

PREPARED FOR THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN
2024



City of Ozark

STRATEGIC PLAN



Introduction

This planning team's goal was to create a strategic plan that provides the guidance necessary as leaders make decisions that will impact Ozark for years to come.

The City of Ozark's staff leaders and elected Board of Aldermen came together to chart a course of action for their community and develop specific areas of focus in the fall of 2023. After considerable time and thought, the resulting document is a plan that blends **aspirational goals** with **measurable action items**, and creates a **clear path for the future**.

The development of this plan included several components, including a thorough **SWOT analysis**, the development of a **10-year vision**, a series of **3-year priorities**, and **five areas of focus**. These areas of focus are where City staff and leaders will channel their efforts over the next twelve months, with a goal to accomplish the action items associated with each.

It's important to recognize that this plan is dynamic, designed as a fluid framework that can **adapt to the evolving needs** of the Ozark community. The city will regularly **assess progress** toward the identified objectives and action items, and will provide updates to stakeholders, including the Board of Aldermen. Maintaining ongoing conversations about the plan and its progress ensures it remains **in sync with the community's greatest needs**.

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2016 Strategic Plan: In Review

The City of Ozark last undertook a strategic planning effort in the spring of 2015, and spent nearly a year engaging staff leaders, elected officials, and citizens through multiple mediums. The 2016 Strategic Plan was intended to provide guidance in decision-making and to outline the structure for ensuring measurable steps were taken to achieve the community's vision.

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, five themes emerged as key areas of focus.

The plan went on to develop a series of objectives and action items in support of each area of focus.

1

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

2

COMMUNITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

3

ACCESSIBILITY AND OUTREACH

4

SUSTAINABILITY

5

PUBLIC SERVICES AND SAFETY



SWOT Analysis

SECTION
01

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Prior to the in-person planning session, members of the City of Ozark's leadership team and Board of Aldermen completed an electronic survey to provide their perspectives on a variety of issues. The survey asked each participant to share what they think are the City's biggest strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This electronic survey had 100% participation in the days leading up to the planning session.



These pre-session survey responses were thoroughly reviewed, and a number of themes were identified for each category. These themes were reviewed early in the planning session, with time for additional conversation about each area. More information about the City of Ozark's identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be found in the following pages.

Strengths

Strengths are the things the City of Ozark does especially well, or better than any peer community.



NATURAL RESOURCES & OUTDOOR RECREATION

Survey responses from both board and staff members emphasized the tremendous natural resources present in Ozark, and how they've been capitalized on through parks and trails. Survey responses made frequent mention of the unique opportunities for connecting to nature that exist in Ozark, including the City's great trail system.



HISTORIC DOWNTOWN & DISTRICTS

Survey responses indicated that Ozark has distinct historic districts, and that these districts are one of the community's greatest strengths. Participants made mention of the Historic River District and the Ozark Square, in particular.



PUBLIC SAFETY

A number of survey responses referenced the fact that Ozark is considered by most to be a very safe community. Ozark has minimal blight, and both residents and visitors consider the community to be a clean, safe place.

OTHER STRENGTHS

Some items mentioned when asked about the City's strengths did not receive enough mention to warrant a category of their own. These additional items referenced the city's character, its ability to do more with less, its regional collaboration efforts, its geographical proximity and connectivity to Springfield and Branson, and the Ozark Community Center.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are the specific things that the City of Ozark doesn't currently do better than peer communities, or the areas that need improvement.



LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

Participants identified that more citizens could use platforms like the City's website or engage with the City's newsletter and other digital communication. Many of the responses in the weaknesses category referenced low levels of civic engagement within the City of Ozark. Participants mentioned a lack of interest in learning about local issues, and many citizens are disconnected from their local government.



SUSTAINABLE GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Another weakness identified by survey respondents were ongoing challenges when it comes to managing the rapid growth of the city. Participants mentioned the need to enhance current development, and to plan for the city-wide impacts of any continued growth. In addition, clear and consistent direction is essential for the growing community.



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The final category of weaknesses was around financial sustainability for the city with an emphasis on funding for public safety, particularly when it comes to how public safety resources can support a growing community. Respondents are concerned about the lack of a dedicated funding source for public safety services, and how this lack of funding will impact the city's needs, including for additional resources and space.

Opportunities

Opportunities the City of Ozark could pursue that would lead to a significant improvement financially, operationally, or culturally.



