

TOWNSHIP OF SUGAR GROVE STRATEGIC PLAN

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
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Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development

INTRODUCTION

The Township of Sugar Grove is one of 16 townships in Kane County and one of 1,433 townships in Illinois. The township encompasses six square miles and is bounded by Orchard Road on the east, Dugan Road on the west, Bypass 30 on the south and Healy Road on the north. All residents within those boundaries are Sugar Grove Township residents even though they may also be residents of Aurora, North Aurora, Montgomery, and the Village of Sugar Grove. All residents are eligible for township services administered by the supervisor's office. The township is led by an elected supervisor and four trustees. The other elected officials are the assessor, clerk, and highway commissioner.

There are three important reasons why the Township of Sugar Grove should develop and implement a strategic plan. First, the Township is in an environment where economic, demographic, financial, and other external trends broadly impact the quality of life of its area residents. If the Township of Sugar Grove does not periodically consider this broader environment, it may over time become less effective in providing the type of services and lifestyle that constituents have become accustomed to. Second, certain issues are long-term, complex, politically sensitive, and very costly where routine decision-making processes simply are not sufficient. Third, the Township is neither the sole governing body charged with community decision-making nor sufficiently empowered to enable certain changes throughout the community without input from the Village of Sugar Grove, and to a point, neighboring communities. Strategic planning provides a tool for addressing these kinds of complex issues.

The Township of Sugar Grove has taken the time to engage in a formalized strategic planning and goal setting process that will aid in decision-making. The value of such processes continues to be recognized by policy-making boards and executive staffs in private and public organizations. Strategic planning is a proactive approach to guiding the Township's future rather than making decisions issue by issue or by crisis management. The workshop conducted with Township officials, staff, and community residents provided a setting to methodically and strategically determine a vision and path for the community and Township government.

EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION SESSIONS

On January 11, 2014 officials from the Township of Sugar Grove held a special public meeting to conduct their strategic planning workshop. The event was facilitated by Tracy Rogers-Tryba, an employee of the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) at Northern Illinois University. In addition to the Township officials, representatives from the Library Board, Village of Sugar Grove, and public were in attendance. A number of directed exercises took place during the half-day event including an exploration of the Township’s future condition, an environmental scan identifying the Township’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, a small group exercise utilized in to identify specific initiatives, and a final group activity identifying short- and long-term goals for the Township.

EXPLORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP’S DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

Each participant was asked to articulate what he or she perceives to be the “preferred” or “predicted” future state of the Township in 10 to 20 years. What services, programs, staffing levels, capital needs, and general facets would, or should, be present in the Village? Board members and other participants were asked to jot down their ideas ahead of time and then be ready to share them with the group during the first session. This was a brainstorming exercise—any and all ideas about the Village’s future were encouraged and shared. No evaluative or judgmental debate was permitted during this session.

A FUTURE VIEW OF THE TOWNSHIP OF SUGAR GROVE

Participants engaged in this exercise by responding to the phrase: “In 15 – 20 years when I return to the Township of Sugar Grove, I hope to see.....” The notes below are the *unedited* thoughts and views as recorded by the facilitator on flip chart paper.

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

- Partnerships to build on community resources (2)
- Better transportation options - Metra station, bus routes (3)
- Serve needs driven by the residents (senior services, youth services) (2)
- Increased citizen participation
- More marketing (2)

- Increase use of technology
- Increased economic development (4)

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The next step of the strategic planning process was a review and accounting of the internal and external factors present in the environment that can potentially impact the success of the Township both negatively and positively.

Given the focus of the preceding session participants were next asked to identify what constraints and practical difficulties are likely to be encountered that will make it difficult to achieve the desired future state. These elements included both internal and external factors, conditions, trends, regulations, agencies, resources, etc. Participants were also asked to describe the Township's strengths and weaknesses. In what areas does it regularly excel, and in what areas are there difficulties or shortcomings in terms of expertise, resources, training, etc.? What opportunities are on the horizon that can be used to its advantage? Conversely, what trends lay ahead that would be obstacles or hindrances? The two diagrams below summarize the outcomes of this discussion.

