

2013

# Firth Strategic Plan

Adopted August 6, 2013

Resolution No. 2013-08

(JEO Project No. 130241.00)





## Introduction

As a comprehensive plan prepares a community for future growth and development; a community's strategic plan helps identify and prioritize the specific projects that will assist the village to reach its ultimate destination. These projects do not happen overnight, nor are they accomplished by one person. Careful planning and consideration should be given to each. The village should rely on staff, appointed officials, elected officials, community groups, and other organizations to help achieve these identified projects planned for the benefit of the entire community. The projects may include those necessary to maintain status quo, while others will be necessary or desired for continued community growth. The Firth Strategic Plan will identify the top eight (8) projects or goals of the community and list individual concerns, objectives, actions, timelines, responsible groups/agencies, potential resources, and measurable outputs for each goal.



On April 29, 2013 members of the Firth Village Board, Village staff, and concerned members of the community held a strategic planning workshop to discuss and prioritize various projects in and around Firth. A total of 14 stakeholders participated in the workshop. JEO Consulting Group, Inc. facilitated the workshop which followed an agenda geared to inform, educate and build consensus of the group. The group examined the goals and objectives within the Comprehensive Plan, reviewed the results of the February 6, 2013 Community Improvement Priorities completed by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, and discussed additional identified projects. The goal of the strategic planning workshop was to establish consensus on civic betterment initiatives so the village could formulate strategies and target local resources (both human and financial) to accomplish the goals. It was agreed that a formal plan of action is needed to keep Firth moving forward and to provide efficiency in its resources, regardless of personnel changes. This plan will be reviewed and referenced for ongoing consistency in future planning initiatives.

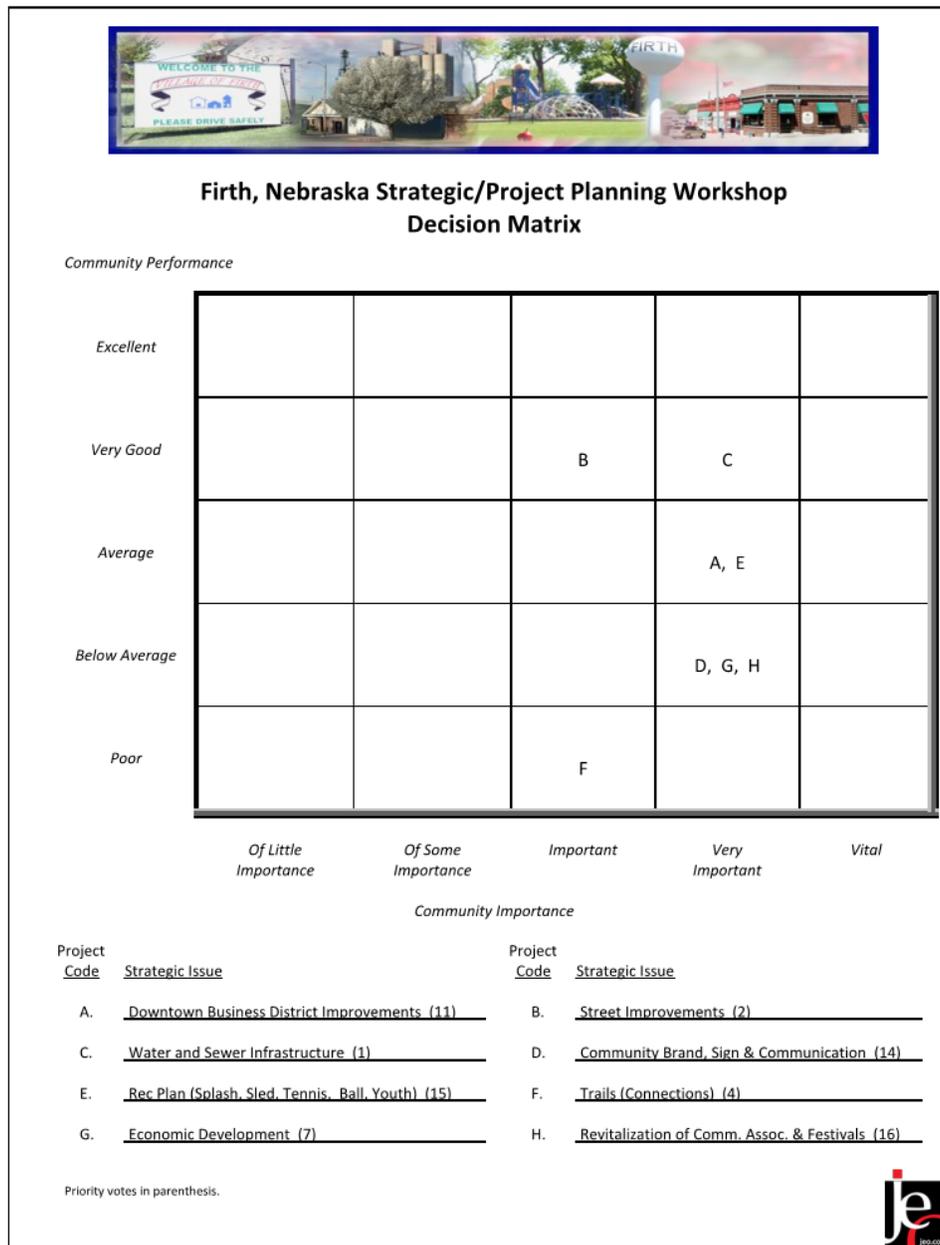
Based on preliminary research in the community, eight strategic issues were presented at the workshop and the stakeholders agreed with their importance. These issues or projects were discussed in detail to identify all associated issues, concerns, opportunities and constraints.

Based upon the workshop discussion, the top eight (8) projects identified were:

- Downtown Business District Improvements (11)
- Street Improvements (2)
- Water and Sewer Infrastructure (1)
- Community Branding, Welcome Sign, and Communication (14)
- Recreation Plan (15)
- Trails (4)
- Economic Development (7)
- Revitalization of Community Association and Festivals (16)

The stakeholders were then asked to consider each of the eight projects and identify their top five priorities through a dot exercise. Participants could place more than one vote on a particular project but were allowed only a total of five votes. Based upon the voting, the eight (8) projects tallied. The voting results are shown in parentheses above.

The next step of the workshop prioritization process included a decision matrix assignment. Two judgments were necessary to complete the decision matrix: 1) the strategic issue's importance to the community and 2) how well Firth is doing to address that issue. A ranking of Excellent indicates that the community is doing an excellent job at addressing that particular strategic issue, while a vital ranking illustrates that particular strategic issue's importance to the community. The results of the Strategic Issues and Priority Setting Matrix exercise are summarized in the following figure:



Special attention should be given to those projects that are “very important” or “vital” to the Village of Firth. Issues in which the Village was given credit as doing a “very good job” with should be continued, whereas those ranking “very important” - but falling behind in performance - should be studied consistent with their overall importance to the community.

Based upon the Strategic Issues and Priority Setting Matrix, the Firth Strategic Planning Group developed the following Community Action Plan to strengthen the Firth community and improve the quality of life for the citizens of the Village. This Plan will empower Firth residents and businesses to look towards the future with confidence and resolve and boldly commit to undertaking the identified issues.

