



CITY OF ISHPEMING
CITY COUNCIL
STRATEGIC PLAN
2026-2030

INTRODUCTION

The City of Ishpeming Strategic Plan (2026–2030) provides a shared framework to guide City Council priorities, policy decisions, and investments over the next five years. It reflects input from residents, City Council members, City staff, and community partners and is rooted in Ishpeming’s history, neighborhoods, and community identity while focused on shaping a clear and practical path forward.

This plan is intended to clarify City Council’s priorities and role, support informed and consistent decision-making, improve coordination across City efforts, and strengthen communication and trust with residents.

This document is strategic, not prescriptive. It does not replace existing plans such as the City’s Master Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, Parks and Recreation Plan, Downtown Development plans, or the work of boards and commissions. Instead, it serves as an umbrella plan that helps City Council align decisions and investments across multiple efforts. As is the case with those other plans, all decisions made using this plan should be tied to existing processes including the Capital Improvements Plan and staff capacity.

The Strategic Plan is a living document. It is expected to evolve as conditions change, opportunities arise, and progress is made.



COMMUNITY HISTORY AND PLANNING CONTEXT

The City of Ishpeming’s identity is deeply shaped by its history as a mining community, its role as a regional center for recreation and culture, and its long-standing tradition of civic pride and resilience. From its founding on the Marquette Iron Range to its evolution as a complete small city, Ishpeming has consistently adapted to economic, demographic, and social change while retaining a strong sense of place.

Over the past decade, the City has undertaken a series of intentional planning efforts aimed at positioning Ishpeming for long-term stability, reinvestment, and quality of life. In 2019, the City completed a Downtown Assessment and Redevelopment Strategy focused on walkability, historic preservation, mixed-use redevelopment, and public space improvements. The 2022–2027 Master Plan followed, providing a comprehensive framework for land use, housing, economic development, infrastructure, downtown development, and quality of life.

More recently, the City adopted the 2024–2029 Parks and Recreation Plan, recognizing parks, trails, and recreation as essential services and economic drivers. In 2025, the City completed a Marketing and Branding Strategy as part of its Redevelopment Ready Communities efforts, articulating an authentic brand rooted in Ishpeming’s history, recreation assets, affordability, and rugged creativity—captured in the tagline “Rooted in Community. Fueled by Adventure.”

What has been less explicit is a unifying framework to help City Council translate multiple plans into annual priorities, communicate clearly with residents about tradeoffs, and maintain continuity through leadership transitions. This Strategic Plan fills that gap. It is rooted in prior planning work and reflects a moment when the City has both momentum and capacity to be more intentional about how decisions are aligned, communicated, and prioritized.



STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The strategic planning process was facilitated by the Lake Superior Community Partnership (LSCP) and included review of existing City plans and studies, a community-wide strategic survey, a parallel City Council strategic survey, a facilitated City Council work session (October 29, 2025), a public open house and visioning exercise (October 30, 2025), and supplemental outreach including paper surveys. Michigan State University Extension was subcontracted to provide professional, third-party facilitation of the council work session and community open house stations.

The public open house drew residents from across the community who participated in focus-area comment stations and an open-ended “A Perfect Ishpeming” visioning exercise. Together, these sessions generated hundreds of individual responses reflecting resident priorities, aspirations, and concerns. That data was the true driver of the five focus areas found in this strategic plan.

Following the two work sessions, the LSCP team received a report from MSU Extension that was then shared with Council. The LSCP proceeded to develop this strategic plan document, sharing updates with Council as progress was made. The final version of the plan was recommended to Council in April 2026.

PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN FOR CITY COUNCIL

This Strategic Plan supports City Council in its role as Ishpeming’s policy-setting and priority-setting body. It helps Council:

- Focus on long-term priorities rather than individual projects
- Align policies, funding, and partnerships
- Guide staff and boards without micromanaging
- Communicate priorities clearly to residents
- Provide continuity during leadership transitions

City Council’s role is not to implement every action directly, but to set direction, enable partnerships, steward resources, and reinforce shared expectations.