S.W.O.T. EXERCISE

(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

INTERNAL

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dedicated staff ✓ Unique character of township-a rural community ✓ Community building ✓ Location of community ✓ Easy to access ✓ Townships “closest to the people” ✓ Less red tape ✓ Potential for growth ✓ Can increase financial resources ✓ Responsiveness of government officials ✓ Open land ✓ Untouched land ✓ Bike trail from Waubensee Community College to Aurora ✓ Newer residents to engage ✓ Affordable housing ✓ Financial stability ✓ Responsiveness to constituent needs ✓ ROI for constituents ✓ Maintenance of roads ✓ Leadership of Board ✓ Consensus building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lack of public information ✓ Not very active in engaging citizens ✓ Innovation—technology ✓ Website needs to be improved ✓ Clarity of who does what? ✓ Township vs. Village ✓ Marketing efforts ✓ Low citizen participation ✓ Old gun club—needs to be cleaned up ✓ Location ✓ Hinders bringing investment into community ✓ Lack of rental properties...especially apartments ✓ Perception of high taxes ✓ Collaboration with other municipal and social agencies for services ✓ Ability to look forward with long range planning

EXTERNAL

OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bring in development ✓ School district ✓ Airport ✓ Waubonsee Community College, Aurora University, NIU ✓ Fiber optics ✓ I-88 ✓ Financially healthy—road funds ✓ Bike trails and pedestrian paths ✓ Expanded transportation ✓ Rail system ✓ Intergovernmental communication, roads, development, technology ✓ Annual intergovernmental roundtable ✓ New Board and lack of experience ✓ Term limit ✓ Constituent awareness of township role, responsibilities ✓ Lack of constituent input ✓ Boundary ambiguity with village and school district – impediment ✓ Small revenue base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lack of transportation ✓ Fear of the wave of growth that will occur north of the future I-88/Route 47 interchange ✓ Lack of shopping and commercial development ✓ Residents want increase in quality and quantity of services at lower costs but aren't receiving them ✓ Lack of citizen engagement ✓ Consolidation of government agencies ✓ Why marketing is important ✓ Lack of direct control ✓ Issues with access to county resources, IDOT roads ✓ Special interest groups ✓ Abolition of Township Governance ✓ Need to raise levies/taxes

SURRENDER OR LEAD

Participants were introduced to a leadership exercise entitled “Surrender or Lead.” The purpose of this exercise was to identify specific initiatives or future states that the participants would like to see for Sugar Grove as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with pursuing them. Participants were broken up into three working groups and their responses were recorded and discussed. These discussions are summarized below. Underlined sections are key phrases that groups were asked to respond to. Groups were also asked to name themselves.

Group #1 – “Sugar Maple Leafs”

1. We want to have a central communication venue (newsletter, e-newsletter, and/or community webpage), but we need to have a way to pay for it.
2. We can't do this at present, because we don't have a structure in place.
3. If it weren't for the strategic planning process, we would not be talking about this.
4. We have to improve communication, because the taxpayers are entitled to understanding what is available to them.
5. We need to finally identify contributors and recipients and put a process in place.
6. Better communication makes us stronger and better able to serve our residents.

Group #2 – “SML: Small, Medium, and Large”

1. We want to be more visible to the public by providing more services to the community that are necessary and appreciated including senior services, transportation expansion, and recreation, but we don't know how to communicate to the community.
2. *No response provided.*
3. If it weren't for the residents, we would not be talking about this.
4. We have to manage to fund our work together in collaboration with other agencies (Village, park district), because we want to achieve visible results.
5. *No response provided*
6. We need to finally work with other agencies to achieve our goals.

Group #3 – “Taxpayer Township Trio”

1. We want to have more community services, but we have limited resources and staff.
2. We can't raise the tax levy, because residents have spoken about taxes.
3. If it weren't for limited staff and volunteers, we would expand more services.
4. We have to improve marketing, communication, and partnerships because residents do not know who does what.
5. We need to finally provide more accountability to the taxpayers.
6. Marketing, partnerships, and communication make us more effective.

Each group nominated a spokesperson and presented responses to the exercise. An insightful discussion developed with the following “common themes” offered by the participants:

- Communication (how to use it/how to deal with limits/how to collaborate)
- Collaborative efforts lead to more effective use of resources
- Community support by the residents is important
- Accountability to residents and community
- Need for streamlined processes and collective goals among entities serving the community (Village, Township, Park District, and Library).

