

STEPHENSON COUNTY

STRATEGIC VISION & GOALS

2025 - 2027



Prepared By:

next level
PARTNERS FOR BIG IDEAS

ABOUT

In February 2024, the Stephenson County Board and Department Heads took part in a planning process to develop a Strategic Vision for the County and a set of initial strategies to implement in the coming years to begin to realize the vision.

This Strategic Vision & Goals is the result of this process. This document contains an overarching vision for the County as we want to see it in 2050 along with an overarching mission statement describing how the County Board and Staff will act in partnership with other organizations and citizens to achieve the vision.

The plan is broken into 7 Focus Areas that also start with a vision statement describing that focus area in 2050. These are followed by strategies the County will implement to begin to achieve the vision. Progress measures describe how we can measure and monitor progress toward the Focus Area vision.

2050 VISION

Stephenson County is a prosperous and welcoming community where families from all backgrounds enjoy high-quality homes in safe, sustainable neighborhoods, in both urban and rural settings. Employment is plentiful and people have access to the health and social services they need. Well-maintained roads and accessible transportation systems make getting to work, school, entertainment, and activities easy and affordable for young and old people alike.

Stephenson County's government is trusted, thanks to a diverse group of leaders, that reflect the community, and by having open communication both internally and externally. This has created a ripple effect in the community, encouraging more involvement in community organizations and leadership. A strong commitment to having best practices, standards, procedures in place and using them has made the government staff and board efficient and effective.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Stephenson County government is a professional, transparent organization that serves the people of Stephenson County through a diverse team of experienced leaders from the community and strong partnerships. We foster respect and trust through active communication and effective management of resources. We use data and technology to measure and communicate our progress and support continuous improvement through new ideas that make us stronger.

2025-2027 FOCUS AREAS



COMMUNITY SAFETY



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT



ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION



RELIABLE COMMUNICATION



HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES



PARKS & FACILITIES

COMMUNITY SAFETY



Whether in a rural community or in an urban area in our County, our residents feel safe and enjoy all there is to do in Stephenson County. Our sheriff and emergency services are fully staffed with dedicated professionals that ensure the public safety with fast response times and proactive crime prevention programs. Safety is understood by all as a collective responsibility. Neighbors know each other, lookout for one another. Residents and business owners participate in programs that help make Stephenson County a safe and respectful community.

Key Strategies

- Strengthen & support resident engagement strategies by providing tools, facilitation support, and best practices to improve crime & safety.
- Hold community engagement meetings, town hall meetings, etc. to identify differences in needs in urban vs rural settings
- Support & evaluate the Crime Suppression Unit program
- Support & evaluate the Social Service Officer program
- Evaluate additional investment in officers for the Sheriff department with a focus on ensuring our officers are representative of the community
- Review mutual aid agreements to strengthen and support our crime and safety targets
- Implement house number system in rural areas to improve response times

Progress Measures

- Continued improvement in crime data
- Resident & Business engagement in crime & safety programming
- Emergency service response times improve
- Residents report feeling safe
- More visits to area businesses and use of parks & amenities

Owner: Public Property & Safety Committee

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Stephenson County's economy is growing. Our existing businesses are expanding and adding jobs, while new companies emerge. Main Street and downtown store fronts offer a variety of shops, restaurants, and entertainment options in our rural and urban towns and cities. Residents can find a wide range of jobs with good pay and benefits. Businesses actively support and participate in community endeavors. The County supports this through partnerships that invest in infrastructure, housing, entrepreneurship, and workforce development strategies that support growth.

Key Strategies

- Work within the Greater Freeport Partnership to strengthen & expand
 - business retention & expansion
 - workforce housing
 - workforce skill training
 - entrepreneurship
- Identify and develop industrial space to support business expansion
- Review County policies to streamline & reduce hurdles for businesses development
- Review and identify incentives for developers & business expansion
- Explore policies & incentives to support alternative energy expansion

Progress Measures

- Jobs
- Average wage
- Business retention
- Business starts
- Commercial construction \$
- Commercial construction sq. ft.
- Shovel-ready sites with water/utility access
- Housing units
- Skill/Education levels of residents
- Tax base

Owner: Planning & Development Committee

EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT



Stephenson County's government responds quickly to community needs and has open channels of communication with residents, partners, and among departments. We provide required services efficiently and effectively and target resources to emerging needs using data, best practices, and thoughtful planning to guide our work. Our government is trusted and transparent. We use technology effectively to centralize systems, streamline services, and communicate with the community.

We value and participate in strong public-private partnerships that support investment and growth. Our relationships with regional, state, and national partners result in support for investment in our communities.

