



STRATEGIC PLAN

2023 - 2025

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LETTER FROM THE MAYOR AND CITY MANAGER

To the City of Barre Community:

Our city, like the rest of our state, nation, and the world, has undergone significant changes in the past two years. The global pandemic dramatically altered the way we live, work, and join together in community. Other macro trends, whether they be economic, socio-political, social justice, and racial, to name just a few, are also impacting our lives in dramatic ways.

Closer to home, we are also undergoing great change in our City. Our City Council reflects relatively new leaders and leadership, and we are transitioning from our long-tenured City Manager to a new leader who will manage our City administration. Within our community, we are seeing shifts in our local economy, increased need for housing across many levels of income, and continued strain on our infrastructure -- both the physical infrastructure as well as the capacity of our workforce to meet the many and varied needs of our City

So, at this moment of significant change, the Council and Administration agreed on the need to develop a strategic plan for the City of Barre. This plan sets out a shared vision and mission, along with five priority areas of focus for the next three years. It also provides a framework for priority setting and a way of collaborative work for our collective City Government -- elected and appointed -- to optimize our limited resources to continue to create, as our mission statement describes, an inclusive community where all of our residents have the opportunity to thrive and become part of Barre's rich history and future.

We want to thank the many City employees and volunteers who provided input to this planning process, as well as all of the residents that have shared their perspectives with our elected and appointed officials in both formal and informal ways over the past few years.

Sincerely

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Mayor

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OUR PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process was launched in April 2022. The City of Barre engaged Fio Partners, LLC, as its strategic planning consultant partner to develop the City's strategic plan. Information was gathered from several sources to capture perspectives on priorities for the City, including:

- Interviews with City administration leaders and City Councilors
- Review of current City plans, initiatives, and priorities
- Input and updates from City committees regarding current and planned work
- Survey of City committee members and City employees on City assets, needs, and priorities

The information gathered was shared with the City Council and City Administration leadership team members at an in-person retreat in June 2022. At the retreat, the Council and Staff provided input on a vision for City and City Government, criteria for setting priorities for the City, proposed priorities, and a way of work to advance these priorities over the next three years. A situational assessment (Appendix 1) provides additional context for the priorities and strategies outlined in the plan.

VISION AND MISSION

Our Vision for Barre City¹

We envision a Barre City that:

- Is a great place to work, live, and raise a family
- Is vibrant, with an active downtown, diverse businesses, and a range of activities and opportunities for residents of all ages
- Continues to be well run, well managed, and well-led
- Is financially responsible and sustainable
- Continuously maintains and continually invests in its infrastructure
- Has residents that are civically engaged and actively working on the betterment of our City
- Attracts new residents, businesses, and investments.

Our Vision for Barre City Government

We envision a City Government that:

- Is responsive, inclusive, transparent, and respectful to and for all
- Is proactive, high performing, and provides excellent services that sustain and improve our City and its quality of life
- Reflects a true partnership between elected and appointed officials; works as a cohesive team on shared goals and priorities and leverages each others' respective expertise and roles.
- Has a workforce that is supported, collaborative, sufficient, and efficient

Our Mission²

The mission of Barre City Government is to provide high-quality and responsive municipal services in partnership with our residents to ensure an inclusive community where all of our residents have the opportunity to thrive and become part of Barre's rich history and future.

¹ Current Vision: The City of Barre is a diverse and welcoming community that celebrates our small town character, urban energy, economic vitality and environmental stewardship.

² Current Mission: The City of Barre's mission is to provide affordable, high quality municipal services and a responsive, accessible, local governance to ensure all persons the opportunity to enjoy contributing to, and being a part of, the Barre community

SETTING OUR PRIORITIES

The City Council and City Administration have developed an initial set of criteria to set priorities for the City Government. These criteria broadly fall under the categories of value, cost, and implementability. Together, the City Council and City Administration will seek to use these criteria and the corresponding questions to consider when evaluating its priorities and its initiatives.

