



MEMORANDUM

TO: Jennifer Levitt, City Administrator, City of Cottage Grove
FROM: Chad Weinstein and James Fischer, Ethical Leaders in Action
DATE: February 10, 2025
RE: Outcomes from 2025 City Leadership Retreat

Introduction

This memorandum is respectfully submitted as the final deliverable of our engagement as co-planners and facilitators of the 2025 Cottage Grove City Leadership Retreat. It is intended to capture the outcomes and spirit of the relevant discussions which took place throughout the day.

Retreat Objectives

The retreat was held on January 25, 2025, in the Training Room at City Hall. The objectives for the retreat were to:

- Recognize progress made on, and recommend future initiatives for, the current strategic plan.
- Review the results of a housing study to inform future strategic plans.
- Revisit commercial and residential development plans to update strategies.
- Inform elected officials of actions taken in the past year to identify and address upstream risk factors, and future actions planned based on those insight from the professional perspectives of staff leaders.

The retreat is also an opportunity for elected and appointed leaders to reconnect and reflect on the state and future of the City of Cottage Grove. The retreat objectives and agenda were created by senior staff in partnership with Ethical Leaders in Action (ELA), then modified based on input from elected officials. We solicited this input through email and in voluntary interviews.

This memorandum is intended to capture direction, questions, and the spirit of discussion from both elected and appointed officials. Particular attention is given to the general will of the council expressed in this working session, typically offered in response to questions raised by staff leaders. The document is organized based on the agenda of the retreat.

Introductory Activity: Strategic Accomplishments in Perspective

For this first module, small groups of mixed council and staff rotated around the room to stations that held pre-printed posters showing a Strategic Direction and the corresponding progress in that area. Participants reviewed the notable accomplishments of 2024, identified their highlights, and commented on what inspired them about these achievements. The number at the end of a bullet identifies how many people rated the accomplishment as a highlight:

- Engaging Residents Where They Are
- Continue to develop video communications. **3**
 - *SWCTC produced 81 videos/ Added 239 YouTube subscribers/ Currently have 155,871 videos on YouTube.*

- Continue to update and refresh of the city's website. **1**
 - *Continually monitoring the website to make sure information is timely and relevant.*
- Dowdle puzzle development and marketing plan. **6**
 - *The Dowdle marketing plan along with editorial calendar was developed at the beginning of the year. Communications continued to follow this plan through the unveiling on Sept. 14 and has adjusted accordingly to demand. Total 2024 sales are 1,092. Promotion of the puzzle is ongoing, and sales will continue into 2025.*
- Enhance residents' knowledge of commissions/volunteer opportunities through video communication. **2**
 - *Worked with SWCTC to create both short form videos and more in-depth videos explaining each of the city's commissions.*
- Develop community survey in 2025. **1**
 - *This has been built into the proposed budget for 2025. The city will be entering into a contract with Polco to conduct the National Community Survey and provide the city with benchmark data about city services.*

Additional comments on Engaging Residents Where They Are:

- Epic Strawberry Fest!
 - Videos de-mystify city operations and show our personality.
 - SWCTC continues to find new and innovative ways to showcase the amazing work our staff does.
 - The wave video! Lots of likes.
 - Video monitors in places where people stand in lines or at retail locations, showing such videos.
 - Hiring a well-rounded experienced Communications Manager has a huge accomplishment.
 - Credit to all involved in the Dowdle puzzle project for being flexible and strategic on that.
 - The adaptation to our community's viewing preferences (short videos) and material that connects to a wide audience.
 - Citizen survey related to the community center/park amendment wanted.
 - Future partner with 833 and Athletic Association
- **Continuing Sustainable Growth**
 - Collaborate with Washington County on the redevelopment and planning for the Park Grove Library.
 - *The city continues to support the county in design considerations, ideas and future services.*
 - Initiate a Housing Plan. **1**
 - *Maxfield Research has completed a housing market study in Cottage Grove.*
 - Develop and implement the next phase of Business Retention and Expansion Program. **1**
 - *The BRE Program was successfully launched. Participation in the business survey was approximately 19%.*
 - Continue to aggressively pursue state and federal funding for the County 19A and 100th Street Realignment Project. **1**
 - *The City was successful in obtaining \$5 million through the Minnesota Highway Freight Program in 2024, along with \$1.667 million in a joint request with Washington County through Congressionally Directed Spending.*