HOW THIS PLAN SUPPORTS OTHER PLANS AND BOARDS

Ishpeming’s City Council operates within a governance structure that includes the City Manager, Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority, Parks and Recreation Commission, and other boards and advisory bodies. This Strategic Plan is intended to strengthen—not override or duplicate—the work of those bodies.

The Planning Commission guides land use and zoning decisions in accordance with the Master Plan. The Downtown Development Authority leads business attraction, façade programs, and downtown activation. The Parks and Recreation Commission stewards the City’s outdoor assets and implements the Parks and Recreation Plan. Each body has defined authority and expertise that Council relies on and supports.

Council’s role in this framework is to set overarching direction, align resources through the budget process, appoint capable board members, and hold itself and partner bodies accountable to shared outcomes. Where this plan identifies actions, the intent is for Council to adopt, authorize, or formally direct the appropriate body—not to act as the implementing party.

This distinction matters. When Council stays at the policy and governance level, it empowers staff and boards to do their best work, makes better use of limited time, and builds the institutional trust that allows Ishpeming to move faster and further on its priorities.



COMMUNITY VISION

The City of Ishpeming is a welcoming, community-oriented place rooted in its neighborhoods, history, and sense of place, supported by dependable and connected infrastructure that allows residents to thrive. Parks, trails, local businesses, and a people-friendly downtown create places to gather and connect, while collaboration, sustainability, and shared pride guide the city forward.

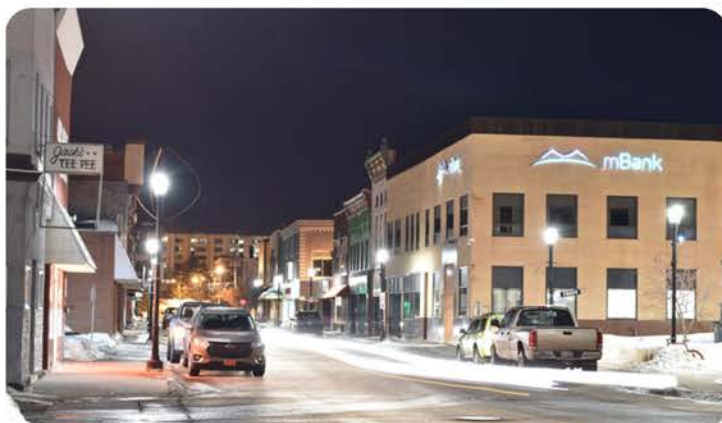
STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS (2026–2030)

The following five focus areas reflect where City Council leadership can have the greatest influence over the next five years. Each includes community context, recent momentum, Council’s role, and an action table with concrete steps, lead responsibility, and suggested timeline. Not every action will be pursued. This plan is designed to support thoughtful prioritization, not create obligation and it will change over time.



To keep the plan relevant and achievable, Council will annually review the plan early in the budget process to establish 3 – 5 priority action items from the plan for the upcoming year. This will be done in partnership with the City Manager and key staff to ensure City resources and capacity align with the chosen priorities. Not all focus areas are required to have a priority action each year as some may require other actions to set the foundation. For example, in Year 1 Council may wish to focus on establishing key programs or processes in the Community & Civic Pride focus area as that can add capacity for more complex items in other focus areas for future years. A typical annual prioritization process may look as follows:





VIBRANT AND WALKABLE DOWNTOWN

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Downtown Ishpeming is the symbolic and functional heart of the community. Engagement consistently emphasized walkability, active storefronts, historic preservation, and gathering spaces not as a new priority but as a longstanding one with renewed momentum. Residents called for more restaurant and dining options, incentives to activate vacant buildings, and programming that brings energy to Main Street year-round. Council members noted the challenge of business attraction and pointed to nearby examples of other communities taking a more proactive approach to their downtown development. Changing the narrative about Ishpeming emerged as a priority in itself – residents see progress happening and want to help tell that story.

