



Grand Traverse County Strategic Plan

2024–2027

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**PUBLIC SECTOR
CONSULTANTS**

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Executive Summary

Grand Traverse County (GTC) engaged PublicSector Consultants (PSC) to facilitate the creation of a strategic plan to guide the direction of the county government from 2024 to 2027. The board of commissioners, county administrator, and department heads worked together during two strategic planning sessions to revise the county's mission and vision and develop strategic goals and objectives.

Mission

Grand Traverse County commits to being a leader in providing responsive, effective, quality service to our community.

Vision

Grand Traverse County, through innovation and collaboration with our community, cultivates a vibrant place for all to live, work, and play.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

1 Plan for sustainable growth and innovation

Objective one: Continue sound fiscal policy practices to meet current and long-term needs

Objective two: Use data and technology to influence innovation

Objective three: Define GTC's role as a regional hub

2 Recruit and retain qualified staff

Objective one: Determine staffing needs to achieve the enumerated goals

Objective two: Support workplace culture

Objective three: Optimize internal communications

3 Build trust and transparency

Objective one: Improve awareness of and access to county services

Objective two: Proactively share information with the community

4 Focus on the needs of the community

Objective one: Protect our environment: water, land, and air

Objective two: Be a catalyst to support diversifying regional growth

Objective three: Meet the broad physical and mental health needs of the community

Introduction and Background

The Grand Traverse County Administrator's Office engaged Public Sector Consultants to create a three-year strategic plan that will guide the county's administrative and programmatic direction. PSC conducted an employee engagement survey to gain insights on the possible needs and directions that should be addressed through the strategic plan. PSC also facilitated two strategic planning sessions with the Board of Commissioners, department staff, and administrative staff. During these sessions, participants:

- Reviewed and discussed the employee engagement survey findings
- Created a vision of success for GTC's future
- Revised the county's mission and vision statements
- Completed a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis
- Built consensus around strategic priorities and the goals and objectives needed to achieve those priorities
- Developed strategic timelines to plot activities and achieve goals

Staff from the administrator's office and PSC worked together between the strategic planning sessions to further refine the goals, objectives, strategies, and activities of the strategic plan, as well as to develop a 90-day implementation plan. PSC sought feedback from commissioners throughout the process to ensure the refinements aligned with their vision for the county.

Employee Engagement Survey Findings

GTC worked with PSC to develop and disseminate an employee engagement survey to gather input that informed initial discussion among commissioners about actions that the county government could consider to strengthen its team, thus enhancing the services the county provides to the community. Employees were asked about their job, team, supervisor, organization, and well-being, as well as open-ended questions about GTC's values, strengths, and weaknesses. Employees made suggestions on ways the county could improve the workplace environment, all of which were shared with the board of commissioners.

Vision for Grand Traverse County's Future

During the first strategic planning session, the board of commissioners was asked to envision an ideal future for GTC to help frame discussion around the County's mission and vision statements. Commissioners' responses centered on the ideas of being citizen focused, working toward a common direction, and building a strong team that tackles complex problems. Each of these areas is described in the list below.

Being citizen focused

- Confidence in making people's lives better
- Housing, jobs, services
- Services to taxpayers
- Diversifying jobs



Working toward a common direction

- Tackling emerging community problems
- Smart growth
- Thriving
- Systems that solve emergent needs
- Improved services for all

Building a strong team

- Collaboration
- Self-actualization
- Respect
- Democracy

Mission and Vision Statements

As part of assessing GTC's future direction, the board of commissioners reflected on the County's mission and vision statements, providing feedback on both and highlighting the following standout words:

- Beautiful
- Desirable
- Collaborate
- Community
- Responsive
- Effectiveness

They also reflected on what they would like to revise within the statements. They agreed that there needed to be a larger emphasis on the people they serve, the board's responsibility to preserve and improve their county, and the engagement with partners to collaborate and generate buy-in. Commissioners also agreed that the board should prioritize informed decisions rather than taking risks, but still maintain their desire to innovate. Finally, the commissioners thought that both statements needed simplification in both context and length.

The GTC administrative team revised the mission and vision statements and engaged PSC to seek input from the commissioners. After a feedback session, the board voted to approve the following mission and vision statements on October 25, 2023:

Mission: Grand Traverse County commits to being a leader in providing responsive, effective, quality service to our community.

