper maps to GIS*

- c. **Objective: Develop program to evaluate staff performance, identify individual goals to achieve and training needs for growth, and recognize strong staff performance.**

Strategies:

1. *Review MAPS pay plan to get employees up to market*
2. *Create a simple performance evaluation process that identifies what the employee has done well (previous year goals), could improve on, needs from their supervisor and expects to achieve over the next year*
3. *Conduct evaluation no less than annually but visit goal progress frequently. Annual evaluations can be on employee anniversary date, before new calendar or fiscal year, or using some other timing*
4. *Budget for a merit increase pool of funds in the budget*
5. *Utilize the evaluation system to award merit increases and improve or remove employees*

- d. **Objective: Submit audit on time**

Strategies:

1. *As records can be closed out (payroll, accounts payable, etc), prepare them for the auditor as soon as possible. Seek temporary assistance if needed*
2. *Schedule the auditor visit for a time when you anticipate records will be complete (adjust visit as needed)*
3. *Document schedules and dates to show LGC if the delay is due to the auditor*
4. *Press auditor to complete audit and meet LGC deadline*

4. **A well-maintained Infrastructure and best practice utility operations**
Provide quality utilities and utility services in an efficient manner. Establish a level of service to be achieved through staffing, a Capital Improvement Plan for infrastructure repair and use of technology.

- a. **Objective: Establish a level of service**

Strategies:

1. *Use staff and focus groups discuss an accepted level of service including fixed dates for meter reading, billing, collection, cutoffs. Include policies for leak settlement*
2. *Write up the level service and policy and educate staff as to what expectations are to achieve the level of service*
3. *Include level of service goals in annual evaluation goals for staff*
4. *Using the level of service for each utility determine the level of staffing required to achieve the goal*

5. *Write and rewrite job descriptions as needed and fill positions through new hires and promotions*
6. *See below about Public Works operations*

b. Objective: Improve the performance of Public Works staff

Strategies:

1. *Identify vacant positions and those not performing up to standard*
2. *Create a preferred organizational chart for the department (utilities, public works/street/solid waste)*
3. *Create job descriptions for leadership positions (others as needed)*
4. *Advertise the positions*
5. *Hire best applicants using signing bonuses, incentives to secure certifications, bonuses or tenure*
6. *Use part-time and temporary certification until positions can be filled*

c. Objective: Using water and wastewater assessments to improve Infrastructure

Strategies:

1. *Complete water and wastewater assessments*
2. *Include funding options for priorities from the assessments in the financial plan*
3. *Select an engineer to design the improvements, bid the projects and manage the construction*

d. Objective: Consider renegotiation/merger with Winfall

Strategies:

1. *Conduct a financial assessment of the merger including costs to implement and revenues and expenses to operate*
2. *Make LGC aware of impact on Hertford*
3. *Negotiate the agreement/merger*
4. *Progress notes*
5. *Staff is to meet and discuss with Winfall*

5. A well-informed citizenry and visitors

Improve communications to guide visitors and keep residents informed.

a. Objective: A brand/tagline for Hertford

Strategies:

1. *Gather a list of marketing firms/individuals*
2. *Secure bids for the work*
3. *Interview them, select one to create a brand for Hertford*
4. *Adopt the brand*
5. *Use the brand on all town correspondence, signs, vehicles, building, website, etc.*

b. Objective: Wayfinding signage to direct residents and visitors to key places in Town

Strategies:

1. *Gather a list of firms or individuals that create, plan, and install wayfinding signage*
2. *Secure bids to design the signage and placement*
3. *Interview and select a firm*
4. *Review and adopt a design and plan*
5. *Implement the plan beginning at the highway*
6. *Complete the implementation as the waterfront and your new community space near completion*

c. Objective: A website to provide up-to-date information for citizens and visitors

Strategies:

1. *Assess current provider and decide if a change is needed*
2. *Pursue more flexibility to allow easier posting of new information*
3. *Update information throughout the site*
4. *Post policies and other information to help citizens understand how the town works*
5. *Freshen content frequently (assign someone to manage content)*

d. Objective: Better Utilize Catalis

Strategies:

1. *Ensure staff is trained to utilize all the modules offered, i.e., website, mass emails, citizen survey, etc.*