- Implement 3M settlement projects while maintaining an interim treatment plan that meets all PFAS standards. **4**
 - *Due to the lowered state Health Based Values and federal Maximum Contaminant Levels for PFAS, Wells 11 and 12 will be treated by the Intermediate Zone Water Treatment Plant.*
- Work collaboratively with developers at Shoppes at Cottage View. **2**
 - *The owner of the property reported that he has asked the developer for development numbers to better understand the challenges that prevent them from moving forward.*
- Issue an RFP for the services of a consultant to assist in creating an Economic Development Strategic Plan and Small Area Study.
 - *A final plan has been completed for review and discussion by the Council at the 2025 Strategic Planning Retreat.*
- Develop a strategic plan for the Convention and Visitors Bureau. **1**
 - *Chandler thinks is currently in the process of completing its final phase of outreach, research, and final report.*
- Remain a Step 5 Green Step City by continuing to improve sustainability across a variety of metrics.
- Final approval for the city's permanent and temporary sign code implemented streamlined standards. Public education was done on the new code requirements.
- Greater trend of home permits issued with 330 new home permits (single family and town home) issued in 2024, trending greater than 2023 with 290 new homes permits issued. **1**
- Secured a \$30,000 CLG Grant through the State Historic Preservation Office for completion of a historic context study for suburban expansion in Cottage Grove between 1945-1990. **1**
- Completed the first proactive code enforcement sweep of the new proactive code enforcement strategic plan.
- Roers, LLC who are building a 144- unit multi-family affordable and senior living project received \$1.96M in Tax Increment Finance funding.
- EDA approved an HRA Levy to help fund housing and redevelopment activities in the city. First HRA levy ever done in Cottage Grove. **1**
- EDA approves funding to support comprehensive, city-wide broadband program.
- Developed an in-house water meter replacement program to be completed with City staff, beginning in 2025.
- Implemented the 14th street snowplow route and fourth sidewalk route.
- Continued to enhance our use of the city GIS system, related to Emergency Management, Stormwater Inspection, Plowing, and Forestry.
- Commissioned two new dump trucks after working through a two-year lead time.
- Completed 1,510 work orders in the fleet division and 333 in the facilities division in 2024.
- Developed 10-year plans for pavement management, mill and overlay, and thin overlay projects.

Additional comments on Sustainable Growth:

- Pursuing state and federal funding for the County 19A and 100th Street Realignment Project should be a top priority.
- We must build out our retail and commercial areas.
- Great job pursuing outside funds; gaining grant funds is very important.
- Kudos to the staff for being innovative and keeping our community ahead of the game.