RECENT MOMENTUM

Recent business openings, reinvestment activity, and the launch of the “Rooted in Community. Fueled by Adventure.” brand give the City new tools to project a consistent, authentic identity. The Downtown Development Authority is an evolving partner with increasing capacity for business attraction, façade programs, and activation. The recent partnership between the DDA and the Lake Superior Community Partnership to create the DDA’s first-ever Liaison position has greatly expanded the capacity of the DDA in the past six months.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council signals downtown vitality as a community-wide priority, aligns policy and investment decisions, and ensures the DDA has the direction and resources it needs to succeed. Council sets the tone and expectations; the DDA and City Manager lead implementation. Council reviews DDA progress against shared goals through the annual budget and work plan process.

POSSIBLE METRICS

The following are core metrics Council should track annually to measure progress on this focus area:

- Total taxable value of Downtown properties
- Number of new business starts in the downtown
- Number of community event attendees in the downtown

VIBRANT AND WALKABLE DOWNTOWN

Category	Action	Who Leads	Timeline
Policy & Direction	Adopt a formal resolution reaffirming downtown vitality as a core City priority	Council	Year 1
Policy & Direction	Review and update policies on adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, and historic building rehabilitation	Planning Commission	Year 2
Policy & Direction	Continue holding an annual joint meeting between the Council and DDA to ensure shared priorities are clearly communicated.	Council & DDA	Annual
Investment	Prioritize downtown sidewalks, lighting, and streetscape improvements in the Capital Improvement Plan	City Manager + Council	Year 2
Investment	Direct the City Manager and DDA Liaison to evaluate options for strategic use of City-owned downtown properties and report back to Council	City Manager w/ support from DDA Liaison	Year 3
Investment	Ensure DDA work plan and budget align with Council's downtown goals through formal annual review	Council → DDA	Annual
Partnership	Direct the DDA to develop a building activation and business attraction strategy with specific targets for vacant storefront reuse	DDA	Year 3
Partnership	Direct the DDA to prioritize recruitment of gathering-oriented businesses (restaurants, cafés) as a measurable annual goal	DDA	Ongoing
Communication	Host a downtown-focused listening session with business owners, property owners, and residents to understand DDA needs, opportunities, and challenges	Council	Annually, beginning in Year 2





STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING CHOICES

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Housing availability, affordability, and neighborhood conditions were raised throughout engagement as concerns for households at every stage of life. Residents and Council alike called for blight reduction, infill development on vacant parcels, and activation of underutilized City-owned land. Interest in diverse housing types—duplexes, tiny homes, move-in-ready options—was strong. The Anderson Block was specifically named as a development opportunity. Community members also noted the connection between strong neighborhoods and school vitality.

RECENT MOMENTUM

Early progress on housing discussions, work to identify developable parcels, and regional conversations at the Marquette County level reflect growing recognition that proactive planning—not reactive responses to individual proposals—is essential. Ready-to-go site planning and alternative housing models are gaining traction as practical approaches. The City has recently identified some notable housing development opportunities and is also in the process of securing additional land which may be used for housing.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council drives housing outcomes through zoning and land-use policy, budget decisions, and formal direction to the City Manager and Planning Commission. Council sets clear housing principles and expectations, then relies on the Planning Commission for technical work and the City Manager for coordination with developers and regional partners.

POSSIBLE METRICS

The following are core metrics Council should track annually to measure progress on this focus area:

- Number of new and rehabilitated housing units in the city
- Number of city-owned sites successfully redeveloped to add new housing
- Number of neighborhood-led events



STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING CHOICES

Category	Action	Who Leads	Timeline
Policy	Adopt shared housing principles to guide all future land-use and investment decisions	Council	Year 2
Policy	Direct the Planning Commission to review zoning regulations for clarity and flexibility, with a focus on diverse housing types	Council → Planning Commission	Year 2
Policy	Formally signal openness to innovative housing models including tiny homes, duplexes, and ADUs through zoning updates or policy statement	Council + Planning Commission	Year 2
Policy	Direct staff and the Planning Commission to report annually on housing inventory, vacancy, and need	City Manager + Planning Commission	Annual
Land & Sites	Direct the City Manager to inventory City-owned parcels suitable for housing and present options to Council with disposition recommendations	City Manager	Year 1
Land & Sites	Adopt a 'Ready to Go' site strategy, with staff identifying and preparing shovel-ready sites to attract private housing investment	Council → City Manager	Year 3
Land & Sites	Direct the City Manager to develop and present options for housing development at the Anderson Block	City Manager	Year 2
Neighborhood	Reinforce blight reduction as a policy priority and direct staff to report on enforcement activity and outcomes quarterly	Blight Committee	Ongoing
Neighborhood	Develop a rehabilitation incentive program to complement enforcement	City Manager	Year 3
Engagement	Authorize and direct the City Manager to design and implement a Neighborhood Ambassadors Program	City Manager	Year 2
Engagement	Host at least one neighborhood-based listening session annually on housing and neighborhood conditions	Council	Annual



SAFE, CONNECTED, AND RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Infrastructure – roads in particular – ranked as the top urgent resident priority in engagement. Council members noted that roads and DPW capacity are foundational, not discretionary. Residents called for a transparent road prioritization plan and a DPW with the capacity to maintain safe conditions. Beyond roads, residents called for sidewalks to be restored where removed, multimodal street design, improved wayfinding, and connections between neighborhoods, downtown, schools, and recreation assets. Specific corridors including Malton Road, Lakeshore Drive, and Third Street were named as streetscape priorities. While not stated explicitly during discussions, any conversation around infrastructure must be considered within the budgetary realities of municipal governments in Michigan. Recent changes to the state’s road funding system have established the Neighborhood Roads Fund which will send additional dollars directly to local governments, but still not enough cover the decades of deferred maintenance.

RECENT MOMENTUM

Ongoing infrastructure investments reflect sustained commitment to Ishpeming’s built environment. The Parks and Recreation Plan and Downtown Assessment both reinforce viewing roads, sidewalks, and trails as an integrated system. Transparent prioritization processes help Council make defensible decisions and maintain public trust.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council adopts the Capital Improvement Plan, sets expectations for how priorities are determined, and ensures the City Manager has direction and budget authority to resource the DPW. Council asks strategic questions about long-term stewardship and tradeoffs; operational details belong with DPW staff and the City Manager. As Council focuses on the actions in this area, it must keep in mind its obligation to tie infrastructure decisions to the Capital Improvements Plan and budget realities. This likely requires Council to think more long-term about this focus area than any of the others due to existing systems.

POSSIBLE METRICS

The following are core metrics Council should track annually to measure progress on this focus area:

- Total miles of local roads constructed/fixed
- Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER)
- Number of policy actions completed



SAFE, CONNECTED, AND RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Category	Action	Who Leads	Timeline
Priority-Setting	Adopt a formal long-term road prioritization framework and direct staff to apply it consistently in CIP planning	Council → City Manager	Year 2
Priority-Setting	Require the City Manager to include a DPW staffing and equipment needs assessment in each annual budget submission	Council → City Manager	Annual
Priority-Setting	Require lifecycle cost and maintenance impact analysis as part of any significant capital decision	Council	Ongoing
Priority-Setting	Hold at least one infrastructure-focused work session per year with the City Manager and DPW to review priorities and condition data	Council	Annual
Connectivity	Direct that sidewalks, trails, and safe pedestrian routes be weighted in CIP prioritization alongside road condition	Council → City Manager	Year 2
Connectivity	Direct the City Manager to evaluate streetscape opportunities on Malton Road, Lakeshore Drive, and Third Street and bring a prioritized recommendation to Council	City Manager	Year 2
Connectivity	Adopt a policy position supporting multimodal transportation planning in all future street design and reconstruction projects	Council	Year 3
Connectivity	Direct staff to develop a citywide wayfinding and signage improvement plan	City Manager	Year 4
Communication	Establish a standard practice of presenting infrastructure tradeoffs in plain language when competing capital needs arise	City Manager	Ongoing