STRATEGIC ISSUES AND CLASSIFICATION OF GOALS

Each issue was listed on separate sheets and placed on the wall for viewing and sorting by fellow group members. This list of issues was then discussed and further sorting took place that resulted in the following issue areas:

Transportation

- Completion of I-88/Route 47 Interchange
- Metra station
- Improve transportation services

Services

- Better utilization of government services, including services from park district and library
- Want a park in or near town

- Lighted ball park
- More senior services, i.e., transportation for seniors and disabled residents
- Indoor sports facility
- Improve senior services
- Expand youth and senior services
- Lack of youth activities beyond sports
- Community events and programs

Bike/pedestrian paths

- Bridge over Blackberry Creek
- Expand bike paths and lanes, pave the lanes
- Connected bike paths

Communication & Marketing

- Residents know where to go to get needed services
- Lack of communication of available services
- Bring back the township newsletter
- Communication of available services to residents
- Improve the usage of the village water bill information insert
- Web page with current events in the community
- Link on web page to all local governments (city, county, assessor's office, park district, community house)
- Shared marketing and communications person

Partnerships

- Clear lines of responsibility
- Local government agencies work together to offer complementary services
- Better collaboration with other agencies
- Partner on land acquisition

Finances

- Monitor budget to give the best bang for taxpayers' bucks
- Local government entities are well-funded and solvent

Development

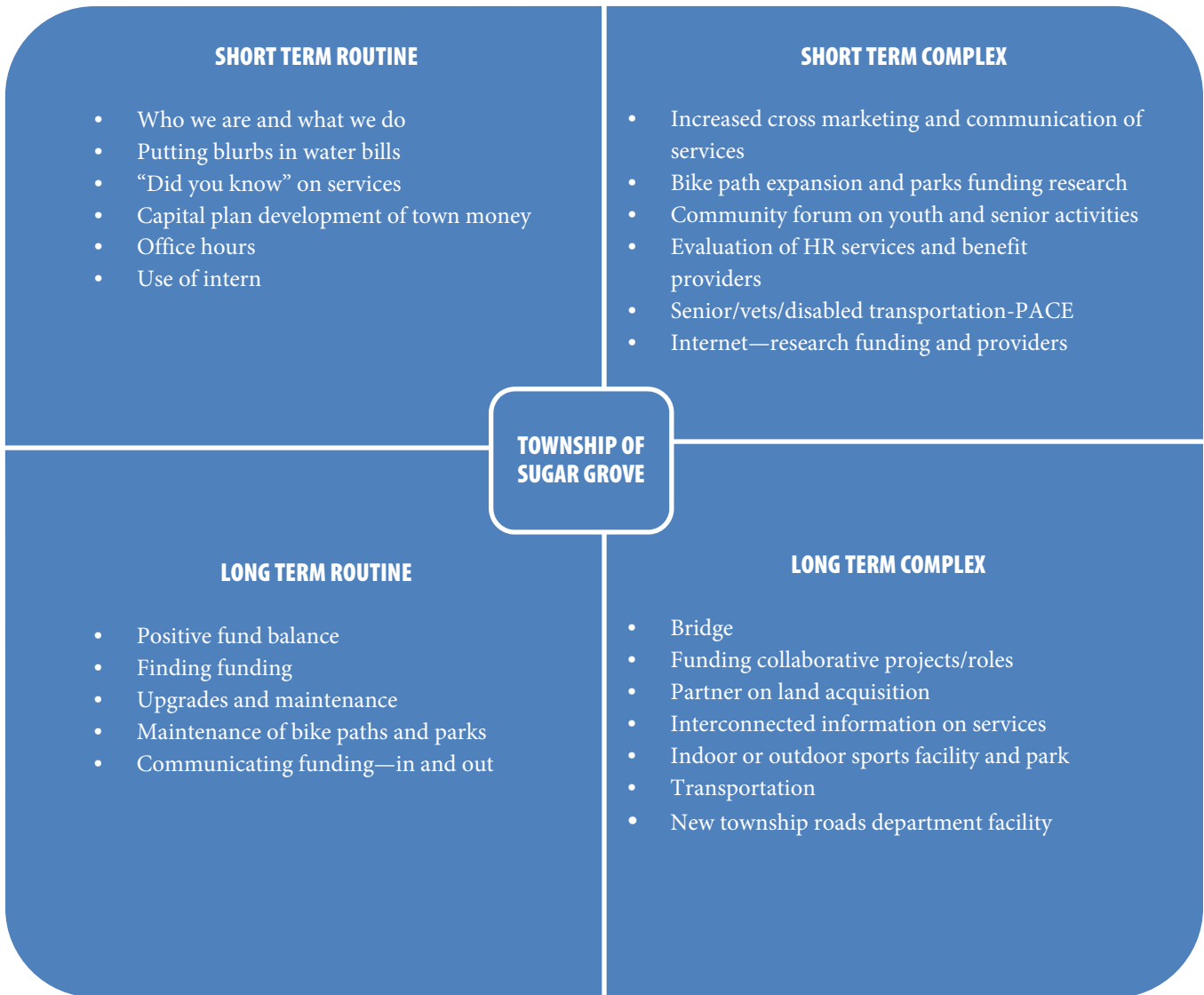
- A central community center—“A downtown”
- New road district location
- Hotel to anchor Village Green area that would include shops, restaurants, open space
- Extension of fiber optics to homes and businesses
- Larger commercial growth
- Development of additional office and industrial property
- Capital improvement plan