The final step in the prioritization process was to divide the eight (8) issues/projects into short-term (defined as 1-3 years), mid-term (defined as 4-6 years), long-term (defined as 7-10+ years) and ongoing project development timeframes. The timeframe for priority projects include:

Short-Term

- Recreation Plan
- Community Branding, Welcome Sign, and Communication
- Revitalization of Community Association and Village Festivals

Mid-Term

- Economic Development
- Trails
- Downtown Business District Improvements (Short to Mid-Term)

Long-Term

- none

Ongoing

- Water and Sewer Infrastructure
- Street Improvements

The Community Action Plan has identified eight (8) priority goals of the Village of Firth and lists individual concerns/needs, objectives, actions, timelines, responsible groups/agencies, potential resources, and measurable outputs for each goal. Although the following goals are numbered, it is realized that such goals may take on different forms, be consolidated with other goals/projects or be re-prioritized based upon unforeseen issues or opportunities. In such cases, this strategic plan shall be re-examined and adopted to provide proper guidance. At a minimum the Village should conduct an annual review of the adopted Firth Strategic Plan to assure all goals, objectives and actions are kept current.

**Goal #1: Revitalization of the Firth Community Association.**

Concerns/Issues

- Association worked with organizing festivals and 5-6 people were doing it all.
- Restructuring of Association should include representative from entire community and should range in age and demographics. Group should involve business owners.
- Facebook and Twitter is needed.
- Should bring back the “fun days” which had car show, cake walk, parade, crafts, etc.
- Other past events or possible ones include Farmer’s Market, Easter Egg Hunt, Fireworks, Valentine’s Day for adults.
- Need to establish a Community Foundation.

Objective #1: Consider the need to reorganize the Firth Community Association.

Action Step #1: Hold a town hall meeting to discuss the need to reestablish the Firth Community Association.

Action Step #2: Educate stakeholders on the past successes of the Association and the reasons why it disbanded.

Action Step #3: Explore the future role of the Association.

Action Step #4: Identify a broad-based group of stakeholders that may be willing to serve on the Association.

Timeline: 2013.

Objective #2: Incorporate the Firth Community Association as 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Action Step #1: Consider the long-term benefits of incorporating the Association as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Action Step #2: Discuss the annual cost and administrative requirements of maintaining the non-profit status.

Action Step #3: Meet with officials from the Nebraska Community Foundation to discuss becoming an affiliated member of the statewide organization.

Action Step #4: If appropriate, seek professional assistance in preparing and submitting the necessary paperwork to incorporate the Association as a non-profit organization.

Timeline: 2013-2014.

Objective #3: Continue addressing community betterment initiatives.

Action Step #1: Appoint a Board of Directors to establish and oversee the Association’s priorities and policies for allocating resources (human and financial) that support local civic betterment initiatives.

Action Step #2: Establish the Association’s areas of interest, types of support or sponsorship, strategies for soliciting donations, and general funding priorities.

- Action Step #3: Review local planning documents (Firth Strategic Plan, Comprehensive Development Plan, and other community plans) to identify civic betterment projects and funding needs.
- Action Step #4: Establish priorities and annual funding-raising goals.
- Action Step #5: Consider strategies to effectively campaign for contributions from Firth stakeholders.
- Action Step #6: Investigate outside resources to help leverage local contributions.
- Action Step #7: Provide the resources (human and financial) necessary to support community projects and events.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #4: Organize, advertise, and sponsor community projects and events.

- Action Step #1:* Hold a town hall meeting to discuss the public's attitude towards reinstating much-enjoyed, well-attended community events. Past events have included: Firth Fun Days, Farmer's Market, Easter Egg Hunt, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks Display, and Valentine's Day for adults.
- Action Step #2: Examine factors that contributed to the cancellation of these community events.
- Action Step #3: Employ a community-wide survey to solicit public opinion on what types of events, activities, displays, and programs residents would like to see offered at these civic events.
- Action Step #4: Appoint a Community Events Planning Committee.
- Action Step #5: Nominate a Committee Chairperson to facilitate scheduling, planning, advertising, and managing the event.
- Action Step #6: Develop a list of potential community events. Consider the likelihood/feasibility of each event.
- Action Step #7: Foster cooperation with travel and tourism partners within the area. Consult with the Southeast Nebraska Tourism Council, Inc. and Southeast Nebraska Travel Guide to avoid scheduling conflicts with, or capitalize on, other area events.
- Action Step #8: Establish the official date, time and location for the civic event, as well as a final list of events to be held.
- Action Step #9: Develop an Implementation Plan which outlines the time of each event, its location and volunteer responsibility.
- Action Step #10: Conduct the necessary fundraising, advertising, and scheduling of equipment/materials/facilities needed for each event.
- Action Step #11: Mobilize community volunteers, host the Community Event, and conduct clean-up activities.
- Action Step #12: Conduct a post-event meeting of the Community Events Planning Committee to discuss the event and offer any recommendations.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #5: Ongoing support of the Firth Community Association.

- Action Step #1: Develop an updated database of Norris Public School and Firth Public School alumni. Introduce the alumni to the Firth Community Association, its fundraising goals and seek their financial support.
- Action Step #2: Hold an annual event to raise awareness of recent successes, upcoming civic betterment initiatives, annual fundraising goals, and most importantly, to thank donors for their ongoing support of the Association.
- Action Step #3: Educate stakeholders about leaving a lasting legacy through proper financial and/or estate planning by making the Firth Community Association the beneficiary of investment instruments.
- Action Step #4: Use local media outlets to inform the public of upcoming events and fundraising opportunities. Celebrate large donations.
- Action Step #5: Establish an endowment to ensure the financial sustainability of the Firth Community Association.

Timeline: Ongoing.

#### Responsible Group/Agency

Firth residents, Firth Village Board, Firth Strategic Planning Committee, local organizations and businesses, Norris Public School alumni, estate and financial planners, private foundations, Nebraska Community Foundation, Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), Norris Public Power, and Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

#### Potential Resources

Charitable donations, life insurance proceeds, bequests, endowments, gift annuities, personal investment instruments, private foundations, local option sales tax, Tourism Marketing Grants, and Community Development Assistance Act.

#### Measurable Outputs

Nebraska's rural communities are undergoing profound changes. From agricultural consolidation to reduced federal funding to property tax levy limits and spending lids, all of these changes are constraining private sector and local governments' ability to invest in critically needed new technology, equipment, programs and community facilities. Communities are asking, "Where will these monies for community investments come from?"

Researchers at Boston College estimate that in the next 30 years, more than *\$41 trillion* will be transferred from one generation to the next in the United States. Using the Boston College assumptions and methodology, the Nebraska Community Foundation estimates that \$250 billion will be transferred in Nebraska over the next 25 years, and nearly \$100 billion of that in rural areas (defined as places with populations of 10,000 people or less). If only five percent of this wealth was gifted to community betterment projects and endowments, it could equate to \$5 billion for Nebraska communities.