CRITERIA	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
VALUE	<p>Is/Does the project/initiative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrated with the overall goals of the City? ● Reduce our risk exposure or potential liability? Is there a compliance risk to be considered? ● Good for the environment of the City? ● Improve the economy of the City? ● A need or a want? ● Further equity or address the needs and interests of underserved/under-resourced populations? ● Urgent? ● Align with our broader mission and vision? ● Save staff time or increase staff efficiency? ● Likely to have opportunity costs?
COST	<p>Is/Does the project/initiative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Affordable (what is the cost), both the initial costs and ongoing operational expenses? ● Connect with other funding opportunities (to help offset costs)? ● Likely to have a positive impact on the City (e.g, grow the grand list)? ● Avoid higher costs in the near future?
IMPLEMENTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Does the staff have the capacity to do this project? ● Does the staff have the time to do this project? ● Is contracting the project out a viable option? ● Does the project have multiple steps? ● What projects/workstreams will be put aside?
PRIORITIZATION FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding/financing ● Time frame/urgency ● Ability to engage people to do the work (City employees and/or contracted vendors) ● Importance to community

OUR GOALS FOR OUR CITY AND ALL WHO LIVE, WORK, AND VISIT

- 1. To keep Barre affordable for our residents by developing a strong and diversified financial base that grows the grand list.**
- 2. To ensure that our residents and businesses have reliable infrastructure -- including roads, water, sewer, and public buildings -- that meets their needs through continuing to invest in maintenance, upgrades, and replacements.**
- 3. To be a great employer as a City government, attracting, retaining, and developing our workforce to meet and exceed the expectations of our residents.**
- 4. Build on community pride to continue to make it an attractive and safer community for all who work, visit, and live in our City.**
- 5. To continue to align the efforts of City government -- employees, elected officials, and volunteers -- in support of the strategic plan's goals and priorities.**

Goal 1: To keep Barre affordable for our residents by developing a strong and diversified financial base that grows the grand list.

Strategy 1: Prioritize the development of a wide range of housing options as a core component of our economic development strategy

Tactics to Stimulate Infill Development:

- Advocate for the development of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) strategy and playbook for the City to stimulate infill housing development
 - Identify core covenants and requirements for TIF related projects
- Assess the City's current bonding capacity and prioritize bonding goals
- Prioritize areas of the City to serve as special tax districts to develop necessary infrastructure
 - Underperforming properties and assets
 - City-owned properties and assets

Tactics to Stimulate Overall Housing Development

- Develop a plan for real estate development by housing development partners that contributes to the grand list to ensure that there is appropriate tax revenue to offset the costs of services that support new housing
- Renegotiate our relationship with Barre Area Development Corporation
 - Review, evaluate, and potentially modify the current governance model of Barre Area Development to ensure that City leadership is effectively represented on the Board
 - Review and enhance contractual oversight and monitoring of deliverables
- Develop a strategy to pursue state funding for affordable housing (\$250M available)
 - Convene housing development organizations and private developers
- Complete the planning and zoning regulation review process
 - Incorporate the implications of changes as it relates to City services and resources
 - Explore opportunities to develop upper-story housing

Tactics to Strengthen the Existing Housing Stock

- Explore sustainable strategies to ensure code compliance in our rental properties, particularly properties that are owned by absentee landlords
- Review and strengthen housing ordinances, as appropriate, to ensure safety and health of residents in rental housing.
- Pursue opportunities and funds to support weatherization and other investments that homeowners can make to improve their property

Strategy 2: Facilitate sustainable economic development that attracts both employers and employees to Barre City

Tactics to Stimulate Overall Economic Development

- Conduct brownfields studies on potentially developable land for future use by developers
- Explore changing our economic development model by bringing economic development responsibilities in-house (rather than shared with the Town of Barre)

Tactics to Stimulate Downtown Development

- Create strategies around underutilized Main St. properties
- Enact policies and practices that encourage Main St. activity (i.e., later restaurant hours, police department foot patrols, improved lighting, planned events/activities with the Barre Partnership, etc)
- Continue to identify potential downtown development opportunities
 - Assess under-utilized sites downtown and prioritize for creating development opportunities

Strategy 3: Equalize and optimize the tax base to ensure equity

Tactics:

- Hire an assessor to complete and maintain accurate inventory descriptions and assessment of the grand list
- Conduct the Citywide reappraisal
- Explore models and opportunities to increase user fees among non-residents
 - Evaluate feasibility of implementing transportation network costs
 - Evaluate the feasibility of establishing tiered rates for other communities that use and benefit from Barre City’s infrastructure and services

Goal 2: To ensure that our residents and businesses have reliable infrastructure -- including roads, water, sewer, and public buildings -- that meets their needs through continuing to invest in maintenance, upgrades and replacements.