Vision: Grand Traverse County, through innovation and collaboration with our community, cultivates a vibrant place for all to live, work, and play.

The revised mission and vision statements served as the bases for the development of goals and objectives. Further, GTC’s government will be able to use these statements to guide the implementation of the strategic plan.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The board of commissioners completed a SWOT analysis during the first strategic planning session to examine what possible strategic actions could be taken to leverage strengths and opportunities or improve weaknesses and mitigate external threats in order to achieve their vision of success.

<p>Strengths</p> <p>What’s working well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GTC is a desirable place to live, work, visit, retire, and play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean and attractive spaces • Natural resources and environment • Professional expertise of the workforce • Financial responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GTC is fiscally sound • GTC is “lean” • GTC provides quality services • Safety 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>What gaps exist?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Community health • Supply and affordability of housing • Child care • Skilled trades training • Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of relationships • Lack of shared vision between units of government and the private sector • Decentralized government • Systematic approach to problem solving • Population diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age, culture, and income
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>What opportunities exist to leverage, grow, and expand?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have what others want <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clean natural environment • Projected increases in taxable value • Continue to encourage a balanced local economy • Willingness to act • Schools—public, private, and religious • Economic vitality 	<p>Threats</p> <p>What is working against our future success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to find common ground • Layers of government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion and lack of knowledge about the responsibilities of each unit of government • GTC does not make community aware of accomplishments • Financial limits • Resistance to change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inertia • Adherence to the status quo • Prior decisions • Lack of creativity and innovation

Strategic Directions and Priority Actions

During the first strategic planning session, commissioners and department heads took part in a consensus-building activity where they were asked to individually brainstorm ideas for what action GTC should complete to successfully achieve its vision through addressing the ideas generated during the SWOT analysis and the results of the employee survey. They then worked in small groups to refine their ideas and report to the larger group. Finally, participants worked to organize ideas into common themes that were revised throughout the strategic planning process to form high-level goals, objectives, and activities. For original ideas generated through the consensus-building activity, see Appendix B.

In the second strategic planning session, the board of commissioners and department heads developed and refined objectives. Between sessions and throughout the planning process, staff from the GTC Administrator's Office worked with PSC to refine and reorganize the goals, objectives, strategies, and activities to align with the broad directions identified throughout the planning process. Additionally, the board of commissioners provided feedback on the goals and objectives via two online surveys done throughout the process.

The board of commissioners consented to the following goals and objectives on December 6, 2023.

Goal One: Plan for Sustainable Growth and Innovation

Objective One: Continue Sound Fiscal Policy Practices to Meet Current and Long-term Needs

- **Strategy one:** Continue to work toward AAA credit rating
- **Strategy two:** Explore avenues of tourism to fund essential services
- **Strategy three:** Complete the facilities master plan

Objective Two: Use Data and Technology to Influence Innovation

- **Strategy one:** Commit to funding new technology
- **Strategy two:** Take an inventory assessment of all data currently available within the County's systems

Objective Three: Define GTC's Role as a Regional Hub

- **Strategy one:** Identify the region geographically
- **Strategy two:** Determine what sustainable growth looks like
- **Strategy three:** Create a proactive implementation plan to assess and manage growth needs
- **Strategy four:** Facilitate collaboration among the region's local units of government
- **Strategy five:** Continuous adaptive planning

Goal Two: Recruit and Retain Qualified Staff

Objective One: Determine Staffing Needs to Achieve the Enumerated Goals

- **Strategy one:** Budget for adequate staffing levels to accomplish goals
- **Strategy two:** Stay within 85 percent of the market for similar positions
- **Strategy three:** Determine which departments and positions require adjustments in their pay scales to ensure appropriate compensation
- **Strategy four:** Focus on internal pipeline

Objective Two: Support Workplace Culture

- **Strategy one:** Realign the responsibilities of the board of commissioners and county employees
- **Strategy two:** Determine what it means for GTC to be an employer of choice
- **Strategy three:** Prioritize mutual trust and honesty to foster engagement
- **Strategy four:** Encourage and respect time off
- **Strategy five:** Communicate openly with respect and willingness to have hard conversations among department heads, management, and team members

Objective Three: Optimize Internal Communications

- **Strategy one:** Review communications matrix
- **Strategy two:** Review and adjust current communications standards
- **Strategy three:** Provide continuous trainings for communication protocols