Making Cottage Grove a Recreation Destination

- Develop park and building plans for Mississippi Reserve Park. **4**
 - *Created Mississippi Dunes Park Master Plan. Completed a building concept design for the park. Completed grant application for park development.*
- Develop education materials for local option sales tax referendum.
 - *Worked with consultants to plan and execute communication to residents to inform them of the three projects, show the concept plans, and provide the tax impact if the projects pass. Also attended community events.*
- Develop plans for the Kingston Park Building. **1**
 - *Building and site design plans and specifications are 90% complete.*
- Create unique recreational places and spaces that are signature landmarks to Cottage Grove. **3**
 - *Glacial Valley Park opened to the community and has realized exceptional usage of the facilities.*
- Leverage key recreational facilities and park buildings to be points of pride for the community. **3**
 - *We continued to reinvest into our existing parks and take care of what we have by replacing aging recreational facilities such as playgrounds at West Draw, Nina's and Granada Parks and replacing sports lighting at Woodridge Park to improve playability and reduce energy use.*
- Began habitat restoration process of over twenty-two acres within the Cottage Grove Trailway Corridor with over \$157,000 in grant funding from the MN DNR Conservation Partners Legacy program. **2**
- Added Pickleball programming with nearly 400 registrations for club membership, leagues and tournaments.
- Converted PaddleShare kayak trailer to allow for snowshoe rentals during winter months.
- Added No School youth programming options such as Election Day at Peter Thompson Park
- Managed over 40% increase in facility/event permitting revenue in our park system and have created a strategy for development of an online platform for program registrations.
- 2025. Ice Arena and River Oaks Golf Course and Event Center posted a net profit. River Oaks generated over 42,000 rounds of golf in 2024.
- Planted nearly 100 trees at Sunnyhill Park, Pine Tree Pond Park and Kingston/Grey Cloud Elementary/CGMS campus as part of Arbor Day program.
- Added party lighting system to Ice Arena's west rink to expand programming options and to enhance event experiences.
- Added solar panels to the Ice Arena's west rink roof which is expected to generate over 300,000 KWH of clean energy with utility savings of \$25-30K.
- River Oaks Launched a set tournament fee that reduces frustrations and potential for pricing inequities.
- Replaced nearly a half mile of cart paths and cleared over an acre of wooded areas to improve playing experience at River Oaks Golf Course.
- Hired new Executive Chef and created a new menu and have solidified a deeper team of kitchen staff.
- Reclassified our Twin Cities Public Country Club Membership.

Additional comments on Making Cottage Grove a Recreation Destination:

- The park & trail system is a jewel in the crown of our city; credit to Parks & Rec.
- River Oaks is a well-maintained and highly thought of public course.
- City staff have done a great job with programming toward this goal.
- Outstanding parks, green space and golf!

- Habitat restoration is often an underappreciated effort. But the benefit of the environment and habitat has a generational impact. CG is way ahead of trends in this area.
- There is finally a plan for the Kingston Building; lots of excitement!
- We have an amazing Parks & Rec staff and a Council that supports them.

Remain an Employer of Choice

- Continue to develop and implement DEI strategies.
 - *The city worked with the Center for Economic Inclusion at the beginning of the year to complete the racial equity dividends index. The city continues applicant diversity tracking.*
- Develop training programs for employees at all levels such as the Management and Leadership Development Academy and the Learning to Lead Academy, Book Studies and Guest Speakers.
 - *Employee Training Plans – all employees met with immediate supervisor to develop an individual training plan. The city hosted the inaugural Managers Summit in February along with a Fall Book Series on Upstream.*
- Continue to grow and enhance employee engagement programs. (GOLD, Police and Fire awards programs, Health and Wellness)
 - *River Oaks hosted the Police and Fire dinner and awards recognition as well as the milestone anniversary lunch and awards. The city awarded 7 GOLD awards to nominated employees. The Wellness Committee continues to plan monthly activities for staff.*
- Start retention interviews, continue new hire interviews, and Lunch and Learn enhancement.
 - *The first round of retention interviews were completed in February. 10% of employees from each department were selected at random for the first round later opening to all employees. A total of 25 retention interviews were completed in 2024. Human Resources continues with 90-day new hire interviews for every new employee, totaling 17 in 2024. Each department participated in hosting one Lunch and Learns. Service award lunches continued in 2024.*
- Settle all union contracts in 2024.
- S&P Global reaffirmed our AAA bond rating with the 2024 A Bonds issuance.
- Received GFOA Certificate Award for Financial Report for the 33rd consecutive year.
- Since the FMP has been prepared it is easier to understand the projects that need to be bonded each year. This led to the opportunity to issue bonds early in 2024 in order to capture lower interest rates.
- The City had 37 personnel actions for regular, full and part-time employees. Which includes hirings and promotions.
- The city had 147 seasonal hires. This number does not include returning staff.