CONSIDER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Responses frequently mentioned considering a variety of funding sources that could support the City of Ozark. Respondents mentioned considering expanding the City's tax base through use taxes, sales taxes, and/or other means to support the City's growing operations. Overall, there was consensus about the need to develop a plan for how the City will generate the funds needed for its infrastructure.



DEFINING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH STRATEGIES

When we asked about opportunities, quite a few people responded with answers related to development. The city should determine growth strategies and develop ordinances to encourage sustainable growth. Respondents suggested offering tax incentives to attract businesses to Ozark, where their use is appropriate and within the confines of the law, redeveloping the LCRA, and building a strategic economic development plan focused on recreation and tourism. A focus on developing ordinances to achieve sustainable growth should be a priority.



LEVERAGE NATURAL RESOURCES

The third area of focus in the opportunities category was about showcasing Ozark's natural resources. These responses included completing the Chadwick Flyer project, increasing recreational opportunities that focus on natural resources, and becoming a tourism destination that bridges the gap between Springfield, Branson, and Arkansas.



INFORM RESIDENTS

The final area of focus in the opportunities category centers around how the city can improve its digital presence and informational material. There was frequent mention of improving citizen interest and engagement to have a more informed population.

Threats

For the purposes of this exercise, threats are the external economic, industry, and/or talent-based concerns that could impact the City of Ozark's ability to be successful. In many cases, threats are out of any one person or organization's control, such as inflation, natural disasters, etc.



BALANCE GROWTH

Many responses to our question about threats mentioned concerns about managing the city's growth. We heard concerns about city funding and resources being able to keep up with the growth of the community, and that current ordinances may need to be reevaluated or revamped. There needs to be a focus on defining and encouraging targeted growth, to balance the city's growth to allow development without stifling it.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

There were a variety of responses that mentioned threats to the City's financial position, especially as the community grows. Respondents were concerned about not having a dedicated revenue source to support all public services, not having the funds needed to maintain the City's infrastructure, and declining sales tax revenue due to an increase in online retail.



DECLINING PUBLIC TRUST

Another theme that emerged when asking about threats to the City of Ozark was the sense of declining public trust in institutions, including municipalities. Respondents sense there is a lack of trust among the general public toward municipal government, which when combined with misinformation leads to a disengaged public.



ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

Environmental threats were the final theme to emerge from survey responses. Respondents are particularly concerned about water table levels and how low levels may impact the city. Respondents also acknowledged that Ozark's geographical location leaves it vulnerable to natural disasters such as ice storms and tornadoes.



Visioning

SECTION
02

10-Year Vision



DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

During the planning session, leaders worked together to develop a 10-year vision statement for the City of Ozark. This vision statement is intended to guide the City of Ozark and its leaders as they continue to make decisions about, and plan for, the future of their city. This statement is unique to Ozark, and should serve as a rallying cry for citizens, city staff, and Board members.

The City of Ozark is a **safe and thriving community**, characterized by its **historic districts** and strong sense of **community identity**.

The City's staff and elected leaders provide focused leadership for the community and are equipped with the resources necessary to accomplish their shared objectives. Knowing government cannot provide all solutions, the City actively **builds and maintains partnerships** with the business community, educational providers, civic and non-profit organizations, and other governmental entities.

Ozark's residents are **deeply committed** to their community, appreciating the City's excellent, public services, public school system, enjoying the community's exceptional outdoor offerings, and supporting local businesses. Residents are **engaged and educated** about issues impacting their community and play an active role in **shaping Ozark's future** through informed involvement in local issues.

3-Year Priorities

Attendees at the planning session identified the following items as priorities for the next three years.

To develop this list, planning participants spent time considering the 10-year vision statement and considered what the City of Ozark would look like in November 2026 in order to be on its way to realizing that 10-year vision statement.

In three years...

The City of Ozark will have demonstrated responsible stewardship of the Transportation Sales Tax to earn the community's trust for an extension, potentially with no sunset.

The City will identify new financial options to support the police department.

The City will provide information to its residents about current and long-term financial needs and begin discussions with the community about financial strategies to address those needs.

The City will be recognized as a trusted source of information to its citizens and have a comprehensive digital infrastructure.

The Board of Aldermen will be well informed about city projects, finances, and pending developments in order to share that information with the public, and in turn share public feedback within the organization to enhance decision making.

The City will demonstrate strong stewardship of land and other natural resources.

Additional information about each identified priority can be found in the following pages.

3-Year Priorities, continued

TRANSPORTATION SALES TAX PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The planning group articulated that by April of 2027, the City of Ozark will need to have successfully **created and promoted informational material about the accomplishments of its current Transportation Sales Tax and the benefits of continuing it without a sunset.**

Eliminating the need for future proposed renewals of this tax will help the city focus on growing other important revenue streams, which is elaborated on in the item below.