If a significant portion of this wealth being transferred is not captured for community betterment, it may be lost to estate taxes or heirs who no longer live in their hometown, or in Nebraska. By engaging in good estate planning, heirs can be taken care of, and communities can be provided a lasting legacy. Giving back is easy, but it doesn't just happen. Research indicates three essential elements must be present for charitable donation to occur:

- ◆ Donor must be made aware of the need.
- ◆ Donor must be supportive of the cause; and
- ◆ Someone the donor trusts discusses the opportunity to give back with them.

As stated, most substantial charitable donations occur because someone the donor trusts discusses the project/program with him or her. *Asking is essential.*

In an effort to ensure sustainability, the Village of Firth should consider revitalization of the Firth Community Association into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to help concerned individuals mobilize charitable giving to support the long-term betterment of the community.



This giving can assist Firth in providing essential quality of life amenities, such as health care clinics, telecommunications, K-12 education, environmental protection, library, community centers, park/recreation and scholarships.

In addition to financial sustainability, the Village must rely on local residents to help improve the quality of life in Firth. Local volunteers have the capacity to initiate and successfully implement a wide variety of civic betterment projects/programs. Not only will civic participation make these initiatives feasible, but for each participating volunteer, it will instill a heightened sense of community pride and ownership.

Revitalizing the Firth Community Association is a short-term goal of the Village.

**Goal #2: Development of a Recreation Plan for the Village of Firth.**

Concerns/Issues

- Splash pad in the works for the park.
- Recreation plan is needed for park and all recreation in the community.
- All sports fields need updating in some way.
- Need improvements to small ball field including lighting and irrigation.
- Large ball field needs new dugouts.
- Basketball court and tennis courts should be separated.
- Walking path in community is needed.
- Community does not offer much for high school age kids.
- Park is not ADA but equipment is in good shape.
- Fitness center in town is needed.
- Could use exercise stations in park or along trails.
- Church is looking to construct a gym that could be used by the community.

Objective #1: Evaluate the recreational needs of Firth families and residents.

- Action Step #1: Establish a Firth Park and Recreational Board comprised of parents, students, coaches, seniors, and outdoor recreational enthusiasts.
- Action Step #2: Consider the usage of the village park system.
- Action Step #3: Outline current programs/facilities that are offered in Firth, whether publically- or privately-sponsored.
- Action Step #4: Determine the programs/facilities overall strengths and weaknesses.
- Action Step #5: Identify potential opportunities and threats to the long-term sustainability of these programs/facilities.
- Action Step #6: Survey the residents of Firth about the need for a splash pad, ball field improvements, trails and other potential programs/facilities desired by local residents.
- Action Step #7: Summarize the findings and publicize the results.
- Action Step #8: Review and update park system maintenance procedures.

Timeline: 2013.

Objective #2: Evaluate the long-term, cost-effectiveness of programs/facilities desired by local residents.

- Action Step #1: Outline and prioritize those programs/facilities.
- Action Step #2: Analyze the cost of providing said programs/facilities.

Timeline: 2013-2014.

Objective #3: Develop a long-term Recreation Plan for the Village of Firth.

- Action Step #1: Procure the services of a professional planning consultant to develop a Master Plan for the Firth Park and Trail System.
- Action Step #2: Hold a town hall meeting to discuss how residents plan to use the village park and trail system.
- Action Step #3: Identify and prioritize park amenities that will encourage maximum usage for community, social and family, and general affairs.
- Action Step #4: Develop a park schematic showing location of existing amenities.
- Action Step #5: Consider measures to integrate recreational opportunities and community amenities via walking/biking trails.
- Action Step #6: Develop a plan showing the layout of future park and trail improvements and their relationship to each other.
- Action Step #7: Prepare cost opinions for planned park and trail improvements.
- Action Step #8: Identify the appropriate public agencies and/or community organizations that will be responsible for the implementation and ongoing oversight of the programs.

Timeline: 2014.

Objective #4: Package the financial resources necessary to make improvements that are consistent with the Recreation Master Plan.

- Action Step #1: Consider the most appropriate resource (human and financial) to undertake the park and trail projects.
- Action Step #2: Conduct local fund-raising activities.
- Action Step #3: Pursue public/private monies to offset the construction cost of the projects.

Timeline: 2014-2015.

Objective #5: Implement priority and cost-effective park improvements/programs.

- Action Step #1: Consider the feasibility of implementing the Firth Recreation Plan in phases.
- Action Step #2: Implement feasible/viable programs/facilities desired by local residents.
- Action Step #3: Develop and support programs which encourage activities where families can participate together.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Groups/Agencies

Firth Village Board, Firth Park and Recreation Board, Firth residents, Norris Public Schools, Firth Community Association, Nemaha Natural Resources District, local businesses and outdoor recreational enthusiasts.

### Potential Resources

Local monies, Local Option Sales Tax, private donations, private foundations, volunteer efforts, fee for use, concession stand proceeds, Community Development Assistance Act (CDA), Nebraska Recreational Trails Program, Transportation Alternatives, and Land and Water Conservation Program.

### Measurable Outputs

It is clear that a high quality of life, in general, tops the list of attributes communities must strive for, in their efforts to both survive and prosper. The availability of quality housing, education and commerce must be in place to keep current residents from relocating, and to entice new families into a community. Parks and recreational amenities are no less important in satisfying a stable and growing population.

In an era where municipal budgets leave little room for non-essential services/facilities/programs, it is vital that local residents outline their recreational priorities to provide direct guidance to local decision-makers. These efforts will ensure that limited local resources are supporting only those programs/amenities that are demanded by residents.

A professional planning firm can assist the Village in soliciting public input on asset identification/prioritization (i.e., splash pad, trails, playground equipment, picnic shelters, picnic tables, barbeque grills, open space, tennis/basketball courts, etc.), park layout and cost opinions. This professional consultation will ensure that the outdoor recreational interests of today's generations are met so that the park will provide long-term service to the community.

Developing a Recreation Plan for the community is a short-term goal of the Village.



**Goal #3: Enhance the visibility of Firth, Nebraska.**

Concerns/Issues:

- Town was named after Frank Firth who worked for railroad and was killed in crash south of the community.
- Area is/was known for good train spotting.
- Need website upgrades and Facebook page.
- Social media should include list of businesses, events, how to get involved, basic information, pancake feed, school events, etc.
- Need a sign at Hwy 77.
- Need a sign once you get to town such as a “Welcome to Firth” and sign should be upscale.
- Maybe need a sign near Norris.
- Need to let people know where Firth is.
- Village does not have a logo.
- Town has Spring banners with tulips on them because of Dutch heritage.
- Need to tie history to community branding.

Objective #1: Improve communication among the residents of Firth, Nebraska.