PARKS, RECREATION, ARTS, AND COMMUNITY LIFE

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Ishpeming’s recreation and cultural assets are among its greatest competitive advantages. Parks, trails, outdoor facilities, arts, and community events ranked as both investment priorities and sources of community pride. Residents called for better utilization of Al Quaal and the winter sports complex, continued Brasswire Campground development, and improvements to Lake Bancroft. The Suicide Hill Ski Jumping Tournament’s 138-year legacy is a signature asset that defines Ishpeming’s identity. Residents also expressed strong interest in re-establishing Nordic ski culture, expanding the skate park, building a bandshell, adding a splash pad, and supporting signature cultural events including the Pow Wow and Blueberry Fest.

RECENT MOMENTUM

The 2024–2029 Parks and Recreation Plan provides a Council-adopted framework for prioritizing investments and maintenance. A recent land purchase creates new opportunities to expand outdoor facilities, trails, and beach access. Strong volunteer and partner networks—including the ISC trail system—amplify City capacity. Recognition of recreation and arts as economic drivers reinforces the case for sustained investment.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council ensures budget allocations keep pace with the Parks and Recreation Plan, provides clear direction to the Parks and Recreation Commission, and recognizes recreation and arts as contributors to economic development and Ishpeming’s brand. The Parks and Recreation Commission brings implementation recommendations to Council; Council provides resources and direction.

POSSIBLE METRICS

The following are core metrics Council should track annually to measure progress on this focus area:

- Number of grants for recreation amenities applied for (DNR, MDARD, etc.)
- Number of actions from the Parks & Recreation Plan completed
- Number of attendees at public events in the city

SAFE, CONNECTED, AND RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Category	Action	Who Leads	Timeline
Investment	Require annual Parks and Recreation Commission report on implementation progress against the 2024–2029 Parks and Recreation Plan, tied to CIP and budget review	Parks & Rec Commission	Annual
Investment	Direct the City Manager to incorporate the new land purchase into a Parks and Recreation Plan update through a formal public process	City Manager	Year 2
Investment	Include Brasswire Campground, Lake Bancroft, and Al Quaal maintenance and enhancement needs in the annual CIP process	City Manager + Parks & Rec Commission	Annual
Investment	Direct the Parks and Recreation Commission to evaluate high-priority community amenity requests—including a splash pad and expanded skate park—and bring cost and partnership options to Council	Parks & Rec Commission	Year 2
Activation	Direct staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission to pursue event and arts partnerships, including a bandshell feasibility study	City Manager + Parks & Rec Commission	Year 2
Activation	Formally recognize the Suicide Hill Ski Jumping Tournament, the Pow Wow, and Blueberry Fest as strategic community assets and direct staff to identify appropriate City support for each	Council → City Manager	Year 1
Activation	Establish a policy expectation that recreation assets are actively promoted through the City’s brand and marketing strategy	Council → City Manager	Year 3
Communication	Publicly recognize volunteer and partner contributions to parks and recreation annually as part of Council’s public communications	Council	Annual
Communication	Establish an annual public report on Parks and Recreation Plan and Strategic Plan progress as a shared accountability mechanism	City Manager	Annual





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND COMMUNITY PRIDE

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Residents expressed a desire for stronger two-way communication with City leadership and a more inclusive approach to civic participation throughout every phase of engagement. People want to understand how decisions are made, feel that their input matters, and see City Council as accessible and accountable. A hopeful undercurrent ran through the process: residents believe Ishpeming is making real progress and want to help change the community’s narrative.

Youth engagement emerged as a widely supported priority. Residents called for a Youth Council, programming for teens and young adults, youth involvement in downtown and community initiatives, and spaces like the skate park where younger residents can gather and feel ownership. Seniors were also highlighted – ideas like “senior storytelling” reflect a desire to honor long-time residents and integrate them meaningfully into civic life.