Miscellaneous

- Today’s residents want to live here in 20 years, whether they are babies or baby boomers
- Residents get excellent return on interest for their tax dollars
- Residents are engaged and feel well-served by their local government
- HELP

At the end of the open discussion, participants were asked to classify each goal according to its complexity and time required to implement. The goals and their classifications as short- or long-term, complex or routine, are presented below. Short-term goals were identified as those that could or should be completed or substantially under way by the end of the next fiscal year. Complex goals were goals that required extraordinary resources, specialists, funding or, the involvement of outside organizations or agencies. Routine goals, although not necessarily simple, were goals that could be accomplished through unilateral decision of the Board and within present budget constraints.

The goals developed by the group are presented in the tables that follow.



IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS FOR THE TOWNSHIP OF SUGAR GROVE

Utilizing the workshop findings, a series of strategic objectives and goals were identified and presented to the Township officials for review and commentary. A number of ideas were generated and discussed during the workshop encompassed a scope beyond the legal purvey of a Township’s charter. By law, Illinois townships are charged with three basic functions: 1) general assistance for the indigent; 2) the assessment of real property for the basis of local taxation; and 3) maintenance of all roads and bridges outside federal, state, and other local jurisdiction. With these functions in mind, an initial identification

of strategic goals and objectives were identified by the facilitator and forwarded to the officials of the Township for input and commentary. The following strategic plan, mission, and values were formulated as a result of the comments and input for the Township of Sugar Grove.

TOWNSHIP OF SUGAR GROVE STRATEGIC PLAN

2014-2019

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Township of Sugar Grove is committed to improving the quality of life of its citizens through open communication and dialogue that facilitates responsiveness to resident needs while maintaining a safe, environmentally rich, and fiscally sound and responsible community.

VALUES:

A connected community that engages its citizens; recognizing that a community is only as viable as the communications between its officials and stakeholders.

A collaborative community that seeks solutions to leverage the Townships resources-human, fiscal, and natural.

Integrity in public process and fiscal responsibility in the stewardship of the financial resources.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: FISCAL STABILITY

GOAL I: Sustain Township's Financial Resources

OBJECTIVE A: *Ensure fiscal responsibility*

Actions:

- Maintain fiscal responsibility and caution in all we do – stabilize fiscal position
- Ensure Township financial resources are utilized to serve the functions of the Township and citizen stakeholders
- Annually review Township investments and fund balances for best rate of return and growth
- Leverage funds and resources from a variety of sources
- Solicit citizen input on major facility projects that impact current community needs and future growth
- Develop an easy-to-read snapshot “dashboard” of the Township’s fiscal year-end financial health to provide to Township stakeholders

OBJECTIVE B: *Explore joint service arrangements with other local government agencies*

Actions:

- Promote collaborative fiscal solutions with contiguous governing bodies to provide for fiscal efficiency, integrity, and optimal service delivery to constituents
 - Road and Highway maintenance agreements to share personnel and equipment
 - Continue to maintain collaborative agreements that maximize ability to provide General Welfare Services to citizens
- Partner with the Village of Sugar Grove, the Library, and Park District, and Wabaunsee Community College as well as other taxing bodies whose service area overlap identifying integration opportunities

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

GOAL I: An Educated Governing Board

OBJECTIVE A: *Promotion of an educated governing board that works collaboratively, ethically, and for the benefit of the community they serve*

Actions:

- Establish budget line item for training and education of Township Officials
- Commit fiscal resources to support training and education of Township Officials
- Invest in shared education programs/events with Township Officials as a means of building collective understanding and consensus in decision-making process
- Participate in Township Officials of Illinois educational programs to assist elected officials in performing their job within the mandated statutory responsibilities
- Conduct an annual retreat to review, reflect, and prioritize strategic goals and objectives for the upcoming fiscal year
- Conduct annual review and analysis of performance measures to ensure they are consistent with strategic plan and can be effectively benchmarked.
- Develop a performance management “dashboard” so residents can review Township performance.
- Focus our energy and attention on attainable, achievable, and accountable goals that the Township can control/complete

GOAL II: Lead and Facilitate Intergovernmental Cooperation

OBJECTIVE A: *Explore joint service arrangements with other local government agencies*

Actions:

- Develop an inventory of current intergovernmental agreements
- Evaluate objectives of current partnerships/agreements and determine future direction
- Open discussions with the Village of Sugar Grove, the Library, Park District, and Waubesa Community College and other taxing bodies whose service area overlap Township boundaries to identify integration opportunities
- Develop joint communication policy on marketing of cross-sector programs and services

- Explore shared funding and planning opportunities to leverage existing resources among all entities for optimal delivery of programs and services
- Coordinate transportation resources with the City of Aurora and Ride in Kane Program to provide an improved system which serves the needs of senior and disabled residents while planning for community growth
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

GOAL I: Establish Township Identity

OBJECTIVE A: *Gain insight into the perceived public identity of the Township of Sugar Grove and the services it provides to its citizens while soliciting citizen feedback*

Actions:

- Create budget line item for citizen focus group(s) or survey
- Conduct focus groups/survey
- Utilize outside entity to facilitate conducting focus group/survey
- Utilize citizen feedback to identify gaps in branding of the Township, its programs, resources, and services provided to residents
- Incorporate citizen feedback to determine new Township programs, resources, and services
- Utilize citizen feedback to identify future programs, resources, or service needs in the community
- Establish Township brand and identity so that it is consistent with mission statement
- Create internal process to provide consistent marketing and branding identity
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects

GOAL II: Market and Communicate Township Programs, Resources, and Services

OBJECTIVE A: *Centralize marketing and communication efforts within the Township of Sugar Grove*

Actions:

- Create budget line item for marketing and communications
- Commit fiscal resources to fund marketing of Township programs, resources, and services

- Hire personnel for communication and marketing
- Establish job description and responsibilities for marketing and communication position
 - Establish processes for managing shared personnel and funding of position internally and
 - Investigate alternative hiring scenarios for interim marketing and communication personnel vis-à-vis cooperative internships or work-study programs with higher educational institutions
 - Identify partners for shared communications personnel
 - Designate key staff as communication gatekeepers until permanent staff position filled
- Create process and content for consistent messaging
- Utilize social media as a source of communication and marketing
 - Incorporate Google analytics to track website usage; review every six months
 - Update website and other social media utilized by Township, such as Facebook, on a monthly basis to provide current information on programs and services
- Leverage existing resources, such as water bill inserts, Township website, Township newsletter, and signage to deliver consistent messaging regarding programs, resources, and services
- Establish toolbox of sample communication templates for consistent branding and marketing with Township mission
- Establish uniform FAQ pages on partner websites and/or a frequently searched index
- Improve communication between Township officials, staff, and community
- Institute a two-way communication plan aimed at engaging and informing stakeholders and constituents
- Assess methods of communicating by township office and department annually