Additional comments on Remain an Employer of Choice:

- Internal leadership training is done well and I appreciate how they are attended by all departments, including union staff.
- Very well-managed city; thanks for the raise!
- We invest in people – our culture is great!
- Settling union contracts can be an arduous task. There was a lot accomplished this year; done fairly and with open dialogue.
- The council appreciates the hard work to settle the contracts fairly and competitively.
- Our onboarding process has streamlined and is much easier and quicker to manage.
- Part-time/seasonal employees allow for flexibility and are financially cheaper. When done right, these employees are key to our success in delivering service.
- We work to understand our culture and how someone fits that culture prior to hiring.

- Kudos to the Finance team for achieving and maintaining our AAA Bond Rating. This has a positive impact on everything we do. Protect at all costs.
- Continue to take time to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals and teams.

Public Safety Strategic Direction

POLICE

Staffing 3

- Hired 4 Police Officers, INV Aide & Records Specialist
- Added Social Worker (Case Management Unit)
- Added Traffic Safety Officer
- Investigative Aide to full-time
- Promoted Records Specialist to Crime Analyst
- Added Reserve Officers
- Added Community Impact Sergeant
- Added Administrative Sergeant

Strategic Planning 6

- Developed and Adopted Police 5-year strategic plan, core values, and vision
- Developed a staffing plan for police to address growth (identified benchmarks and service levels)
- Quarterly & annual reports to measure and maintain progress on strategic goals

Response Times/Calls for Service

- Down to 5.5 minutes from 6.0 minutes for priority 1 calls with minor emphasis.

Wellness, Recruitment and Retention 1

- Positive Impact Committee
- New wellness & peer support policies
- Provided annual mental health checks and medical screening, CISDs, peer support and chaplain support, and free counseling
- Assigned squad (take home) program
- Employee appreciation & awards banquet
- Employee of the quarter awards
- Years of service recognition
- Labor contracts
- Actively recruited and developed a CSO Cadet program
- OSHA inspection
- Job Fairs
- Explorer Post

Technology and Equipment

- CrimeView Mapping
- Vector Solutions Check-It & FTO Solutions Software additions
- Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR) - pilot program
- Flock (exploring)
- Purchased and installed new outdoor warning siren
- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program application submission for 2 new outdoor warning sirens

Community Engagement **1**

- Explorer Program
- Citizens Academy
- Night to Unite
- Open House
- Safety Camp
- Strawberry Fest
- SafeCam program
- Police services survey
- Online crime reporting
- Latino Peace Officer Association – Shop with a Cop
- Military support and cancer awareness patches
- Public Safety Board partnership
- Christmas gift program participation (BTYR and CG Lions Club)

Miscellaneous

- Event staffing/officers assigned to special events
- Planned and hosted a train derailment tabletop exercise for Cottage Grove with 110 internal and external participants
- EOC activation for severe weather event (August 2024)
- All Hazard Plan updated

FIRE

Staffing **3**

- Hired 7 full-time firefighters
- Hired 7 part-time firefighters (3 with 2025 start dates)
- Additional Deputy Fire Chief
- Promoted New Fire Chief
- Promoted two new Deputy Chiefs and two Fire Captains
- Established Fire Inspector/FAO position
- Established Community Paramedic positions
- Community Paramedic with Case Management partnership

Strategic Planning **5**

- Developed a Fire/EMS 5-year strategic plan, core values and vision
- Developed RFP for Standards of Cover/Community Risk Reduction Study
- Developed a staffing plan for Fire/EMS to address growth (identified benchmarks and service levels)

Response Times/Calls for Service

- 4930 calls for service
- 7.1% increase from 2023 (4603)
- 61% increase from 2017 (3070)
- Maintained Response times
- Fire response times: 6:37 minutes (emergency calls)
- EMS response times remain better than state averages: 6.22 minutes (emergency calls)