RECENT MOMENTUM

New City leadership, refreshed branding, and this strategic planning process itself represent meaningful steps toward more inclusive and transparent governance. The “Rooted in Community. Fueled by Adventure.” brand provides a framework for consistent, authentic storytelling. Sustaining this momentum requires treating engagement as an ongoing practice, not a periodic event.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council sets the tone for how the City engages residents and models the transparency and accessibility it wants the community to experience. Council authorizes civic structures like a Youth Council, sets clear engagement expectations across the organization, and uses the City’s brand and communication tools to tell Ishpeming’s story honestly and optimistically. The City Manager and staff implement engagement programs; Council provides direction, authorization, and accountability. As many of these potential actions would result in new programs or activities, Council should take extra care to factor in necessary staffing and resources prior to committing to them.

POSSIBLE METRICS

The following are core metrics Council should track annually to measure progress on this focus area:

- Number of attendees at City Council listening sessions
- Percentage of residents who feel connected to Council (Require annual Pulse survey)
- Percentage of residents who feel the City is on the “Right Track” (Require annual Pulse survey)

SAFE, CONNECTED, AND RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Category	Action	Who Leads	Timeline
Youth Engagement	Adopt a resolution authorizing a Youth Council, with the City Manager responsible for structure, recruitment, and implementation	Council → City Manager	Year 3
Youth Engagement	Set a formal expectation that youth voices are reflected in relevant City decisions affecting recreation, downtown, and neighborhoods	Council	Year 2
Youth Engagement	Include skate park expansion and other youth-focused amenities in the CIP process, with the Parks and Recreation Commission providing a recommendation	Parks & Rec Commission	Ongoing
Inclusive Engagement	Adopt inclusive engagement standards that apply across all City planning and public input processes	Council	Year 3
Inclusive Engagement	Direct the City Manager to implement varied outreach approaches beyond formal meetings, including digital tools, pop-up outreach, and neighborhood conversations	City Manager	Year 2
Inclusive Engagement	Direct the City Manager to design and implement a Neighborhood Ambassadors Program	City Manager	Year 1
Inclusive Engagement	Establish a formal mechanism for seniors to contribute to City storytelling and civic processes	City Manager	Year 4
Communication	Implement an annual “Pulse Survey” to capture information on progress and current feelings of residents	Council	Year 1
Communication	Direct the City Manager to ensure all City communications use language consistent with adopted brand standards	City Manager	Ongoing
Communication	Model open, candid communication about progress and tradeoffs in all public Council meetings and communications	Council	Ongoing
Communication	Highlight partnerships, volunteer efforts, and local successes in Council communications to reinforce Ishpeming’s momentum	Council	Ongoing



MEASURING & REPORTING PROGRESS

No plan is complete without a clear process for measuring progress and reporting results to an organization's key stakeholders. For City Council, those key stakeholders are its residents and businesses. In order to provide an ongoing structure for measuring progress, Council will do the following:

1. Conduct a "Pulse" survey annually in the early fall as part of budget preparations. This will allow the city to collect key metrics and also gather feedback on which items should be prioritized in the upcoming year.
2. Hold downtown-focused, neighborhood-based, and topic-specific sessions, as well as joint conversations with boards, commissions, and partners. These sessions are for listening, clarifying, and aligning – not for negotiating individual projects or substituting for staff and board work.
3. Provide a full annual report on the progress of this plan. The report should include the core metrics, progress on the previous year's priorities, and overall progress on the plan. It should be written in plain language and made readily available on the city's communications channels.

While the budget process is a natural time for assessing progress and setting strategic plan priorities, Council may conduct its annual reporting and surveying activities during a different time of year if it so chooses.

CONCLUSION

The City of Ishpeming Strategic Plan (2026–2030) reflects a shared commitment to thoughtful leadership, collaboration, and long-term progress. Rooted in the community's history, identity, and prior planning work—and in the voices of residents who showed up to share their vision for a better Ishpeming—this plan gives City Council a practical framework to guide decisions, engage residents, and continue building a strong, connected, and resilient community.