DIVERSIFIED REVENUE

Over the next three years, a key focus will be **identifying ways to diversify the community's revenue sources.** This approach aims to enhance financial stability, ensuring a robust and resilient economic foundation for the city's future. One opportunity to explore would be a tourism tax when the city is eligible.

As of November 2023, the City of Ozark does not have **a dedicated revenue source to support the City's Public Safety needs.** Ozark leaders are committed to examining additional funding sources to maintain a safe community and provide the Public Safety Department with the space and resources needed. Sales tax is often unreliable, particularly during a recession, and should not be the sole funding source for Public Safety needs.

Any new revenue sources are likely to require a vote of the people, reinforcing the need for an informed and engaged citizenry, which is outlined in the following priority.

3-Year Priorities, continued

A MORE INFORMED & ENGAGED COMMUNITY

In three years, the City of Ozark will be a community where **citizens are highly informed and actively engaged in local issues**. Bringing this ideal to life includes several key initiatives. Firstly, there will be a concerted effort to **increase trust in city officials and government**, recognizing that trust is fundamental to civic engagement. To achieve this, the city will simplify and enhance the effectiveness of its communications, ensuring that messages about the city's activities are clear and impactful.

Effective communication includes providing educational material for citizens to understand city processes and functions better, increasing awareness and access to public meetings, improving streaming equipment, considering utilizing a city channel, improving public meetings and voting formalities, and continuously improving facilities infrastructure for public accommodation and safety.

Streamlined communication, improved trust, and increased engagement at the ballot box will position the city for pivotal changes in the future, such as a consideration for new and diversified funding. The city's leadership also aims to increase voter turnout in future local elections, a direct measure of citizen engagement and participation in the democratic process. Collectively, these initiatives aim to foster a **vibrant, participatory community atmosphere in Ozark**.

One of the means of bringing this vision to life is through the City's comprehensive digital infrastructure, which is outlined below.

A CITY WITH COMPREHENSIVE DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Over the next three years, the City of Ozark is set to develop a comprehensive digital infrastructure, improving how it connects with residents and disseminates information. Currently, the city's primary engagement channels are its Facebook page and official website, supplemented by newsletters and emails targeting specific projects and neighborhoods.

The city's strategic vision emphasizes the importance of an informed and engaged electorate, which will require establishing a robust and effective digital presence across various platforms. This expansion is not just about reaching a wider audience; it's about enhancing the quality and impact of the city's messaging. A key objective of this effort is to counteract the spread of misinformation on social media by **providing citizens with direct, reliable, and accurate information from the city itself**. This digital focus is poised to make interactions with the city more **accessible and informative, fostering a well-informed and connected community**.

3-Year Priorities, continued



BOARD OF ALDERMEN AS INFORMED COMMUNITY LEADERS

By 2026, the City of Ozark's Board of Aldermen will be a body of elected officials who not only govern but also feel well-informed and well-equipped to represent their community and constituents. These local leaders will **continue as trusted leaders of their community and be proactive about engaging with community members. The Board will serve as a bridge between city businesses, staff, and community members.**

To facilitate this, all members of the Board of Aldermen will receive regular updates from City staff on key issues, including financial and budgetary information. This knowledge will empower Board members to **make informed decisions** and to effectively and accurately convey information to the public when inquired about it. The Board of Aldermen will continue to ensure that decisions are made in the community's best interest while adhering to city ordinances and comprehensive and strategic plans. The Board will continue to support and collaborate with city staff to keep the city running smoothly. By doing so, the Board of Aldermen will play a crucial role in **fostering a community where residents feel connected, informed about, and represented in the city's governance and initiatives.**

STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Over the next three years, the City of Ozark is committed to reinforcing its role as a responsible steward of land and natural resources. Recognizing its wealth of natural resources and amenities, the city will continue **protecting and enhancing these assets.**

This commitment involves making key investments in outdoor resources, which are vital for the community's well-being and recreational enjoyment. By 2026 the City will successfully secure property for additional park land, a move that underscores the community's dedication to promoting outdoor activities and recreation. Another major initiative is the **redvelopment of the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA)**, which will play a crucial role in the community's future.

In addition to this, Ozark will focus on **developing sustainable land use policies**, ensuring that growth and development are balanced with environmental conservation. Through these concerted efforts, Ozark aims to not only preserve its current natural resources but also to plan strategically for future investments, ensuring that the city remains a beautiful and sustainable place to live.



