BOWLING GREEN

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS 2022-2032 STRATEGIC PLAN

SUBMITTED BY:

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Introduction



In 2021, the City of Bowling Green determined it should undertake a strategic planning process. The City's last strategic plan was completed in 2007 and was updated by staff each year. To assist the Board of Commissioners (BOC) and City staff in the process, the city contracted with the Kentucky League of Cities Community and Economic Development Services (KLC CED).

To initiate the work, KLC CED recommended that the Mayor, each Commissioner, and Department Head respond to a short survey. This would prepare everyone by thinking about the current situation and looking forward to what is on the horizon. Once the surveys were done, individual interviews were conducted in person by KLC CED advisors.

To further enhance the planning process, community stakeholders and constituencies were identified. These individuals were also given a survey to complete. Focus group meetings were held with these local leaders to ascertain their thoughts for the future of Bowling Green. During these interviews, the participants determined that a checklist or some type of matrix would be a valuable tool going forward so that everyone can keep track of their progress on goals and objectives.

The KLC CED advisors utilized all previous strategic plans going back to 2007 to establish a baseline and to honor the work accomplished by the City in recent years. Additional research included reviews of planning documents and studies the City has invested in related to housing, safety, parks and recreation, as well as Census and other relevant and historic data.

Over the course of three months, 21 meetings were conducted to gather information from diverse perspectives. With this intake and research, an initial framework for the strategic plan was developed. Communication between the KLC CED advisors and the City management team continued as the plan was further developed.

The framework for the strategic plan was presented by the KLC CED advisors on October 19, 2021, at the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners. The BOC had the opportunity to review the direction of the strategic plan and provide feedback.

Following the BOC meeting, KLC CED advisors prepared a working draft of the strategic plan and presented it to the BOC for their consideration at a special work session on January 28, 2022. Following the work session, KLC CED staff finalized the plan and presented the plan for adoption in February 2022.

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Executive Summary

The City of Bowling Green, Kentucky, is located in south-central Kentucky. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Bowling Green has a population of 72,294. It is Kentucky's third largest city, trailing only Louisville Metro and Lexington. Bowling Green's population increased by 24.5%, from the 2010 Census of 58,067, making it the fastest growing city in the state.

The City's rapid and sustained growth can be attributed to many factors with strong leadership and vision of the community at the top of the list. For many years, the City's elected officials have adopted policies that encouraged business investment and growth while conservatively managing the City's finances, thus keeping tax rates relatively low. The result has been the growth of a diverse economy fueled by multiple market sectors including manufacturing, healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship.

In addition, the City's population is one of the most diverse in the State. Foreign-born persons comprised 12.8% of the City's residents in 2020. Bowling Green has maintained its small-town charm while offering a world-class cultural experience.

This growth trend is expected to continue in the coming decade. As the City grows, its government must anticipate and plan for future opportunities and challenges that will emerge. Planning and managing the City's finances and services to accommodate this growth is a delicate balancing act. The Board of Commissioners has recognized that it needs a broad vision for the future along with policy strategies that will guide the City for the next decade.

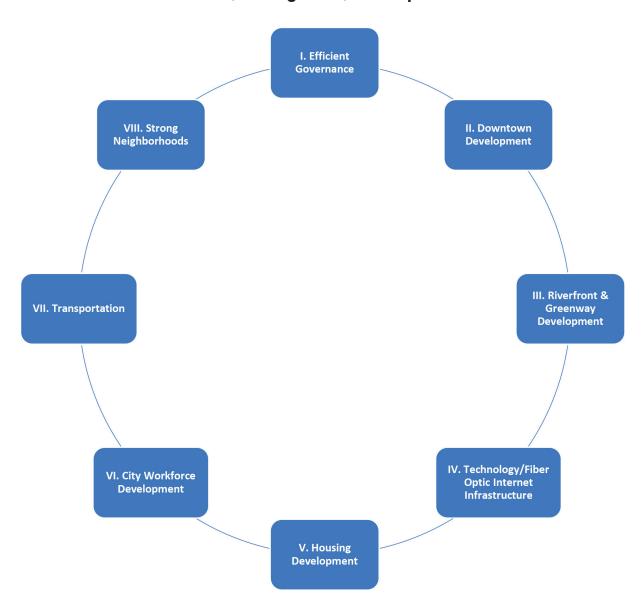
The Bowling Green Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for achieving its vision of a growing and prospering community while preserving the quality of life that makes the City unique.