Strategy 1: Create a Facility and Infrastructure Maintenance Plan to ensure that our investments in infrastructure upgrades are maintained and have extended life cycles.

Tactics:

- Assess, prioritize, and publicize our infrastructure reinvestment needs and priorities
- Develop and implement process improvement methods to ensure investments provide long-term solutions (rather than short-term patches)

Strategy 2: Develop a resourcing strategy to address the short-term needs of our physical infrastructure.

Tactics:

- Create a mechanism to fund depreciation, including exploration of dedicated funding streams, and private/public partnerships (including naming rights)
- Explore user fees and other innovative funding strategies for non-resident use of City infrastructure and resources

Strategy 3: Establish long term capital resourcing plans to address significant infrastructure upgrades

Tactics:

- Position the City to capitalize on federal infrastructure act funds
- Evaluate bonding capacity and community willingness to borrow capital reinvestment funds
- Establish a long-term capital reinvestment fund as part of the annual budgeting process (e.g., a % of the overall operating budget)
- Commit to use of Fund Balance to reinvest in needed upgrades
- Explore the creation of infrastructure or utility districts as a mechanism to fund infrastructure as part of overall development strategy

Strategy 4: Leverage the capacity of our current infrastructure where possible to support expanded regional use and innovative solutions

Tactics:

- Explore partnerships with neighboring communities related to leased space and other opportunities to provide leased services
- Collaborate with partners to build emerging infrastructure (e.g., build out electric vehicle charging stations), energy conservation, etc.

Strategy 5: Increase our use of partners to address local transportation needs

Tactics

- Advocate with Green Mountain Transit to expand bus transportation and public transportation systems for residents
- Collaborate with the Barre Unified Union School District to support transportation of residents during the summer to the pool and other municipal facilities and resources

Strategy 6: Build Barre City's capacity to successfully project manage our infrastructure projects

Tactics

- Assess the return on investment in hiring or contracting with a project manager to oversee infrastructure projects
- Build in project management costs to proposals and applications for funding that resource infrastructure projects

Goal 3: To be a great employer as a City government, attracting, retaining, and developing our workforce to meet and exceed the expectations of our residents.

Strategy 1: Ensure that City salaries are competitive and that benefits are compelling and valued

Tactics:

- Benchmark our salaries against other communities and, where applicable, the private sector to promote recruitment
- Make equity adjustments where appropriate to promote retention of existing employees

Strategy 2: Promote the value and contributions that City employees make to support the overall quality of life

Tactics:

- Communicate with the public about the current conditions as it relates to the state of the City's workforce
- Identify opportunities to demonstrate and spotlight the value-adds that City employees and services make to the overall quality of life
- Help residents better understand the connection between their tax dollars and the benefits that they and the City receive

Strategy 3: Identify opportunities to generate operational efficiencies in the delivery of City services

Tactics:

- Leverage technology where possible and appropriate to support operational efficiencies
- Evaluate existing mandates/expectations/ordinances and identify opportunities to remove or reduce their burdens on the workforce
- Develop a modern website that can become a hub for basic functions (i.e., payments, permits, etc.)
 - Study other municipal websites and identify templates that can reduce/simplify workload

Strategy 4: Create a human capital pipeline

Tactics:

- Build relationships with area schools and institutions of higher education to identify pools of local qualified and interested candidates.
- Work with institutions of higher education to create internship opportunities to fill in gaps
- Develop succession plans for key staff leadership positions

Goal 4: Build on community pride to continue to make it an attractive and safer community for all who work, visit, and live in our City.