Wellness, Recruitment and Retention **2**

- Retention, Recruitment and Recognition Committee
- Updated workout equipment
- Provided annual mental health checks and yearly medical screenings, CISDs
- Employee appreciation & awards banquet
- Accelerated firefighter/paramedic program
- Instructors at Paramedic and Fire training
- Century College
- Inver Hills
- Ride Along Program
- Phoenix Award (life-saving award)
- Promotional positions with incentive pay for Community Paramedics and Fire Inspector/FAO
- Second Language Training opportunities
- Robust training opportunities for all firefighters

Technology and Equipment

- Exploring fire rescue boat
- Pre-plan software
- Upgraded fire radios
- Radio headsets in fire trucks
- CAD in all front-line apparatus (command staff, fire trucks and ambulances)
- Fire Fleet/Equipment Management (Fleet reduction)
- Approved purchase of Fire Tender
- Applied for FEMA Grant for new SCBAs
- Purchased new cardiac monitors and ventilators

Community Engagement **2**

- Heart Safe Community
- Teddy's Heart Initiatives
- Southern Washington County Community Education Partnerships
- School Visits
- Day Care Visits
- CPR/AED training (business, students and community members)
- Safe Haven Program (180 visits to date)
- Life Safety Inspections
- Fire Open House
- Night to Unite
- Safety Camp
- EMS services survey
- Car Seat Safety
- Youth Fire Prevention and Prevention (Youth Service Bureau)
- Fall Prevention
- Public Safety Board partnership

Miscellaneous

- Maintain National Recognition for heart and stroke EMS care
- Event staffing/Fire/EMS crews at special events as needed
- Full time and part time staff in VCS Software (all staff in Public Safety scheduling software)

Additional comments on Public Safety accomplishments:

- Accomplishing much while undergoing transition in 2024 – Great job!
- Our proactive policing presents a good public image while reducing incident exposure.
- Commitment to engaging with the community, forming relationships and educating is absolutely awesome!
- Effective use of technology allows us to cover more issues, reduce labor, and help residents.
- Credit staff for being highly strategic in both PD & FD to then formulate tactics to fit the plan.
- Strategic planning is critical to all other efforts and the foundation for all of the good work that we do.
- Very proud to accomplish hiring 4 officers and 1 social worker. This helps our public safety staff focus on public safety.
- Heart safe initiative was awesome. Well done!
- Our community engagement from Public Safety is awesome, intentional, and makes a difference. Our PD/FD are highly respected.

Maxfield Housing Study

The second module of the retreat consisted of a review and discussion of the Maxfield Housing Study. The following questions and topics arose and were discussed:

- Mortgage and foreclosure rates are relevant statistics; we believe that some homeowners who would like to move are not doing so due to their advantageous mortgage rates.
- Does current zoning allow for the additional units that we project in 2030 and 2035? (In short, yes.)
- Maxfield's methods and data for determining demographic diversity differ from those used by the U.S. Census.
- The Council can balance investments in market rate versus affordable housing. Investing to support the development of market rate housing may be necessary for some developments; costs can be high, but the yield high in terms of property taxes has historically been good. In any case, the City must not let developers take short cuts.
- How will we support subsidized/affordable housing for low-income and seniors?
- Do we need to advance transportation initiatives to make us more inviting for funding support?
- The EDA should take the lead in developing options for the Council to consider with respect to LAHA.
- The council will authorize staff to work on a proposed plan for allocation of LAHA funding.
- The council directs the EDA to develop a 10-year plan for the HRA levy to address the issues of affordable housing and affordable senior housing.

East Ravine Development Plan

The third module concerned the East Ravine Development Plan. The following topics and questions arose during this discussion:

- Should CG increase its park dedication fees?
- Should CG levy today or bond for land acquisition?
- What scale of investment will be necessary to meet public demand for parks?
- Could we keep parks simpler to save money?
- Could CG offer naming rights to parks or create other sponsorship programs to increase funding?

- Could the Parks Commission confirm that CG has the right-sized parks in the right locations?
- Do the specific geographic features of this land indicate a need to adjust service levels to align costs and benefits of park locations and amenities?
- Proceed with a feasibility report for the Ravine Parkway with a reduced median section.
- Work with the SWWD to secure land for Vandenberg Lake.
- Continue to work with the County on securing the land south of 80th Street.