Over the past several years, many entities within the community have created strategic plans and conducted studies to address specific components of community growth and development including housing, business development, neighborhood redevelopment, parks, greenspace, trails, connectivity, immigration, and education.

This Plan will not be a consolidation nor regurgitation of those plans. The purpose of the City's Strategic Plan is to focus on policies and strategies specific to the city government. It is built upon eight areas that comprise the purview of the Board of Commissioners. In addition, three areas of partnership, cooperation, and support are identified in which the City government has a vested interest as a participant.

The Eight Pillars

The Eight Pillars
For Growth, Management, and Implementation



The Plan

The KLC CED team began its work in April 2021. Interviews and research continued throughout the summer. The strategic planning process included discussions with the Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager, Assistant City Manager/Chief Financial Officer, City Clerk, each of the city's Department Heads, and key community stakeholders. By October 2021, KLC CED had distilled the information into eight primary areas of focus that are presented as "Eight Pillars for Growth, Management, and Implementation."

Each pillar will include a description of the area of interest, a list of policy strategies for the BOC to consider, and a matrix for implementation, budgeting, and primary position of responsibility. The matrix will provide an efficient method to track progress and insure accountability.

It is important to note that circumstances and conditions change over time, and the Board of Commissioners (BOC) must recognize that priorities, strategies, and the ability to implement should consistently be reviewed, revaluated, and adapted. Adapting should not be equated with failure. Rather, the inability to implement serves as a reminder that one cannot always predict the future with absolute clarity. History has shown that cities that adapt to changing realities early are the ones that thrive. Indeed, creating and adapting have been key to the current success of the City of Bowling Green.

The Eight Pillars of the strategic plan are presented along with an implementation matrix. They are not prioritized in any particular order. They are standalone strategies upon which yearly budgeting priorities can be assigned over the next 10 years.

I. Efficient Governance

The City has been well-managed over the past several years. The City prides itself on "living within our means." Fiscal responsibility, economic growth, an exceptional quality of life, and the efficient delivery of City services have been the hallmarks of excellence. A new era of potential challenges will face the City over the next 10 years. Not only is the City growing in population, but the expansion of the Kentucky Transpark and the recent announcement by the Ford Motor Company of a \$5.4 billion investment in Hardin County, will fuel future economic growth in Bowling Green and Warren County for the foreseeable future. In addition, the expansion of Nashville's economic footprint from the south up I-65 will also impact Bowling Green's future growth and development. Planning for orderly growth is an immediate priority.

- 1. Conservative budgeting that is focused on the role of city government.
- Examine projected revenues and projected expenditures to determine if revenue growth at the current rate will
 adequately support the delivery of future demands on city services. Thoroughly examine the impact of various
 revenue scenarios on the City's finances.
- Leverage federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
- 4. Acquire land for future City government needs.
- 5. Set aside a specific amount of time regularly during the BOC meetings to review and discuss progress on the strategic plan. Adapt the plan as needed.
- 6. Be proactive in engaging the City's visionary leaders in discussions about opportunities and challenges that are on the horizon. Then, act.

- 7. Continue to support contract agencies that perform essential services focused on improving the quality of life within the City.
- 8. Develop a robust 10-year financial and development strategy in support of economic development expansion.
- 9. Continually improve transparency and communication with the public.



II. Downtown Development

With recent investments in public infrastructure improvements and building rehabilitation, the downtown is poised for continued growth and development. City officials desire a focus be placed on special events and recruitment of businesses to the downtown. These investments will also draw more traffic to spur the riverfront development, encouraging additional greenway connectivity. The City should be laser-focused on the specific outcomes it wants to achieve during the next 18 months, identify the resources required, and drive implementation to completion.

- 1. With the hiring of a downtown development coordinator, the City should accelerate the implementation of the City's vision for a thriving and vibrant downtown.
- 2. A thriving downtown needs 250 event days annually. Develop a list of the resources required, such as setup, security, cleanup, staging, and publicity. Determine the resources that the City could provide either as in-kind or financial.
- 3. Diversify the business mix.