- Action Step #1: Gauge public interest and support for a community newsletter beyond the newsletter issued by the Firth Village Board.
- Action Step #2: If needed, identify individuals and organizations that are willing to help assemble newsletter, including but not limited to layout, writing articles, photography, etc.
- Action Step #3: Prepare and distribute the newsletter.
- Action Step #4: Support efforts to use social media to advertise upcoming civic events, basic information, and local businesses.
- Action Step #5: Encourage residents to post photographs on the Firth Facebook page and “tweet” updates about the community.
- Action Step #6: Post newsletter on the community’s website and social media sites.
- Action Step #7: Evaluate the effectiveness of the Village’s website.
- Action Step #8: Work with interested residents/students to redesign the Village’s website – as needed - to relay timely/crucial information to visitors of the site.
- Action Step #9: Utilize the Village’s website to display times/dates of upcoming events and community news.
- Action Step #10: Update the website and standardize the process for posting civic events and community news.
- Action Step #11: Ensure accurate and timely information is posted on the website.

Timeline: 2013 - 2014.

Objective #2: Implement a community branding plan for the Village of Firth.

- Action Step #1: Survey key stakeholders to determine existing attitudes, perceptions, opportunities and challenges regarding the Village’s image.

- Action Step #2: Provide opportunities for public input. These opportunities may include: one-on-one meetings and focus groups, a vision survey to be completed by civic and business leaders, a community survey to be available to local stakeholders, and a perception study that will be conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the brand perceptions among important targeted audiences inside and outside of Firth.
- Action Step #3: Hold an area-wide competition to design the elements that best represents the branding message for the Village of Firth.
- Action Step #4: Select the community branding message that best represents a unified message that reflects the community's identity and past experiences that distinguishes it from other communities in the area.
- Action Step #5: Use community branding (message/logo) in all printed advertising, web site design, media placement, public relations, and civic events.

Timeline: 2013-2014.

Objective #3: Design and install directional and "Welcome to Firth" community signs.

- Action Step #1: Identify the most appropriate/visible location for community signs.
- Action Step #2: Contact the Nebraska Department of Roads and Lancaster County Highway Superintendent about necessary permits to install the community signs.
- Action Step #3: Acquire rights to use said property (acquisition/easement).
- Action Step #4: Hold a town hall meeting to raise awareness of the new "Welcome to Firth" community sign.
- Action Step #5: Engage local stakeholders or competition to design the welcome sign and landscaping plan for the site.
- Action Step #6: Incorporate the community branding message/logo into the design of the welcome sign and site plan.
- Action Step #7: Develop cost opinions for the sign(s).
- Action Step #8: Obtain all necessary permits.
- Action Step #9: Secure the necessary resources to implement the project.
- Action Step #10: Install the sign(s).
- Action Step #11: Dedicate sufficient resources for ongoing operation and maintenance of the signs and sites.

Timeline: 2013 – 2015.

Responsible Groups/Agencies

Firth Village Board, private businesses, residents, civic leaders, Norris Public Schools, Lancaster County, Nebraska Department of Roads, and Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development.

Potential Resources

Village funds, local donations, private foundations, in-kind services, Nemaha Natural Resources District, UNL - County Extension Service, and Local Option Sales Tax.

### Measurable Outputs

The Village of Firth believes that civic pride is instrumental in portraying a positive "first impression" that Firth is an inviting place to visit, work, invest and live. Towards this end, the Village has identified three measures in an attempt to improve civic pride within the community. A discussion of these measures, each providing a means to attain an objective, follows:

- *Improve Civic Communication*

Communication is the first and most important ingredient in creating unity and strength in a well-rounded, safe and empowered community. Studies show that the free flow of local information creates a civic space that fosters social interaction which provides valuable information for community homes, schools and businesses.

The Village of Firth has expressed interest in increasing the public's awareness and understanding of civic affairs, and has selected the following means in which to deliver the information to local residents: a community newsletter and the community website.

When there's increased public awareness and understanding of community affairs, citizens are more likely to get involved, responsibilities are decentralized and the special talents and interests of contributing individuals/organizations are engaged. In addition, a well-informed public promotes:

- a greater understanding of other ideas and culture;
- the free flow of accurate information; reducing the negative impacts of civic rumors.
- trust among elected officials, community leaders and civic organizations.
- a greater understanding of our community's shared goals and vision;
- a readily available source of information on a community's wants and needs;
- consensus and understanding between residents and civic polices;
- well-publicized town hall meetings and local events;
- information on how to participate in community events and volunteer activities;
- access to findings and results of civic meetings in the community;
- frequent "word-of-mouth" communication; and
- residents communicating needs to local government.

A community newsletter, beyond that which is currently prepared by the Firth Village Board, could be prepared to provide valuable information to Firth residents and experience to Norris Public School students interested in pursuing a career in journalism, business, English, marketing, political science, or writing. Direct mailing (the cost of which can be offset by selling advertising space to local businesses, or via private donations) or placing copies at strategic locations throughout the community, most frequented by local residents (restaurant, post office, Village Clerk's office, grocery store, churches), are effective means in which to get the newsletter out to the general public.

Likewise, the Firth community website can provide vital, updated information to the public at a reasonable cost. The Webmaster must make the process of gathering civic information simple so residents can easily update the information with accurate dates, times and locations. This can be done by simply providing a telephone number, address, and standardizing the information requested by making it a fillable webpage.

- *Community Branding*

The branding concept has its roots in the Community Improvement Priorities Report (February, 2013) prepared for the Village of Firth by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development. The benefit of community branding is far-reaching; it represents to the outside world a unified message that Firth is a great place to live, visit, work, play, and invest. Proactive communities brand themselves to be distinctive and to be destinations of choice for businesses, industry, visitors, residents, families and others.

Communities throughout the nation are taking a page from the private sector in developing brands to stand out in the minds of employers, visitors and residents. Unfortunately, many who start with lofty branding goals end up settling for a slogan and visual identity that falls short of becoming a true brand. Instead, community branding is a:

- shared identity for the future of the Village among residents, businesses, governments and community groups,
- consistent and compelling theme and a focused message to create interest in Firth as a destination to live, work, visit, play and invest, and
- tool for everyone to use with a consistent look, feel and message that preserves identities and missions that are unique.

Community branding can be a powerful tool that allows targeted markets to focus on what they need or want from their destination. It is about celebrating the community's unique identity and experience, distinguishing it from the other communities in the region.

Tips for building a community brand:

1. Total buy in. Community leaders and stakeholders from throughout Firth must believe in the brand.
2. It's not about advertising. A distinctive, one-of-a-kind brand wins the hearts and minds of people. Brands are more than names, symbols or slogans. Our brand will be about the Firth experience.
3. A set of principles. We will establish a set of values and principles to guide use of the Firth brand.
4. Stand out to stand apart. Firth's brand will be based on a set of attributes and factors that distinguish the community from its competitors.
5. Brand ambassadors are critical. Everyone in Firth must be an ambassador for the brand. It will take a team to ensure that messages about Firth are aligned with the brand promise.
6. Consistency. The Village must stay true to the course by policing the messages as each organization, business or person conveys the brand.
7. Live the promise. A brand is a pact with residents, visitors and businesses. A successful brand keeps its commitment and delivers on the promise.

A community that does not have a plan to manage its brand risks being defined by the competition or the media possibly in a negative light.

Branding should be managed by local government and owned by the community and its businesses both large and small. Creating a business alliance that is separate from the local government allows the branding to weather changes in administration while keeping the essential messaging and focus in the same direction. To succeed and sustain it is imperative that branding receives strong support from the civic institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce, school, civic organizations, industries and Village and county government offices.