Discussion: Upstream Issues and Efforts

After a working lunch that included an information briefing from the Public Safety Department, department heads updated the Council on their year-long efforts to identify and address “upstream” risk factors before they become problems. The following ideas arose from those discussions:

- The possibility of customer facing employees having flexibility in work hours by extending office hours and front desk security and design.
- Installing ballistic protection for the Council dais. This may be combined with the redesign of the front desk area to enhance both a sense of openness and facility security.
- Enlisting support from the Cottage Grove Scramblers and Lions for various projects to help get our message out to the public.
- Educating the public on the new road salt system.
- Providing Public Safety updates once per quarter in the weekly update to Council.

Discussion: the Future of Innovation Village

The fourth module was a review of the small area plan for a vision called Innovation Village. Discussions with the corporate land holder are underway; their acceptance of this vision for residential and mixed-use development is an initial, critical success factor. Ideas and questions that arose from that discussion included:

- Could there be a train stop there in the future?
- How can we save the old buildings, particularly making the old school a focal point?
- How can we work with 3M to reassure them that the development will be consistent with their interests? Excellent housing, consistent with the needs of senior, technical and business leaders, combined with natural and commercial amenities, might be highly desirable.
- The current visions are for higher-end development.

Final Exercise: Advancing the Strategic Directions

This final working session was, in some sense, the focal point for the entire retreat. Council and staff returned to the Strategic Direction posters to make notes on their goals and hopes for advancing in each of these directions in the coming year. Participants then reconvened to discuss each of the Strategic Directions in turn, articulating a “consensus” view of Council on goals or areas for staff to develop into proposed plans for each Direction.

Engaging Residents Where They Are

Discussion-based guidance for 2025:

- Develop crisis communication action plan.
- Began conversion of utility billing system that will be completed in 2025. The new system will provide a more seamless customer service experience. The new system will be more robust and efficient for city staff.

- Communications and Administration team to re-vamp Constant Contact email communication. Residents can sign up for five channels through the “Get Connected” tab on the website. One post per week per channel will be shared.
- Communications team will work with SWCTC and utilize internal resources to produce a video each week meeting residents where they are and how they prefer to receive their information.
- Developing a community survey has been built into the proposed budget for 2025. The city will be entering into a contract with Polco to conduct the National Community Survey and provide the city with benchmark data about city services.

Other ideas from the written comments and discussion:

- Consider a resident app and/or an employee app (e.g., for work orders, etc.)
- Focus on engaging local civic groups and clubs as advocates for accurate information on critical topics relevant to the community.
- Develop podcasts or information videos that advance transparency by de-mystifying city operations, humanizing city employees, informing the public and showing the personality of our city.
- Implement a web-based work order system for residents to alert public works of issues.
- The website has improved, but could we develop a phone friendly app for people to connect with the city.
- Try to make the survey consistent enough to compare with previous and future years for comparative assessment. It is important to keep it an annual event.

Continuing Sustainable Growth

Discussion-based guidance for 2025:

- LAHA- Think critically about the impact of policy and investment on community vitality.
- Link affordable projects to sites that are less expensive to develop.
- Mixed-use districts help us to meet our housing needs.
- Prepare and approve a Local Affordable Housing Plan. Staff should develop a policy proposal for LAHA dollars.

Other ideas from the written comments and discussion:

- Mixed-use districts help us meet housing needs at all points on the economic continuum.
- Create an industrial business plan for the city that compares the available labor force over time. Have a more structured plan that is normalized to project services on a per resident basis.
- Direct the EDA to begin a ten-year plan for HRA levy.
- Find ways to sustainably fund parks to maintain quality of life: Park fees? Dedicated levy? Public art? Continue to coordinate the plan for future park/rec spaces in growth areas.
- Relaunching an initiative to improve historical education of the community because CG has a great story that deserves to be shared.
- Develop a mobility/transportation plan that shows future routes; add micro-modal transportation to CG.
- Pursue feedback from realtors and developers on issues they see as most important around bringing more amenities and medium density housing to the city. Push developers where needed, or as one comment read, “*less talk, more action.*”
- Pursue the vision of Innovation Village (3M is a critical factor); preserve and integrate Langdon School into the development.
- Look at Grey Cloud Island master planning. Develop a plan for when Holcim is done mining.
- Continue to pursue funds, complete environmental work, design, and platting for 100th Street.
- Get the ball moving on the Shoppes – Hotel RFP, Ross land appraisal, etc.