Goal Three: Build Trust and Transparency

Objective One: Improve Awareness and Access to County Services

- **Strategy one:** Be more responsive to the public through relationships with constituents
- **Strategy two:** Determine metrics for customer services
- **Strategy three:** Better engage with underrepresented voices, including youth

Objective Two: Proactively Share Information with the Community

- **Strategy one:** Provide success stories of commission-related work to create productive resolution making for resident issues
- **Strategy two:** Review external communications policy and practices
- **Strategy three:** Identify goals for increased accessibility

Goal Four: Focus on the Needs of the Community

Objective One: Protect Our Environment: Water, Land, and Air

- **Strategy one:** Determine how to conserve resources
- **Strategy two:** Explore funding options for conservation projects
- **Strategy three:** Work interdepartmentally to meet conservation needs

Objective Two: Be a Catalyst to Support Diversifying Regional Growth

- **Strategy one:** Attract more industry and technology employers
- **Strategy two:** Incentivize skilled employees to come to the region

Objective Three: Meet the Broad Physical and Mental Health Needs of the Community

- **Strategy one:** Increase access to full-spectrum mental health services
- **Strategy two:** Enhance services for mental health, substance use disorder, and the needs of young people
- **Strategy three:** Collaborate with community partners to fulfill critical needs such as housing, childcare, and infrastructure
- **Strategy four:** Obtain public input when necessary

Action Planning

Action planning is the method to identify key tasks to implement each objective. Each of the identified strategies was considered and the key actions to implement each objective have been selected with corresponding timelines for each task. GTC administrative staff continue to review activities with the GTC departmental staff as needed. The current activities timeline is available in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Strategic Planning Session Participants

- Rob Hentschel, Commissioner Chair (District 5), Grand Traverse County
- Brad Jewett, Commissioner Vice Chair (District 4), Grand Traverse County
- Brian McAllister, Commissioner of District 1, Grand Traverse County
- Lauren Flynn, Commissioner of District 2, Grand Traverse County
- Ashlea Walter, Commissioner of District 3, Grand Traverse County
- Darryl Nelson, Commissioner of District 6, Grand Traverse County
- TJ Andrews, Commissioner of District 7, Grand Traverse County
- Scott Sieffert, Commissioner of District 8, Grand Traverse County
- Penny Morris, Commissioner of District 9, Grand Traverse County
- Nate Alger, County Administrator, Grand Traverse County
- Christopher Forsyth, Deputy Administrator, Grand Traverse County
- Bonnie Scheele, Clerk, Grand Traverse County
- Dean Bott, Finance Director, Grand Traverse County
- Donna Kinsey, Human Resources Director, Grand Traverse County
- Jimmy Argyle
- Jim Baker
- Chris Barsheff
- Jennifer Berkey
- Joe Berry
- Kristyn Brendel
- Melanie Catinella
- John Chase
- John Divozzo
- Cliff DuPuy
- Kate Edwards
- Chris Fieldhouse
- Amanda Flowers
- Alisa Gallo
- Sam Gedman
- Trina Girardin
- Stephanie Gray
- Wendy Hirschenberger
- Jeremy Hogue
- Michelle Krumm
- Mike Lahey
- Corey LeCureux
- Jenny McKellar
- Lana Payne
- Michael Roof
- Dave Schaffer
- Mike Shea
- Sherise Shively
- Gwen Taylor
- Jodi Thayer
- Jason Torrey

Appendix B: Consensus-building Results

What does Grand Traverse County need to do to achieve success?

Intentionally drive the mission	Convene to work together	Focus on priorities	Plan for future growth and innovation	Make Grand Traverse County the employer of choice	Build trust and transparency
<p><i>As illustrated by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the next step • “Show me, don’t tell me. Actions speak louder than words.” • Focus on the mission • Sound fiscal policy • Customer service orientation • Commit to resolving problems • Public service • Relationships with constituents and others 	<p><i>As illustrated by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with community partners to fulfill critical needs • Collaboration of county/departments/entities • Facilitate communication and collaboration among local government • Convene partners to collaborate • Better engage with under-represented voices, including youth 	<p><i>As illustrated by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate avenues of tourism to fund essential services • Conservation of resources • Value our environment • Incentivize skilled employees to the region • Do better at attracting more industry and technology companies • Enhance services like mental health and juvenile justice • Access to full spectrum mental health services 	<p><i>As illustrated by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous adaptive planning • Culture of constant change • Collaboration in strategic planning/growth • Forward-thinking technology • “Knowledge is power” • Open data points, information sharing, and innovation 	<p><i>As illustrated by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance adequate staffing levels to accomplish goals • Respect employees • Employee recruitment and development • Communication, internally and externally • Re-alignment of what the responsibilities of the board of commissioners versus the civil services are 	<p><i>As illustrated by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open to building trust • Enhancing transparency • Effective communication