A community can mean many things to many people and may be emotional or historical in nature. Stress early and often that branding isn't about consensus or compromise, but about creating a strong, resonating message that will define the community now and in the future.

Do not allow the message to be watered down. View the message from a consumer's perspective, not a politician.

Create a brand that will not hinder or discourage positive change in the community while at the same time, matching what is presently available. The branding must match the self-image of the community to gain the trust of the consumer.

- *Community Sign*

Just as homeowners often decorate the entrance of the house or yard with seasonal door wreaths, colorful plants and flowers in the garden, or interesting address plaques and door mats, communities also place attractive signs at entrance points into the community, to make visitors feel more welcome. Municipal signs and community entrance signs provide distinctive recognition for your town or village.

Entrance signs enable a community to identify itself and welcome visitors with a custom-made sign which often reflects some aspect of the community's character. They should be permanent in nature and constructed with building materials that can withstand the elements. Strategic use of rock materials, metal and wood could provide the basis for a scale appropriate, aesthetically-pleasing sign that will entice visitors to explore the community.

Finally, the community sign should display a simple message containing the following:

- "Welcome" message,
- the name and a symbol or logo (community brand) of the community

The sign structure is often accompanied by attractive landscaping which may include flowerbeds arranged to display a community message and appropriate lighting to ensure proper illumination during the evening hours.

Enhancing the visibility of Firth is a short-term goal of the Village.

**Goal #4: Improve the appearance and viability of the downtown business district.**

Concerns/Issues

- Water lines downtown are adequate but sewer main replacement is needed due to age.
- Sidewalks need to be improved.
- Street lights and landscaping improvements are needed.
- Electrical power is overhead and functions well but lacks aesthetic appeal.
- Downtown needs more curb appeal – store fronts.
- Businesses currently include two banks, two restaurants, two tire shops, car wash, grocery store, and a Farmer’s Cooperative.
- There is a need for a fitness center, arts & crafts, and ice cream store.
- Two vacant buildings downtown but otherwise Central Business District is somewhat full.
- Village lacks available buildings or sites for commercial development in the downtown.
- Population is becoming more rental because of smaller houses and need to determine what they need. Need to look more globally.
- Need to explore more incentives and programs to lure in businesses.



**Objective #1:** Evaluate the physical condition of the Firth downtown business district.

- Action Step #1: Establish a Downtown Association to coordinate the downtown revitalization efforts.
- Action Step #2: Engage the services of a Professional Engineer to inspect the physical condition and capacity of the downtown area including, but not limited to, streets, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, grade changes, parking, surface drainage and underground utilities.
- Action Step #3: Meet with business-owners to evaluate the future needs and deficiencies of the downtown area.

- Action Step #4: Provide opinion of costs to correct physical deficiencies.
- Action Step #5: Prepare the Firth Downtown Condition Report.

Timeline: 2014-2016.

Objective #2: Foster cooperation and communication among downtown business-owners to develop a vision for downtown revitalization.

- Action Step #1: Hold a town hall meeting to present the results of the Firth Downtown Condition Report.
- Action Step #2: Hold a working conference with downtown stakeholders to create a vision for the redevelopment of the downtown area.
- Action Step #3: Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the downtown.
- Action Step #4: Survey local residents about spending habits to identify economic leakages within the downtown business district.
- Action Step #5: Identify potential niches that will make the Firth downtown a visitor's destination that will lead to lasting economic activity.
- Action Step #6: Identify potential programs/measures to incentivize downtown property-owners to renovate their building façades.
- Action Step #7: Evaluate the need/desire/potential for urban landscaping within the downtown area.
- Action Step #8: Consider applying for Leadership Community Designation through the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Timeline: 2015-2016.

Objective #3: Create a Business District Master Plan.

- Action Step #1: Develop a Business District Master Plan to incorporate elements of the Firth Downtown Condition Report and visioning process to encourage a unified downtown revitalization strategy.
- Action Step #2: Hold a meeting with downtown stakeholders to unveil the Business District Master Plan.
- Action Step #3: Revise the plan as necessary to ensure that it reflects the needs, thoughts, and desires of residents and downtown business-owners.
- Action Step #4: Present the Business District Master Plan to the Firth Village Board for their review, approval, and implementation.

Timeline: 2016-2017.

Objective #4: Determine the Village's and business owner's fiscal capacity for long-term capital improvements within the downtown area.

- Action Step #1: Consider downtown stakeholder's willingness and financial capacity to support implementation of the Business District Master Plan.

- Action Step #2: Meet with the Village’s fiscal agent to determine the bonding capacity of Firth.
- Action Step #3: Identify local, regional, state and federal resources for downtown improvements.
- Action Step #4: Maximize the impact of downtown revitalization efforts by leveraging local monies with “outside” resources.
- Action Step #5: Package all necessary financial resources.

Timeline: 2017.

Objective #5: Secure plans and specifications for long-term downtown improvements.

- Action Step #1: Enter into a service agreement with a Professional Engineer to prepare plans and specifications for downtown revitalization activities.
- Action Step #2: Conduct necessary engineering services to prepare plans and specifications.
- Action Step #3: Hold a town hall meeting to solicit public input on the plans and specifications.
- Action Step #4: Make necessary revisions and submit the plans and specifications to the Firth Village Board for final approval.

Timeline: 2018.

Objective #6: Reconstruct public infrastructure within the Firth’s downtown area.

- Action Step #1: Bid phase to include advertising, letting and contract award to the lowest, responsible/responsive bidder.
- Action Step #2: Hold a preconstruction conference.
- Action Step #3: Construction related activities.
- Action Step #4: Project close-out.

Timeline: 2018-2019.

Objective #7: Promote activities that will compliment downtown revitalization efforts.

- Action Step #1: Create a marketing plan for the downtown area.
- Action Step #2: Recruit businesses that are consistent with the Business District Master Plan.
- Action Step #3: Incentivize local business-owners to improve the physical condition, appearance and energy-efficiency of their buildings by capitalizing a Downtown Building Renovation Fund Program.
- Action Step #4: Consider Wayfinding signs along U.S. Highway 77/Firth Road/Nemaha Street to educate visitors/travelers about the various goods and services found in Firth.

- Action Step #5: Contact the Nebraska Department of Roads and Lancaster County Highway Superintendent to obtain necessary permits to install Wayfinding signage along these routes.
- Action Step #6: Invest in aesthetic improvements along Nemaha Street; Firth’s “featured street” that ushers traffic from Firth Road to the heart of the downtown area.
- Action Step #7: Sponsor civic events/programs within the downtown area.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Groups/Agencies

Firth Village Board, Firth Planning Commission, Firth Downtown Association/business-owners, Firth residents, Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development and Firth Community Association.