Areas of Focus

SECTION
03

Areas of Focus

Charting the course for the next twelve months.

After careful consideration of the City of Ozark's 10-year vision, three-year vision, and S.W.O.T. summary, the planning group developed five areas of focus for the city to prioritize over the course of the next twelve months.

Each of these areas of focus was explored in greater detail, with planning participants defining what each area means for citizens of Ozark as well as corresponding action items for the next twelve months.

1

FINANCIAL STABILITY

2

PUBLIC SAFETY

3

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

4

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE

5

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS

Area of Focus:

Financial Stability

Financial stability is a cornerstone of Ozark’s long-term health and prosperity. Managing a city is a complex and costly endeavor, and the participants in the planning session agreed that growing the city's revenue and maintaining financial stability are paramount.

This area of focus highlights the City’s commitment to prudent financial practices in addition to considering future revenue growth opportunities. It recognizes that a strong financial foundation is essential not just for current operations, but also for the city's ability to invest in future projects and services that will benefit the community.

The objectives and actions detailed in this section are designed to safeguard Ozark's financial health, ensuring that the city can continue to thrive and serve its residents effectively for years to come.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CITIZENS?

- 1** Citizens will understand how and why the City of Ozark spends funds and how the City’s finances impact them as residents of the community. Citizens will know that the City of Ozark makes efficient use of public funds.
- 2** Citizens understanding of taxing districts, what the money is collected for, and whom it is dispersed to.
- 3** Citizens will have an understanding of the long-term effects of decisions made by the City.
- 4** Citizens will trust that future taxes and the financial benefits from those taxes align with the community’s long-term goals.

Area of Focus:

Financial Stability

The following action items were developed as 12-month goals to support this area of focus.

1.

Review the current City of Ozark budget to find potential cost savings of at least 5%

2.

Explore long-range opportunities to reduce of existing utility costs, including through alternate energy and building efficiency.



3.

Conduct a comprehensive fee study.

4.

Provide Board of Aldermen with quarterly financial updates



Area of Focus:

Public Safety



Recognized for its strong sense of safety and well-kept public spaces, Ozark is a community where public safety is paramount. The City's leadership is committed to ensuring that these standards are not only upheld but also enhanced in the future.

This area of focus outlines a proactive approach to crime prevention, community engagement, and public safety, emphasizing strategies that will continue to provide citizens with a high quality of life.

When achieved, the actions outlined in this area of focus make the City of Ozark a place where people can live, work, and play with peace of mind, knowing that their well-being is a top priority.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CITIZENS?

- 1** Citizens will benefit from an enhanced Public Safety department that is equipped with appropriate tools and resources.
- 2** Citizens will have a responsive police force that addresses root causes of crime in their community.
- 3** Robust public safety efforts will enhance the quality of life for Ozark citizens.
- 4** Citizens will be served by a Public Safety department that takes a proactive approach to preventing crime and improving community engagement.

Area of Focus:

Public Safety

The following action items were developed as 12-month goals to support this area of focus.

PLANNING

Develop a plan for providing an adequate facility to meet the needs of the community and staff members.

RECRUITMENT

Enhance the Police Department's recruitment plan, including the use of social media components, to responsibly grow authorized staff and meet the community demands.

RETENTION

Enhance retention efforts for current departmental employees by investing in training opportunities and skill development.

Area of Focus:

Civic Engagement

A strong sense of civic engagement is key to fostering a vibrant and participatory community. City leaders at Ozark are focused on establishing the City as a trusted source of information, ensuring that residents can rely on accurate and timely communication for their needs.

This area of focus emphasizes the importance of creating a seamless experience for residents when interacting with city services, streamlining processes to make engagement more accessible and efficient. Additionally, there is a strong commitment to reaching out to and connecting with new groups of residents, particularly those who have historically been less involved in local government.

This inclusive approach aims to broaden civic participation, ensuring that all voices in the community are heard and represented. The objectives and action items outlined in this area of focus are designed to strengthen the bond between the city and its residents, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and community spirit.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CITIZENS?

- 1** Citizens will have a seamless user experience when interacting with the City, whether it be in-person, over the phone, or online.
- 2** Citizens will receive information from City publications, which are known to be trusted resources of information.
- 3** Citizens who may have previously been unengaged or unaware of City updates will be effectively aware.

Area of Focus:

Civic Engagement

The following action items were developed as 12-month goals to support this area of focus.

1.

Improve digital infrastructure, with a focus on the website.