Key Strategies

- Board Meetings are respectful and efficient, information is shared in advance to streamline discussions and improve decision making
- Empower department heads through improved communication & collaboration
- Streamline & standardize systems to improve efficiency and reduce risk
- Fully implement centralized data & communication systems (Teams, etc.)
- Develop a Human Resource Director position to improve retention, streamline hiring and H.R. practices, and reduce risk
- Establish a succession planning process for director level and other key positions

Progress Measures

- Establish a dashboard to communicate progress on key measures (e.g. turnover, budget performance, productivity, etc.)
- Benchmark Stephenson County performance against other like communities in key performance metrics
- Retention rates improve
- Time or funding saved by procurement, RFP and other process improvements
- County Board is viewed as organized, effective, and respectful

Owner: Administration Committee

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION



Our transportation systems are reliable, safe, convenient, affordable and create access for all to get where they need to go in our county, and anywhere in the world. Buses, roads, bike trails, sidewalks, and paths are well maintained and lit, creating safe pathways between residential areas and schools, parks, and shopping; while connections to highways, air, and rail support business growth.

The County works in partnership with villages, townships, cities, state, and regional officials to track & share data about the condition of our transportation systems and to develop resources and ongoing plans for continuous improvement.

Key Strategies

- Support and evaluate the comprehensive road plan
- Review equipment condition and replacement plan
- Explore policies for UTV use of County roads & trails
- Support advocacy efforts for expanded bus & train services
- Explore route enhancements for Pretzel City bus service in partnership with the City of Freeport

Progress Measures

- Road & equipment condition improvement mapped and shared with community
- Transportation funding received from external sources & grants
- Usage of trails and bus ridership
- Citizen feedback shows improvement of transportation systems

Owner: Planning & Development Committee

RELIABLE COMMUNICATION



Thanks to advocacy, partnership, and prudent investment, the County effectively supports the ever-expanding role of communication and data systems in the day-to-day lives of our residents and businesses. High-speed internet and cellular services reliably support every home and business in the county. Emergency service systems are regularly tested, have built in redundancies, and staff are trained to use them when needed.

In addition, residents and businesses are informed about County services, and results through regular, active communication in multiple formats such as website, messaging systems, social media, and newsletters.

Key Strategies

- Review and evaluate emergency communications systems such as sirens and cellular & messaging systems to evaluate readiness.
- Update access and outage maps of high-speed internet service to engage partners and providers in improving coverage with a focus on neighborhoods and rural communities that currently lack access.
- Update coverage and outage maps of 5G cellular service to engage partners and providers in improving coverage with a focus on neighborhoods and rural communities that currently lack access.
- Engage & align partners, such as Greater Freeport Partnership, regional economic development & government partners, and service providers in a focused and intentional effort to create 100% access to high-speed internet and cellular networks.

Progress Measures

- Emergency communication systems readiness ratings including system condition, redundancy, and staff training levels.
- High-speed internet service access improvements (# households, businesses)
- 5G cellular service coverage improvements (# households, businesses)
- Investment by providers, partners, and County

Owner: Planning & Development Committee

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES



Residents are healthier and more able to participate in work, school, civic, and social activities in Stephenson County. Access for everyone to brain and body health services, social services, wellness activities, and healthy local food is easy and affordable. A strong network of providers, agencies, businesses, governments, and NGOs work in a coordinated effort to impact social & health determinants and wellbeing outcomes. Visits to service providers are made easy by effective referral and communication networks, and fully staffed facilities and clinics ensure quality care and short waiting times to access services.

Key Strategies

- Explore and engage in emerging local food efforts that support local farmers and provide local healthy food to residents.
- Evaluate health & wellness programs and benefits for County staff to improve health and wellness outcomes and support employee retention.
- Explore County's role in development of a health & social services coalition to identify and address needs in the health care, brain health, and social service systems.

Performance Measures

- Healthy foods are accessible and available to all populations
- County staff receive services and programs that benefit their health and wellness
- An engaged and representative coalition is developing and monitoring health and wellness programs for the community
- Progress is being tracked on a dashboard of social & health determinants

Owner: Nursing Committee in partnership with County Health Department and 708 board.

PARKS & FACILITIES



Our County facilities are well maintained through regular maintenance and long-range planning and investment. County buildings are efficient and effective places for employees to work in person or through high-quality technology solutions and residents and businesses find them easy to access and navigate. Our parks, recreational facilities, trails, and waterways are well maintained and make a positive impression with visitors and residents who come to experience our beautiful amenities.

Key Strategies

- Evaluate all building facilities (condition, accessibility, effective use, cost, etc.) and create a long-range facility plan.
- Use the long-range facility plan to engage partners and external funding opportunities
- Assess & develop plan & funding for ongoing park, recreation, infrastructure maintenance & replacement (e.g. equipment, landings, amenities, etc.)
- Evaluate the cost-benefit of a maintenance director position vs contracted maintenance services

Performance Measures

- Long-range facility plan and capital plan in place to guide facility planning, maintenance, and spending
- Cost-benefit analysis of maintenance director vs contract approach complete and used to choose best course of action
- Park & recreation facilities condition reporting (2x annually)
- Benchmark facility investments & needs vs like-sized counties
- Track external funding & partnership support

Owner: Public Property & Safety Committee, and Department Heads

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