Potential Resources

General Obligation Bonds, Special Assessment Districts, Local Option Sales Tax, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program-Downtown Revitalization Program, Tax Increment Financing, special assessments, private monies, Business Improvement District, private foundations, Building Entrepreneurial Communities Act, Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Energy Office, Nebraska Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs (EDGE), GROW Nebraska™, Recreational Trails Program, Transportation Enhancement Program, Rural Enterprise Assistance Act (REAP), Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), Community Development Assistance Act, Federal Home Loan Bank – Joint Opportunities for Building Success, Small Business Administration and USDA Rural Development.

Measurable Outputs

Firth residents recognize that the downtown area is the literal and symbolic heart of the community, and as such, it enjoys the distinction of being the center of the public arena. It is the place that defines the larger community - culturally, economically and politically. The physical setting of the downtown reveals the values and underpinnings of the local society (the opportunities and constraints therein) and serves as a measure of civic health and vitality.

Firth’s principal entrance from Firth Road (a highly traveled east-west corridor) is Nemaha Street, a street that is flanked by the residential, commercial uses and public spaces. Nemaha Street provides a gateway and ushers traffic through various community features on its way to the downtown area. This entrance offers visitor’s a first impression of the community; the cardinal attribute that portrays Firth as a quality place to visit, work, live, recreate and invest.

Despite its importance - and high visibility - the Firth downtown area is in need of revitalization. Steep steps, uneven sidewalks, broken step curbing, ADA accessibility concerns, inadequate street illumination and aging sanitary sewer collection service are perpetual obstacles for local businesses, visitors and patrons of the downtown area. Not only do these conditions pose a real public health and safety concern – *especially for seniors and persons with physical mobility issues* – but they can impair sound community growth and constitute an economic liability for the Village, in terms of maintenance and funding of public infrastructure repairs. These conditions may preclude economic growth and investment opportunities for the residents of the community. This is an untenable situation for a Village that prides itself on advocating a positive community image.

Clearly, the Firth downtown area cannot function successfully as the economic core of the community in its current state.

It is through the implementation of downtown revitalization efforts that residents can expect to witness economic and civic progress. A thriving downtown builds a positive self-image for the community; creates job opportunities; attracts new industry and strengthens service and retail job markets; symbolizes a community's confidence, vitality and long-term viability; saves tax dollars; stabilizes and improves the area's tax base; protects the investments already made in downtown infrastructure, while attracts new private investments; preserves the community's historic resources; and enables property-owners to maintain commercial buildings and preserve an critical component of the community.

The Village of Firth should consider a wide array of initiative aimed at improving the physical appearance and long-term viability of the downtown area. Such activities should include:

- Reconstruction of downtown infrastructure systems (streets, sidewalks, lighting, surface drainage, etc.).
- Create a Marketing Plan that will result in the downtown becoming a visitor's destination.
- Foster niches markets that will lead to lasting economic activity.
- Recruit businesses which are consistent with the Downtown Marketing Plan
- Integrate trail/pedestrian way development into the overall Business District Master Plan.
- Establish a loan pool to incentivize local business-owners to improve the physical condition, appearance and energy-efficiency of their downtown buildings.
- Create urban landscaping within the downtown area.
- Purchase and install a community kiosk to improve public communication.
- Invest in aesthetic and signage improvements along Nemaha Street; Firth's "featured street" that ushers traffic from Firth Road to the heart of the downtown area. Such investments may include: community sign, large-scale art sculptures, landscaping, lighting, trailhead, walking path, etc.
- Sponsor civic events/programs within the downtown area. Such events/programs may include: street dances, cultural celebrations, performing arts, concerts series, soap box derbies, bed-races, etc. These events/programs not only promote economic activity, but they reestablish the downtown as the center of civic life, fostering a sense of celebration and exploration.

Improving the downtown business district is a mid-term goal of the Village.

**Goal #5: Promote economic development within the Village of Firth.**

Concerns/Issues

- Need to find a new use for Lakeview building. Current Lakeview owners willing to work with Village but needs plan. Assisted living potential but will need remodeling. Community center is possibility with multiple uses including bowling alley. Property is currently listed at \$1.9 million.
- Farmer's Cooperative is sound but land locked.
- Internet bandwidth may need to be improved.
- Current trucking company would have opportunity for expansion.
- Good truck route. Cooperative may be increasing tonnage.
- Prairie Land Dairy is located four miles east of Firth and has community presence.



**Objective #1: Examine the economic profile of the Village of Firth.**

- Action Step #1: Establish a broad-based Firth Economic Development Committee.
- Action Step #2: Hold focus group session to discuss trends in the Firth business community (business startups, failures, expansions or relocations).
- Action Step #3: Review economic indicators (housing starts, employment, unemployment, per capita income, net taxable sales, existing business make-up).
- Action Step #4: Survey the Firth business community to gather information on product/service, number of employees, future plans, and strengths/barriers to economic development within the Village.
- Action Step #5: Survey residents of Firth to gather information on pertinent demographics, income, commuting patterns, purchasing characteristics, and community economic development needs.

Timeline: 2014.

**Objective #2: Evaluate exogenous influences that may influence future economic development efforts.**

- Action Step #1: Examine the strengths and barriers to local economic development.
- Action Step #2: Examine the characteristics of the local economy. Consider the economic composition of the Village of Firth to determine its susceptibility to business cycles, comparative advantages, potential value-added business prospects, economic clusters, and other factors that will lead to economic sustainability.

- Action Step #3: Consider the capacity of existing public infrastructure/utilities to support future economic development efforts.
- Action Step #4: Consider the capacity of public safety (fire protection, law enforcement) to support further economic development efforts.
- Action Step #5: Analyze the existing housing situation in Firth.
- Action Step #6: Review the Village's Land Use Plan/Zoning Ordinance to ensure adequate/appropriate space for business expansion/recruitment.
- Action Step #7: Inventory available business space within the existing downtown area.
- Action Step #8: Consider the opportunities and constraints associated with economic development within Firth.
- Action Step #9: Consider the opportunities and constraints of a “commuter” population base.
- Action Step #10: Consider the opportunities and threats of new economic expansion within the immediate area, especially throughout Lancaster County and the Lincoln metropolitan area.
- Action Step #11: Consider the leakages of the local economy.
- Action Step #12: Consider the availability of labor in and around the community.
- Action Step #13: Consider the availability of “site ready” sites within Firth and its extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Timeline: 2015-2017.

Objective #4: Quantify and qualify the economic potential of Firth, Nebraska.

- Action Step #1: Define the Economic Development Vision for the Village of Firth.
- Action Step #2: Establish clear public policy as it relates to dedicating resources for economic development activities.
- Action Step #3: Establish economic development goals, objectives, action steps and timelines.

Timeline: 2018.

Objective #5: Develop strategies for promoting/fostering economic development in Firth.

- Action Step #1: Develop strategies to promote the success of existing Firth businesses.
- Action Step #2: Identify businesses that have enormous growth potential within the local economy including new businesses, value-added businesses, and new opportunities that slow economic leakages.
- Action Step #3: Outline intervention strategies that respond to specific barriers and opportunities that face Firth businesses (job training, housing affordability/availability, labor market skills, new marketing strategies, public infrastructure, and economic development resources).
- Action Step #4: Identify growth areas within the community which are suitable for economic development.
- Action Step #5: Identify partners for economic development, including financial assistance partners, technical, educational and job training partners, improve communication among business and government leaders, and foster cooperation among industry coalitions, and local residents.