- Continue to engage the County to be ready when the future of Grey Cloud Island becomes clear.
- Remain connected with the Metropolitan Council so we can appropriately influence their planning.

Making Cottage Grove a Recreation Destination

Discussion-based guidance for 2025:

- Think critically about this goal itself. Many of the achievements ascribed to this goal in 2024 primarily contributed to quality of life or services for residents. Could we reword this initiative to “Making Cottage Grove a Recreation and Gathering Destination” and expand it beyond amenities for local residents?
- Focus on sports and tournaments. This includes the Ice Arena as well as parks-based athletics fields.
- Frame “Ice Arena 2.0.” Complete a study to determine modernization needs such as confirming viability of current location, adding another sheet of ice, office space and lobby circulation.
- Hamlet Park – accelerate completion and funding sources.

Other ideas arising from written comments and discussion:

- Continue to expand recreational programming and diversity of programs.
- Embrace the Mississippi River for recreation and tourism.
- Consider the scope of parks in East Ravine; should we adjust service levels due to unique features of the area?
- Analyze the Lifetime Fitness project in Rosemount; could something like that be done in CG?
- Work with the Parks Commission to review park dedication fees, naming rights, or a levy to offset park development costs.
- Obtain snow making machinery for our trails to make them a cross-country skiing destination.
- Develop a “feature” of CG that draws tourists (world’s largest swing., ball of twine)
- Continue seeking ways to recover costs from recreation operations.
- Continue to work with the Watershed District on the Vandenberg Lake acquisition.

Remain an Employer of Choice

Discussion-based guidance For 2025:

- Continue plans to for security re-design of the front desk area. Add ballistic resistance to council dais.
- Restart the insurance committee to receive feedback regarding benefits from bargaining units.
- Ensure we continue to seek out health and wellness options for both mental and physical health at a reasonable price for all city employees.
- Recruiting
 - Look for programs to assess whether a new employee fits the culture before we hire them. Continue to look at incentives to work here beyond wages.
 - Ensure our benefits are at least market average.
- Retention
 - Currently wages/benefits are competitive, stay on this.
 - Develop a new public works leadership series.
 - Continue investing in training and other retention efforts. Continue open conversations as part of employee retention interviews.

Other ideas from written comments and discussion:

- The Financial Management Plan is good for overall planning, and we need to continue to assess our performance compared to it.
- Consider the flex schedule for front desk/customer-facing employees and improve security in this area.

Public Safety Strategy

This is not one of the formal strategic directions on the strategic plan, but is of course a topic of key strategic importance. The following comments were captured from the written comments:

- Continue cooperative equipment sharing where feasible.
- Continue aggressive recruitment.
- Keep people as the #1 resource.

Parking Lot Topics

The following items were placed in the “parking lot” for future discussion or action; items that are also covered in the discussion notes above have been omitted from this list.

- Consider adjustment of park service level for East Ravine between 70th & 80th.
- Find foreclosure trend data.
- Push DNR to restore its part of Mississippi Dunes to native oak savannah; enlist Friends of Mississippi to partner in the effort.
- Note homeowner concerns regarding a trail on the south shore of the Lake Robert.
- See what can be done about the North Point fence panels that keep falling down.

Conclusion

The retreat adjourned at approximately 3:45 PM. The facilitators wish to express their gratitude for being invited to return for the 2025 retreat. It is a privilege and a distinct pleasure to work with the appointed and elected leaders of the City of Cottage Grove.