Strategy 1: Optimize the use and enjoyment of our City's natural resources

Tactics:

- Revisit the All in for Barre recommendations and support the completion of their initiatives
- Continue to promote and explore opportunities for walkability and connected communities
- Promote the use of the City's physical assets (open space, public lands, reservoir)
 - Explore feasibility of user fees, rent, etc. to provide sufficient resources to support the maintenance and upkeep of these assets

Strategy 2: Make Barre a destination for events

Tactics:

- Develop partnerships with organization inside and outside of Barre City to attract them to bring events and activities to the City
 - Promote the City's public and other assets as venues to host events (e.g., bike races, basketball tournaments, etc.)
- Consider sponsoring and otherwise supporting community events that build civic pride

Strategy 3: Promote and enhance community safety in Barre City

Tactics:

- Address low level crime and nuisances (e.g., graffiti) promptly to reduce perception of unsafe parts of the City
- Engage community residents in crime prevention and safety efforts
- Promote visibility in public spaces (helps police patrol and see under trees); night time lighting
- Implement walking/bike patrols of Main St. and other high visibility areas to build and strengthen relationships between police and businesses/residents.
- Encourage local businesses to adopt parts of the bike path, etc. and promote community clean ups as part of public service activities
- Work with local businesses to create safe havens for students that are walking to/from school
- Partner with the school district to increase access to Green Mountain Transit services for students

Goal 5: Continue to align the efforts of City government -- employees, elected officials, and volunteers -- in support of the strategic plan's goals and priorities

Strategy 1: Increase communication between and within City administration and the City Council

Tactics:

- Hold quarterly public forums/round table discussions with government employees and officials to review accomplishments, roadblocks to success, and ways forward to accomplish the goals established in the strategic plan.
- Strengthen/standardize the bi-directional flow of communication between residents, Ward Councilors, and City staff to ensure that residents are receiving consistent information and equitable services
 - Leverage existing platforms (e.g., city website)
 - Increase documentation of requests (e.g., telephonic) by City staff

Strategy 2: Implement a clear model that outlines roles and responsibilities of the City Manager, the Mayor, the City Council, and City employees

Tactics:

- Research and review similar models from other communities.
- Review job descriptions to ensure that City employees are clear about their roles, responsibilities, and limitations
- Provide a clear and consistent orientation for new staff and Council members regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the Council and City administration
- Regularly assess (at least quarterly) degree to which roles and responsibilities are clear and adhered to

Strategy 3: Enhance and align our City Committees to more holistically and comprehensively engage and use our resident volunteers

Tactics: Communication and Support

- Enhance our onboarding for volunteers
- Ensure appropriate committee supports
 - Provide training for staff to support boards and committees
 - Conduct periodic check-ins with and between committee chairs
- Make sure communication is clear and training is available and provided
 - Evaluate the Council member liaison role with respect to regularly attending committee meetings

Tactics: Structure and Role

- Establish and annually review charge and charter of each committee that sets parameters and expectations
- Explore opportunities to combine and consolidate committees to increase efficiency and impact
 - Consider benchmarking array of committees with other communities

MONITORING OUR PROGRESS

Implementation Approach

The Strategic Plan is a living document that is a road map by which the City Administration and the City Council should be held accountable. The plan should be utilized to create an annual plan with annual goals for the City. Progress against annual goals can be monitored by ensuring regular updates on plan progress at City Council meetings and consistent reporting on desired key results noted below.

In addition, an implementation plan will be used to track progress against the selected strategies and tactics for the first year and then updated accordingly for each successive year.

Key Results

The implementation of the Strategic Plan is envisioned to enact a set of measurable key results. For each goal, the table below outlines key areas of measurement and proposed key results.

In some areas, baseline data, as well as the City’s capacity to measure and report on progress, will need to be created as part of the first year of implementation. It is envisioned that a dashboard of key results would be created to track progress against key results and be reported out periodically throughout implementation.