Action Step #6: Review activities associated with Firth festivals and identify other activities that may enhance the economic impact of the annual community events. Actively promote any of the civic celebration on a regional basis.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #6: Support small business development and entrepreneurial training.

Action Step #1: Survey Firth resident to determine community economic development leakages, patronage potential and interest in and concerns about starting a small business within the Village.

Action Step #2: Tabulate and analyze survey results.

Action Step #3: Consider the feasibility/possibility of addressing the concerns of potential small business concerns.

Action Step #4: Offer ongoing training and education to small business concerns/entrepreneurs about accessing capital, preparing business plans, effectuate niche markets, expanding market share, foster economic clusters, or develop effective marketing strategies.

Action Step #5: Incentivize small business development efforts.

Timeline: Ongoing.

#### Responsibly Groups/Agencies

Firth Village Board, Firth Planning Commission, Firth Business Association, Firth residents, Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development.

#### Potential Resources

Local Funds, Tax Increment Financing, LB840 Local Option Sales and Use Tax, U.S.D.A. Rural Development Programs, Utility Providers, Nebraska Investment Finance Authority Programs, Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED), Nebraska Department of Roads, U.S.D.A. Rural Development, U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration.

#### Measurable Outputs

Community and government leaders across the country have, for the past 15 to 20 years come to the realization that they not only can, but must initiate programs to enhance their local economies. Governments have sometimes provided enormous subsidies to try to entice large businesses to build manufacturing plants within their communities; while others have started small loan funds to encourage "micro-enterprise" businesses or created "incubators" that provide office space and services to a variety of small businesses. Results of these rural economic development efforts have been decidedly mixed.

"Smokestack chasing" has lost favor with many rural economic development practitioners because of the unintended impact it has had on community systems and local fiscal restraints. In these difficult environments, the Village of Firth must have a clearly focused and structured economic development strategy that is consistent with the vision statement and values contained within the Firth Comprehensive Plan. This guide is an important first step in attaining the Village's long-term commitment of job creation, increased pedestrian traffic within the downtown area, filling vacant store fronts, sales tax revenues, promotion of Firth as an attractive place to visit, live, work, and invest.

Most often, successful organizations are achieving their goals as a result of having community support for a well-conceived "plan of action" which serves as a blueprint for an economic development program. The Economic Development Plan for Firth could serve as a powerful, yet focused guide for the community in formulating intervention strategies that will allow Firth to achieve economic development successes. Likewise, the Plan must emphasize the importance of preserving the high quality of life enjoyed by local residents, and supports community values such as environmental preservation, small town atmosphere, recreational facilities, and human resources.

In the extremely competitive field of economic development, those with the highest degree of readiness are most likely to succeed. One state sponsored program that could assist the Village of Firth in their pursuit of economic development is the Leadership Community Designation program through the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. The purpose for this program is to accommodate new business prospect inquiries and support expansions. By going through the application process, communities will have the opportunity to learn about the importance of "readiness" and what impact that might have on luring business to the community.

Clearly, this program is not realistic for all communities but the processes to help identify capacities, stimulate focused planning and deliberately structure web sites are invaluable for all communities, particularly the Village of Firth.

Improving the Firth economy is an ongoing goal of the Village.

**Goal #6: Develop trails to connect the Village of Firth to regional trails, parks, and other surrounding points of interest.**

Concerns/Issues

- Consider a trail from Firth to Norris.
- Trail connection to Homestead Trail along Firth Road is desired.
- Trail around corporate limits is possible and would be used.
- Consider trail to and around new drainage detention area.
- There are few sidewalks and no trails within the Village.
- Safety and maintenance are issues with the trails.



**Objective #1:** Determine the need for trail development that connects Firth to regional trails, parks, and other surrounding points of interest.

- Action Step #1: Evaluate the existing regional trail system and demands for development.
- Action Step #2: Review the Village's Comprehensive Development Plan to identify future trail connections.
- Action Step #3: Develop a sidewalk plan to determine which pedestrian ways should be widened to trail standards.

Timeline: 2015.

**Objective #2:** Incorporate trails into future land development.

- Action Step #1: Work with developers to assure trails are programmed into their development as indicated in the Comprehensive Plan and Subdivision Regulations.
- Action Step #2: Require dedication of land for trails through the administration of the Village's Subdivision Regulations and Subdivision Agreements.
- Action Step #3: Dedicate necessary rights-of-way or easements for trails.

Timeline: 2015-2019.

**Objective #3:** Develop a Trails Master Plan for the development/connectivity of future trails.

- Action Step #1: Engage the services of a Professional Engineer to facilitate and design the future trails system in Firth.
- Action Step #2: Hold an informational meeting on the future trail system of Firth and the surrounding area
- Action Step #3: Solicit political/public support for trail development.

- Action Step #4: Develop a trails map to facilitate the interconnection of community and regional assets.
- Action Step #5: Develop a trails map to facilitate the interconnection of regional and statewide trail networks.
- Action Step #6: Prioritize the implementation of trail development.
- Action Step #7: Prepare cost opinions for the phased development of the future trails system.

Timeline: 2018-2019.

Objective #4: Design of multi-use trails connecting Firth to regional trails, parks and surrounding points of interests.

- Action Step #1: Develop preliminary design plans for new or expanded trails.
- Action Step #2: Solicit political and public support for trail development.
- Action Step #3: Hold an informational meeting on Trails Master Plan.
- Action Step #4: Acquire necessary rights-of-way or easements for trails.
- Action Step #5: Prepare plans and specifications for trail project.
- Action Step #6: Finalize plans and specifications.
- Action Step #7: Programming of public funds for the construction of the project.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #5: Implement construction of multi-use trails.

- Action Step #1: Continue ongoing political/public support for the trail development.
- Action Step #2: Pursue available resources that are available for trails development.
- Action Step #3: Conduct an environmental review process, as required by the project's funding agencies.
- Action Step #4: Secure necessary permits/approvals.
- Action Step #5: Bid phase to include advertising, letting and contract award to lowest responsible/responsive bidder.
- Action Step #6: Undertake construction related activities.
- Action Step #7: Complete construction.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Group/Agency

Village of Firth, City of Hickman, Lancaster County, Firth residents, Norris Public Schools, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Nemaha Natural Resource District, community service groups, and major employers.

Potential Resources

Local Fund, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Nemaha Natural Resources District, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Recreational Trails Program, Nebraska Department of Roads Transportation Enhancement Program, developers, park dedication land/fees, private donations, local volunteers, and local fund raising events.

### Measurable Outputs

Trails can serve all types of people, with many different interests and capabilities – seniors, children, families, people with disabilities, and visitors to the area. Indeed, in the future, new user groups and requirements are likely to emerge in the future.

The Village of Firth seeks to increase the overall mobility and wellness of its citizenry by providing an integrated, non-motorized network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the community, connecting every subdivision and neighborhood to community features, such as the downtown area, recreational facilities, municipal parks, major employers, historic assets, and to the regional/statewide trails network. The Village can achieve maximum public benefit, with limited local resources by constructing trail facilities in a planned, phased and coordinated manner. A vital first step towards achieving this community goal is to prepare a Master Trails Plan the consistent with the Village's Comprehensive Development Plan.