III. Riverfront and Greenways Development

The City should determine the ways in which it wants to support the future development of the riverfront area and the City's greenways. The potential future impact on the local economy and the quality of life for the residents and visitors is significant. The City already has a Greenway Development Plan. Riverfront development planning is well underway. It is critical that the City determine the financial and management resources that it wants to commit during the next fiscal year. This is a multi-year project. Additional mid-term planning strategies, timelines, and available resources should be identified. Budgeting priorities over the next 10 years should be developed and implemented.

- 1. Determine funding commitment to infrastructure requirements to implement the Riverfront Development Plan through the annual budgeting process.
 - a. Site preparation
 - b. Water
 - c. Storm drainage
- 2. Establish the Riverfront Development Plan management resources that the City will commit over the next 10 years.
 - a. Maintenance of grounds
 - b. Security
 - c. Usage scheduling/reservations
- 3. Implement the City's Greenway Development Plan over the next 10 years. Create a priority list of projects and commit the funds required to implement the projects through the annual budgeting process.
 - a. Connectivity with other areas of the City
 - b. Lighting
 - c. Picnic pavilions
 - d. Picnic tables
 - e. Signage
 - f. Waste receptacles
 - g. Benches
 - h. ADA accessible facilities
 - i. Access drives



IV. Technology/Fiber-Optic Internet Infrastructure

The City has significantly upgraded its broadband infrastructure to fiber-optic internet for businesses. A challenge remains in addressing the "fiber to the premises" for connection to many homes in the city. The City should plan and implement strategies to accomplish the goal of making fiber-optic internet available to every resident of Bowling Green within the next four years.

- Determine the number of residences that do not have access to affordable and symmetrical upload and download fiber-optic internet.
- 2. "Fiber to the Premises Study." Determine the cost to make fiber-optic internet available to every household (available, not free).
- 3. Determine if the City can leverage Federal funds to pay for all or a portion of the cost over a period of four years.
- 4. Move forward in 2022-23 with the development of a Request for Proposal to implement the "fiber to the premises" initiative.

V. Housing Development

Housing development has been identified as an immediate community need. A housing needs assessment was conducted in 2019. A deficit in housing stock across all price points and configurations is an issue that has been consistently mentioned throughout the information-gathering process.

In 2018, it was estimated that 90% of the total housing stock in the Bowling Green Reinvestment Area (BGRA) was occupied. The City should evaluate its success in addressing the situation, identify the gaps and challenges remaining, and refocus its efforts to achieve success.

The City should consider bringing developers, property owners, financial institutions, community agency leaders, and planning professionals together to address the general housing needs in the City.

The growing economy within the region is going to present a unique set of opportunities to the City of Bowling Green. The City must prepare for the inevitable growth that will follow economic opportunity. If people do not have a place to live, the community will not be able to sustain the labor supply required to fulfil the needs of the employers. The pandemic, the Great Reset, and the Great Resignation have changed the employment dynamic. This situation will change again as employers upgrade their ability to do more work with fewer employees.

By 2032, the employer/employee dynamic will have changed in ways that were unimaginable only two years ago.

- 1. Decide where growth will occur as the comprehensive plan is updated this year. Plan for all price ranges of housing development.
- 2. Determine the City's share of future development costs infrastructure, streets, lighting, and traffic impact.
- 3. Convene developers, property owners, Public Housing Authority, financial institutions, realtors, builders' association, nonprofit agencies, community organizations, and planning professionals to discuss the urgent need to plan and execute strategies to create more housing options in Bowling Green. As a result of the pandemic, material costs have dramatically increased and are in short supply. This issue will be one of, if not the most, challenging issue that the City will confront and will impact the future growth of the City for decades to come. The City government and community, together, will create a visionary and bold plan to address the housing needs across all income and demographic groups. The City should then move to action.

VI. City Workforce Development

The City desires that its own workforce be reflective of the community it serves. The City has actively engaged in mentoring and developing programs to recruit, retain, and promote female and minority employees through relation-building events among the various departments. The City should continue to invest the time and resources to implement this vision. In addition, the City should focus on succession planning within its departments.

- 1. Expand the employee recruitment outreach efforts of the City beyond the traditional hiring methods.
- 2. Establish relationships with minority community leaders and actively recruit directly from those populations.
- 3. Expand outreach within the education community so that the City has advocates who will help identify qualified candidates across a broader labor pool.
- 4. Identify positions that will be vacant due to retirement or attrition within the next five years and develop future leaders from within.
- 5. Identify strategies to remain competitive in wages with other cities, counties, and state agencies.