Appendix C: Action Planning Timeline

Goal One	2023	Q1 2024 (Jan.–Mar.)	Q2 2024 (Apr.–June)	Q3 2024 (July–Sept.)	Future Quarters
Objective one: Continue sound fiscal policy practices to meet current and long-term needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figure out budget process in Workday Determine if additional payment will be made to Municipal Employees' Retirement System of Michigan (MERS) Finalize 2024 budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete facilities master plan cost-benefit analysis Finalize agreements with all American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) applicants 			
	Objective two: Use data and technology to influence innovation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify funding for new technology Use Govinvest for data-driven collective bargaining Expand online presence for payments (ACH) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take inventory of all data currently available within county systems Expand internet access within area 	
Objective three: Define GTC's role as a regional hub		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify county participation and role in the MPO Work with Networks Northwest to determine a logical geographical "region" of influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials Mgmt., Septage Treatment Facility, Mental Health, GT Land Conservancy, FishPass Airport, MHC, Traverse Connect Draw heat map, identify needs, pool resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Freshwater Research and Innovation Center 	

Goal Two	2023	Q1 2024 (Jan.–Mar.)	Q2 2024 (Apr.–June)	Q3 2024 (July–Sept.)	Future Quarters
Objective one: Determine staffing needs to achieve the enumerated goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review 2024 requests and apply cost/benefit analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine which departments and positions require alterations in pay scales Deploy and distribute department survey of staffing needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete a staffing analysis to determine appropriate staffing levels, whether high or low 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodically rerun Management Advisory Group study (MAGS) Educate county staff on MAGS study (ongoing)
Objective two: Support workplace culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do analysis of employee benefits: pay, tuition reimbursement, etc. Add modern language to employee descriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create policy determining how the board of commissioners interacts with employees Review department survey and benefits analysis and share with employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership “management by walking around” (MBWA) activities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeat employee survey and compare to benchmarks
Objective three: Optimize internal communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review communications matrix 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iCompass training Audit current communications standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use GTC University (GTCU) at next level Analyze feedback from audit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revamp website with communications from audit 	

Goal Three	2023	Q1 2024 (Jan.–Mar.)	Q2 2024 (Apr.–June)	Q3 2024 (July–Sept.)	Future Quarters
Objective one: Improve awareness and access to county services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure positive interactions with the public • Initiate web audit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify navigation of services • Determine metrics for customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better engage with under-represented voices • Begin implementation of web audit recommendations 		
Objective two: Proactively share information with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract with external communications firm for press releases, commission-related success stories, etc. • Increase social media presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create transparency dashboard on website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update branding materials and communications policies to ensure consistency across departments 		

Goal Four	2023	Q1 2024 (Jan.–Mar.)			Q2 2024 (Apr.–June)		Q3 2024 (July–Sept.)		Future Quarters
Objective one: Protect our environment: water, land, and air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct community needs assessment Apply for DTE Tree Grant Conduct beach monitoring Complete DNR Needs-Assessment Report and apply for grant 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore grant opportunities for environmental protection Utilize federal funding mechanisms to leverage this work (i.e., Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, etc.) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relocate recycling bins from the front of county building to another location Acquire bonds to support drain improvement 	
Objective two: Be a catalyst to support diversifying regional growth		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin Economic Collaborative Discussions series with local units of government (LUGs) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traver Connect, Airport, GTRC Transfer station, Northwest Education Services (TBAISD) skilled training 				
Objective three: Meet the broad physical and mental health needs of the community			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue working with Munson Healthcare (MHC)/Northern Lakes Community Mental Health Authority (NLCMHA) on GTCWC Work with community partners on opioid settlement funds 911/NLCMHA agreement 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community needs assessment 				



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