Goal	Area of Impact	Measurable Results
<p>Goal 1: To keep Barre affordable for our residents by developing a strong and diversified financial base that grows the grand list.</p>	<p>Grand List New Housing Stock New Businesses Open</p>	
<p>Goal 2: To ensure that our residents and businesses have reliable infrastructure -- including roads, water, sewer, and public buildings -- that meets their needs through continuing to invest in maintenance, upgrades and replacements.</p>	<p># of Infrastructure Projects State and Federal Funds Obtained for Infrastructure Projects Local funds budgeted and received to resource ongoing maintenance costs</p>	

<p>Goal 3: To be a great employer as a City government, attracting, retaining, and developing our workforce to meet and exceed the expectations of our residents.</p>	<p>Staff vacancy rate</p> <p>Staff engagement/morale</p> <p>Adoption of technology to provide automated solutions</p> <p>Succession plan in place</p>	
<p>Goal 4: Build on community pride to continue to make it an attractive and safer community for all who work, visit, and live in our City.</p>	<p>“All in for Barre” projects completed</p> <p>Civic events in Barre City</p> <p>Police calls</p>	
<p>Goal 5: Continue to align the efforts of City government -- employees, elected officials, and volunteers -- in support of the strategic plan’s goals and priorities</p>	<p>Council/City Administration relations</p> <p>Committee participation rates/meeting attendance</p> <p>Handling of constituent requests from Councilors</p>	

APPENDIX 1: SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis below is based on the key takeaways from the information gathered during the planning process and the insights shared by Councilors and senior management of the City administration.

STRENGTHS

- *There are significant community assets to draw from to advance the City's priorities. These include a sense of history, community pride, and the skills, talents, and experience of community members. In addition, police and fire, libraries, and public schools are significant public service and resource assets. Parks and recreation are significant natural resource assets. Individual businesses are significant economic assets along with associations of businesses, home-based enterprises, and commercial and industrial structures. Lastly, faith-based organizations are also viewed as significant community assets.*
- *One-time ARPA funding provides a unique opportunity to begin investment in areas that the City has otherwise been unable to invest in. The City has developed some plans to use these funds and is in the process of deploying them.*
- *Council and staff have a shared commitment to the betterment of the City and bring a diverse set of skills, knowledge, and strengths.*

WEAKNESSES

- *There is general agreement that as hard as staff is working, current demands exceed their capacity to fulfill all of their responsibilities on a day-to-day basis. At the same time, there are some differences of perspective as to whether possible solutions are around working differently and/or a need for additional personnel. The City has added four new positions in the current budget but is struggling to fill vacancies in key positions. At the same time, there is recognition that there is an opportunity to increase the City's use of information technology to automate and accelerate work processes to increase efficiency. The lack of a full complement of City employees makes it difficult for City Administration to enact many of the strategies identified in the plan.*
- *There is an inherent dynamic between City Councilors that are elected by the community and members of City Administration, who are employees. Each group brings its own perspectives, experience, priorities, and knowledge to shaping and implementing projects and policies. As such, there is a continued need for mutual sharing and appreciation for these diverse perspectives and interests. The present volume of workload and demand on the City staff members exceeds their current capacity to respond, resulting in the City government finding itself being more reactive than proactive. Open positions in several departments that have been hard to fill have adversely impacted the City's ability to address all of its current priorities.*
- *There are diverse perspectives among members of the Council, which can impede consensus and impede a clear and shared prioritization of community needs and investments.*

OPPORTUNITIES

- *There is an opportunity to increase communication and role clarity within the council, between the Council and City Administration, as well as across and between City Administration Departments.*
- *There is a need for common criteria for determining and agreeing on priorities and a shared way of work for the Council and City Administration to advance the work of the City.*
- *There is an opportunity to redefine the roles and structure of City Committees to further align their work with City priorities.*
- *The City can stimulate economic growth and development through creating a broader range of housing opportunities that attract and retain residents to live and work in the City of Barre.*

THREATS/RISKS

- *There is a potential for significant changes in City Administration as long-time department leaders prepare for retirement. There are some concerns about the depth, or lack thereof, in several areas in the City which may hinder its ability for internal succession planning.*
- *The City's current and anticipated future financial resource needs, particularly regarding infrastructure reinvestment, place a priority on growing the City's grand list, fostering economic development, and growing the overall local economy.*
- *In addition to the traditional responsibilities of City government (infrastructure, safety, quality of life, etc.), the pandemic has highlighted challenges and needs around a range of housing that is affordable for its residents.*