VII. Transportation

The most frequent complaint noted by all groups was traffic congestion. In addition, projected future growth indicates the need for visionary planning and preparation to meet the future needs of the City and Warren County. The City must anticipate future growth within a 10-year horizon and allocate the resources over time to mitigate the effects of unbridled growth that is sure to come.

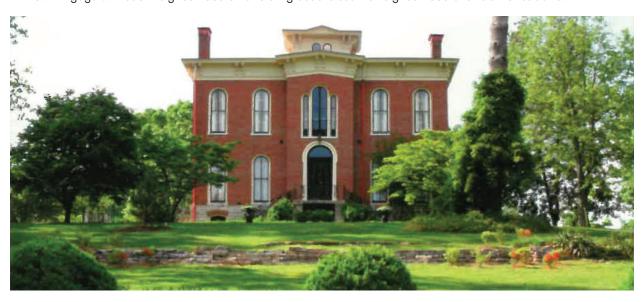
- 1. Public transportation. Reassess the quality and quantity of public transportation services.
 - a. Public transportation between neighborhoods and the workplace is critical for economic stability and growth.
 - b. Public transportation for low-income residents is critical for healthcare, shopping, food, and work security.
 - c. Evaluate the City's investment in public transportation to determine that the services are efficient and effective.
- 2. New development. As the City goes through the comprehensive plan update process, ensure that, to the extent practicable, traffic congestion is mitigated.
- Consistently communicate with the public so that they understand the City does not control or regulate State and Federal highways.
- 4. Work collaboratively with State and Federal highway officials to assess ways to relieve traffic bottleneck areas.
- 5. Require that new developments incorporate smart transportation best practices, and that sidewalks and bike lanes are a part of every new develop.



VIII. Strong Neighborhoods

A sense of place and belonging are critical to the quality of life of a community and a city. Strong, vibrant, and resilient neighborhoods are the foundation of community development. They contribute to the diversity, growth, and long-term sustainability of a city. The City's plan should include an adequate investment of time and resources into the long-term viability for all of Bowling Green's neighborhoods. This is a prime opportunity for City leadership to engage the residents of the neighborhoods and craft strategies that are specific to the needs of each neighborhood.

- 1. Every neighborhood should:
 - a. Eliminate substandard housing using all of the tools at the City's disposal.
 - b. Evaluate safe structure standards, particularly in light of the recent tornado disaster within the City.
 - c. Have adequate, equitable, and effective code compliance.
 - d. Be walkable.
 - e. Have a gathering space. This can be accomplished through block party events, parks, pocket parks, or greenspace.
 - f. Have a strong sense of identity through signage, entrance enhancement, and cultural character.
 - g. Be safe.
 - h. Have connectivity to other areas of the City.
 - i. Have adequate infrastructure.
 - j. Have access to fiber-optic internet.
- 2. Prioritize the needs of each neighborhood and dedicate budget funds to address the basic issues over a period of 10 years.
- 3. Engage with each neighborhood on a rotating basis to see the neighborhood and listen to residents.



Partnership, Cooperation, and Support Functions

Interlocal Agreements, Consolidation of Services, and Convening Partnerships

Multiple opportunities exist for the City government to act as a supporting partner or convener of partners to guide and develop initiatives that benefit the quality of life for the residents of the City, County, and region. All of the issues may not require or be appropriate for direct financial support, though the issues may impact the quality of life, efficient delivery of services, and managed growth of the area. Key partnerships have the potential to impact the future of Bowling Green into the foreseeable future, such as working with Warren County on an updated countywide revenue stream to better support 911 emergency services.

Homeless Issues

In a 2019 housing study, the need for affordable housing was identified as a specific area of need for the City. Other housing challenges include the need for senior housing and transitional housing for the homeless. In 2021, the City of Bowling Green convened a public forum to listen to various community agencies that provide services and support to the homeless community.

The City government should define its role and responsibilities in addressing this issue and implement appropriate strategies to achieve success. The KLC 2021 Housing and Homelessness Summit brought together experts and practitioners from across the State to share strategies, resources, and success stories. The KLC website has a comprehensive list of potential partners and resources that the City can access and share with local agencies. Additional webinars are planned for 2022.

Education

Western Kentucky University, Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College, and local school districts are significant players in the region and impact the future prosperity of the City in many ways. The City should cultivate these relationships and engage as a convener of the partners, when appropriate, to recruit, retain, and expand the workforce and the economy.