2.

Develop Communications Department processes, policies and procedures.

3.

Develop social media guidelines, including distinct departmental voices.

4.

Develop a plan for educational material for citizens with a focus on civics, including municipal government, BOA process, city departments and projects.

5.

Develop the Comm. Dept.'s long-term plan, identifying goals based on the city's comprehensive and strategic plan, and its identity.

6.

Explore digital marketing funding and opportunities.

Area of Focus:

Economic Development & Land Use

Considerations about economic development and land use are pivotal in shaping the future of Ozark's community. This area of focus is more than just a blueprint for growth; it's a thoughtful exploration of "What does Ozark want to be when it grows up?"

The objectives and action items outlined in this section aim to balance growth with sustainability, ensuring that Ozark's development is both economically beneficial and respectful of its unique character and values. This forward-thinking approach is designed to guide Ozark toward a prosperous future where economic opportunities are maximized and all residents are given the opportunity to participate in shaping their city.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CITIZENS?

- 1** The community will offer access to amenities typically found in mid-sized cities while maintaining its sense of community and connectedness, pride in the town's history and traditions, safety, walkability, and historic character, and a pace of life that allows for more meaningful interactions.
- 2** The city will paint a clear picture of the community's growth plans to citizens in the form of an updated comprehensive land use guide.
- 3** Citizens will see themselves reflected in a connected, cohesive community.

Area of Focus:

Economic Development & Land Use

The following action items were developed as 12-month goals to support this area of focus.

Provide members of the Planning & Zoning Commission with an update on that entity's current authorities

Update incentive policies to create a clear process for any future public-private partnerships.

Evaluate the Urban Service Area (USA) to ensure the current rules meet the USA's objectives.

Work in partnership with Show-Me Christian County to identify potential projects that meet land use goals.

Complete a comprehensive update of the future land use map.

Determine and Pursue Phase One of the LCRA property redevelopment.

Identify a comprehensive update of land use regulations and design guidelines.

Area of Focus:

Natural Resources

Stewardship and enhancement of the community's natural resources and outdoor spaces is a key area of focus in the City of Ozark's strategic plan. Recognizing the city's fortunate position amidst beautiful natural surroundings, this area of focus outlines a vision for making these treasures accessible to everyone in the community. It emphasizes the importance of preserving and showcasing Ozark's scenic landscapes, parks, and natural habitats, ensuring that they are not only protected but also easily reachable and enjoyable for all residents.

The plan includes objectives and action items that focus on developing and maintaining trails, parks, and green spaces, as well as initiatives to promote outdoor activities and environmental education.

This focus on natural resources and outdoor access reflects Ozark's commencement to celebrating and sharing its natural beauty, fostering a deep connection between the community and the environment, and enhancing the quality of life for all its residents.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CITIZENS?

- 1** Citizens will have access to new and improved programs and facilities that promote connection to the great outdoors.
- 2** Citizens will benefit from strategic partnerships that encourage tourism and enhance activities along key resources like the Finley River, including an outfitter.
- 3** Citizens will know the City's leaders prioritize good stewardship of the area's natural resources.
- 4** Facilities that citizens have access to will be sustainable to maintain long-term.



Area of Focus:

Natural Resources

The following action items were developed as 12-month goals to support this area of focus.

Undertake a study of funding opportunities to sustain the Parks & Recreation Department, programs, outdoor facilities, and trails, with findings delivered to staff and the Board of Aldermen by the end of 2024.

Explore opportunities for providing regional recreational tourism and programming through securing a Finley River outfitter.

The Board of Aldermen will consider a proposal to preserve the Central Park property by the end of 2024.

Engage potential third-party partners focused on recreational initiatives.

The parks department will develop a proposal to increase transparency with how program fees are evaluated, and how they work to recoup costs.

Evaluate existing programs and new opportunities in conjunction with the existing Master Parks Plan from 2018.



In Closing



The commitment to serving Ozark that is demonstrated by the City's staff and the Board of Aldermen is to be applauded. These perspectives have been instrumental in shaping a vision that will guide Ozark towards a bright and prosperous future.

The collective efforts, insights, and unwavering dedication shown by City staff and members of the Board of Aldermen reflect the spirit of collaboration and community that Ozark prides itself on.

**Ozark's leaders
have cast a bold
vision for the
future.**

This plan is intended to be a living document, revisited frequently to assess progress toward goals and to modify, as needed.

The City of Ozark looks forward to continued engagement with stakeholders as these visions, objectives, and action items are brought to life.