OBJECTIVE B: *Partner with the Village of Sugar Grove, Kane County, and other local agencies to ensure uniform marketing of Township programs, resources, and services*

Actions:

- Identify community partners who will promote Township programs, resources, and services
- Collaborative use of mailers, inserts, electronic media, and partner resources for consistent messaging and information delivery of programs and services to benefit constituents
- Establish partnerships to enhance recognition of programs and services for overlapping constituents
- Increase recognition and usage of programs and services provided by Township of Sugar Grove

OBJECTIVE C: *Effective Township program and service delivery*

Actions:

- Measure citizen awareness and satisfaction with Township programs every three years through facilitated focus groups or community survey
- Measure citizen usage of services on an annual basis by establishing metrics and analytics
- Deliver efficient, cost effective, high quality, and create services/projects which meet and connect the Township's residents with contiguous communities throughout the region
- Expand General Services
 - Senior/disabled programs
 - Bi-monthly lunch program
 - Lawn mowing program
 - Educate seniors and link them to community services
 - Host technology talks for senior services
 - Develop strategy to encourage senior retention, housing options, and participation in Township events
 - Continue to expand transportation options for senior and disabled citizens through coordination of services with the City of Aurora and Ride in Kane Programs

- Youth
 - Establish Township service projects
 - Lawn mowing program – youth for seniors
 - Increase opportunities for youth volunteering by participation in Township service projects
 - Partner with local school districts for community service projects for students to earn community hours
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects
- Investigate and outreach to new agencies to submit proposal for funding to Township Board

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND GREEN SPACE

GOAL I: Balance Growth with Environmental Protection

OBJECTIVE A: *Pursue intergovernmental cooperation on land purchase and/or use*

Actions:

- Develop long range green infrastructure plan in coordination with Village and County planning to serve area citizens while leveraging tax dollars for effective delivery of community needs
- Establish an environmental friendly connected community through planned bike, pedestrian pathways, and bridges
- Coordinate with the agencies and organizations having an interest in the Township to ensure continuity and consistency of planning and development activities
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects

OBJECTIVE B: *Create and maintain functionally appropriate infrastructure and facilities*

Actions:

- Address short-and long-term facility needs
- Solicit bids for repairs and/or new construction
- Continue to fund and carry-out our street/infrastructure maintenance
- Consider available properties and solutions within Township legal structure for current unmet space needs

- Solicit citizen input on major facility projects that impact current community needs and future growth
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects

OBJECTIVE C: *Expand Transportation Services*

Actions:

- Ensure highway system maintenance while preparing for future growth
- Establish a five-year highway improvement program in coordination with Village of Sugar Grove, IDOT and County administrators to ensure quality infrastructure is provided to Township residents
 - Ensure Township participation in completion of I-88/Route 47 Interchange
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects

Strategic Priority 5: **Connected Community**

GOAL I: **Facilitate the Delivery and Access of High-Speed Internet throughout the Township**

OBJECTIVE A: *Increase opportunities for citizens to access and utilize technology related services to advance citizen safety, education, economic development, and social connectedness*

Actions:

- Explore public-private partnerships to provide access to technology
- Explore collaborative opportunities with the Village of Sugar Grove
- Explore collaborative opportunities with Waubensee Community College
- Leverage proposed infrastructure improvements along roads and highways by identification of short- and long-term opportunities for technology integration
 - Proactively research opportunities for Federal and State funding for technology, broadband, or high-speed internet access or improvements for marginalized and at-risk populations such as the elderly, unemployed, youth, and second language learners
- Ensure that Township technology needs are met through citizen engagement and inquiry
- Commit fiscal resources to support the projects

GOAL II: Recognize That a Connected Community Is Part of a Community of Citizens

OBJECTIVE A: *Enhance utilization of electronic and social media*

Actions:

- Deliver efficient, cost effective, high quality, and creative services/projects which meet and connect the Township's residents with contiguous communities throughout the region
- Enhance the Township's ability to provide superior customer service in order to maintain a connected community
- Establish a citizen feedback portal for questions and answers that are publicly posted on the Township's website and Facebook pages
- Utilize electronic communication as a means to Tweet news and events
- Regularly review electronic and social media used by Township for usability and accuracy of information disseminated