Economic and Workforce Development

The City has a direct and indirect role in the future economic development opportunities of the City, County, and region. The Chamber of Commerce, economic development agencies, and education partners along with city and county governments create the synergies that drive the engines of growth and prosperity for the community. The City should evaluate and define "its lane" so that it can exert its fair share of influence in the creation and implementation of the community's vision of the future.

Summary

City government does not have the capacity or resources to solve every community problem. Bowling Green has been steadfast in establishing policies and focusing budget funds on those areas that are specifically within the purview of local government. The City's leadership does, however, play a critical role in leading the entire community and lending its considerable credibility and voice in support of other agencies and organizations that can solve problems. The City should take every opportunity to stand together with these entities that can address issues that impact the quality of life and livability within the City.

Policy Agenda

In conjunction with the Housing Development goal to facilitate a convening of various community stakeholders and partner agencies, the issue of homelessness and transitional housing will be included in the conversation and plan to address housing needs. The City should then move to action.

Conclusion

The City of Bowling Green is a thriving city with economic opportunities and a high quality of life that attracts people to live, work, and play. As the City grows and prospers, new challenges will also arise. It is the hope and desire of the authors of this plan that the leadership of Bowling Green will continue to do what has been its hallmark of success – capturing the vision for what Bowling Green can become and having the fortitude to take bold steps to ensure the vision becomes the reality.





Implementation Tracking Matrix

	tion Efficient Governance	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
1.	Conservative budgeting that is focused on the role of city government.			
2.	Examine projected revenues and projected expenditures to determine if revenue growth at the current rate will adequately support the delivery of future demands on City services. Thoroughly examine the impact of various revenue scenarios on the City's finances.			
3.	Leverage Federal funding through ARPA and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.			
4.	Acquire land for future City government needs.			
5.	Set aside a specific amount of time regularly during the BOC meetings to review and discuss progress on the strategic plan. Adapt the plan as needed.			
6.	Be proactive in engaging the City's visionary leaders in discussions about opportunities and challenges that are on the horizon. Then, act.			
7.	Continue to support contract agencies that perform essential services focused on improving the quality of life within the City.			
8.	Develop a robust 10-year financial and development strategy in support of economic development expansion.			
9.	Continually improve transparency and communication with the public.			

	tion Downtown Development	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
1.	With the hiring of a downtown development coordinator, the City should accelerate the implementation of the City's vision for a thriving and vibrant downtown.			
2.	A thriving downtown needs 250 event days annually. Develop a list of the resources required, such as setup, security, cleanup, staging, and publicity. Determine the resources that the City could provide either as in-kind or financial.			
3.	Diversify the business mix.			

tion Riverfront and Greenways Development	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
Determine funding commitment to infrastructure requirements to implement the Riverfront Development Plan through the annual budgeting process.			
a. Site preparation			
b. Water			
c. Storm drainage			
Establish the Riverfront Development Plan management resources that the City will commit over the next 10 years.			
a. Maintenance of grounds			
b. Security			
c. Usage scheduling/reservations			
Implement the City's Greenway Development Plan over the next 10 years. Create a priority list of projects and commit the funds required to implement the projects through the annual budgeting process.			
a. Connectivity with other areas of the City			
b. Lighting			
c. Picnic pavilions			
d. Picnic tables			
e. Signage			
f. Waste receptacles			
g. Benches			
h. ADA accessible facilities			

	tion . Technology/Fiber-Optic Internet Infrastructure	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
1.	Determine the number of residences that do not have access to fiber-optic internet.			
2.	"Fiber to Premises." Determine the cost to make fiber- optic internet available to every household (available, not free).			
3.	Determine if the City can leverage Federal funds to pay for all or a portion of the cost over a period of four years.			

	tion Housing Development	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
1.	Decide where growth will occur as the comprehensive plan is updated this year. Plan for all price ranges of housing development.			
2.	Determine the City's share of future development costs – infrastructure, streets, lighting, and traffic impact.			
3.	Convene developers, property owners, Public Housing Authority, financial institutions, realtors, community organizations, and planning professionals to discuss the urgent need to plan and execute strategies to create more housing options in Bowling Green. As a result of the pandemic, material costs have dramatically increased. This issue will be one of, if not the most, challenging issue that the City will confront and will impact the future growth of the City for decades to come. The City government and community, together, need a visionary and bold plan to address the housing needs across all income and demographic groups.			

Action VI. City Workforce Development		Addressed	Underway	Not Started
1.	Expand the employee recruitment outreach efforts of the City beyond the traditional hiring methods.			
2.	Establish relationships with minority community leaders and actively recruit directly from those populations.			
3.	Expand outreach within the education community so that the City has advocates who will help identify qualified candidates across a broader labor pool.			
4.	Identify positions that will be vacant due to retirement or attrition within the next five years and develop future leaders from within.			
5.	Identify strategies to remain competitive in wages with other cities, counties, and state agencies.			

	tion . Transportation	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
1.	Public transportation. Reassess the quality and quantity of public transportation services.			
	 Public transportation between neighborhoods and the workplace is critical for economic stability and growth. 			
	 Public transportation for low-income residents is critical for healthcare, shopping, food, and work security. 			
	 Evaluate the City's investment in public transportation to determine that the services are efficient and effective. 			
2.	New development. As the City goes through the comprehensive plan update process, ensure that, to the extent practicable, traffic congestion is mitigated.			
3.	Consistently communicate with the public so that they understand the City does not control or regulate State and Federal highways.			
4.	Work collaboratively with State and Federal highway officials to assess ways to relieve traffic bottleneck areas.			
5.	Require that new developments incorporate smart transportation best practices, and that sidewalks and bike lanes are a part of every new development.			

Action VIII. Strong Neighborhoods		Addressed	Underway	Not Started	
1.	Eve	ry neighborhood should:			
	a.	Eliminate substandard housing using all of the tools at the City's disposal.			
	b.	Have adequate, equitable, and effective code compliance.			
	c.	Be walkable.			
	d.	Have a gathering space. This can be accomplished through block party events, parks, pocket parks, or greenspace.			
	e.	A strong sense of identity through signage, entrance enhancement, and cultural character.			
	f.	Be safe.			
	g.	Have connectivity to other areas of the city.			
	h.	Have adequate infrastructure.			
	i.	Have access to fiber-optic internet.			
2.	bud	ritize the needs of each neighborhood and dedicate get funds to address the basic issues over a period O years.			
3.	_	age with each neighborhood on a rotating basis to the neighborhood and listen to residents.			

Action Partnerships, Cooperation, and Support Functions	Addressed	Underway	Not Started
In conjunction with the Housing Development goal to facilitate a convening of various community stakeholders and partner agencies, the issue of homelessness and transitional housing will be included in the conversation and plan to address housing needs. The City should then move to action.			

APPENDIX

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Summary and Analysis

Several strategies were deployed to gather information regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the City of Bowling Green. A summary of the results is provided below.

Strengths

- Fiscally responsible lean operations
- Fully accredited departments
- City works well with county, WKU, Chamber, and others
- Growth, job expansions
- Diversity
- Parks developments
- Great facilities and employees
- Great parks, public services
- Good planning looking at future growth
- Well-positioned for the future
- Housing study completed

Weaknesses

- Not enough workers for all the jobs
- Out of balance between blue-collar and white-collar jobs
- Lack of fiber-optic internet to homes
- Lack of housing across all price ranges
- Loss of recycling
- Lack of transportation
- Need to keep the students here losing a lot of talent
- Traffic/transportation
- Trying to maintain level of service without raising taxes no other funding source
- Rapidly growing population with limited housing
- Homelessness
- Not many opportunities for community conversations

Opportunities

- Downtown arts and entertainment district
- River Street and riverfront developments
- Engage community and partners to help with problematic issues
- More greenways and connections
- More diversity in supervisory level jobs
- Fiber-optic internet expansion into homes

Threats

- More jobs than workers and wages are low
- Lack of community engagement/conversations
- Growth trying to keep up with providing services to growing population
- Expansion of services (parks) without forethought

CITY OF BOWLING GREEN ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Kentucky League of Cities would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions by the Board of Commissioners, city staff and community leaders in the creation of Bowling Green's strategic plan.

Bowling Green Board of Commissioners

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Commissioner Carlos Bailey

Commissioner Dana Beasley-Brown

Commissioner Melinda Hill

Commissioner Sue Parrigin

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Ashley Jackson, City Clerk

Hillary Hightower, City Attorney

Justin Brooks, Fire Chief

Michael Delaney, Police Chief

Greg Meredith, Public Works Director

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