The Firth Master Trails Plan will serve as a long-range guide to residents, trail users, property owners, governmental agencies, developers and decision makers about the location of trails throughout the community. The Plan will identify preferred trail locations and recreational service areas which will inevitably improve connectivity between where people live and where they learn, work, recreate and relax.

From this "holistic" analysis, the Village will be able establish a specific course of action for phased trail development over the next five to ten years. Recommended improvements will be prioritized and each phase will include an opinion of cost so the Village can follow a planned schedule of capital expenditures, rather than suddenly calling upon taxpayers to finance large scale trail system upgrades all at once. This approach will make trails development more affordable to the Village of Firth.

Developing local trails to connect civic features and employers, and linking to regional trails is a mid-term goal of the Village.

**Goal #7: Improve street conditions throughout the Village of Firth.**

Concerns/Issues

- Need to overlay/improve Main Street. Truck route is on Main Street and may change.
- Install more visible street signs.
- Most streets are currently paved with asphaltic concrete and are generally in good condition. Maintenance is usually done by special projects.
- The Village bonded the cost of the recent drainage project.
- The Village has approximately \$300K in street budget.
- Community has not had a street study done but does work from 1&6-yr plan.

Objective #1: Evaluate street conditions throughout the Village of Firth.

- Action Step #1: Engage the services of a Professional Engineer to conduct a block-by-block investigation of street conditions throughout the community.
- Action Step #2: Evaluate the underlying cause of existing pavement failure and surface drainage issues.
- Action Step #3: Meet with major employers in and around Firth to determine traffic patterns of semi-trucks.
- Action Step #4: Provide recommendations for long-term street/surface drainage improvements.
- Action Step #5: Provide opinion of cost for recommended long-term street/surface drainage improvements per block.
- Action Step #6: Recommend proven maintenance strategies to preserve the life expectancy/physical condition of local streets.

Timeline: 2014-2015.

Objective #2: Prioritize streets, which if reconstructed, would provide maximize public benefit to Firth residents.

- Action Step #1: Hold a Town Hall meeting to review the results of the Firth Street Condition Evaluation.
- Action Step #2: Gather public input on the Evaluation.
- Action Step #3: Consult the Village's One- and Six-Year Road Plan.
- Action Step #4: Provide a framework (i.e., phasing plan) to ensure that long-term street/surface drainage improvements can be identified, prioritized and implemented with maximum public benefit.
- Action Step #5: Map priorities to ensure proper phasing of street/surface drainage improvements.
- Action Step #6: Incorporate priority street/surface drainage improvement projects into the Village's One- and Six-Year Road Plan and Capital Improvements Plan.

Timeline: 2015.

Objective #3: Determine the Village's ability to finance priority street/surface drainage improvements.

- Action Step #1: Evaluate the street budget and effectiveness of local maintenance expenditures.
- Action Step #2: Ensure a proper balance between street construction and street maintenance.
- Action Step #3: Meet with the Village's fiscal agent to determine the Village's debt capacity.
- Action Step #4: Identify local, regional, state and federal resources for street improvements.
- Action Step #5: Maximize project impact by leveraging local funds with outside resources.
- Action Step #6: Package all financial resources for maximum public benefit.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #4: Undertake long-term, priority street/surface drainage improvements, as funds permit.

- Action Step #1: Cause to have prepared plans and specifications for long-term street/drainage improvements.
- Action Step #2: Conduct necessary engineering services to prepare bid documents.
- Action Step #3: Bid phase to include advertising, letting and contract award to the lowest responsible/responsive bidder.
- Action Step #4: Undertake construction-related activities in a planned systematic manner.

Timeline: Ongoing.

#### Responsible Groups/Agencies

Firth Village Board, Firth residents, Professional Engineer, Lancaster County Highway Superintendent, and Fiscal Agent.

#### Potential Resources

Firth General Street Fund, Highway Allocation Funds, General Obligation Bond, Local Option Sales Tax, and Special Assessment Districts, LB98 Monies.

#### Measurable Outputs

Streets might be thought of as the skeleton of the community. They form the dynamic framework for movement, social communication and orderly relationships among buildings and properties. Their importance can be seen in the fact that about one-fifth of the total area of the average American city is used for streets. Furthermore, a large part of the average municipal budget is likely to go into upkeep and building of streets.

Streets exist for the interaction and movement of people, but they serve other functions as well. The physical condition of local streets serves as a measure of civic health and vitality. A well-maintained street network can enhance community pride, increase property values, provide safer, more attractive neighborhoods and even encourage residents to become vigilant in routine property-upkeep. They may also relay an image to visitors and tourists that the community is a sound place in which to live, work, visit and invest.

Clearly, land development - especially residential and commercial - is most desirable when it occurs along a “hard surface” road. For that reason, an improved roadway is not only aesthetically beneficial, but it serves a functional role in promoting economic development, particularly with recruiting small/medium-sized business concerns that rely on walk-in customers, or require truck service. Conversely, deferred or patchwork maintenance can have negative economic impacts on the local community. Poorly maintained streets can restrict the ability of residents and visitors to conduct commerce, as well as personal business and recreation activities.

Despite the importance of streets, the necessity of maintaining and upgrading street conditions within a community remains a mammoth commitment and economic challenge for the Village of Firth. Most officials realize that a period of consistent policy, planning and action will be required to make progress towards addressing the condition of local streets in their community. However, a Village can achieve maximum public benefit, with limited local resources, by making street improvements in a planned, comprehensive and systematic manner. This can only be realized though, if there is first, an effective, “holistic” and professional evaluation of the entire street system, in terms of condition, capacity and recommended upgrades.

A Street Improvements Study and Report will evaluate street conditions throughout the Village – in terms of physical condition and capacity – and provide comprehensive recommendations for necessary upgrades and future needs. This comprehensive planning approach will allow the Professional Engineer to accurately describe each individual street surface; the type and causes of existing street failure; a street condition rating based on a predefined street rating system (e.g., new, good, fair poor, rock, etc.); recommendation for long-term improvements (including surface drainage); cost estimates for recommended improvements, including but not limited to, estimated cost for recommended street improvements, surface drainage facilities, contingencies, legal, administrative, financing, and engineering fees.

From this “holistic” analysis, the Professional Engineer will submit recommendations to the Village of Firth can targeted certain street improvement projects and a specific course of action over the next five (5) to ten (10) years. Suggested improvements will be prioritized and each phase will include an opinion of costs so the Village can follow a planned schedule of capital expenditures, rather than suddenly calling upon taxpayers to finance large-scale street/surface drainage upgrades all at once. Once complete, future street/surface drainage improvements in Firth will be made in accordance with the findings and recommendations found within the Firth Street Improvements Study and Report. This period of consistent policy, planning and action will enable the Village Board to make progress towards addressing the street condition needs of the community, while remaining fiscally responsible to the taxpayers of Firth.

Improving street conditions throughout Firth is an ongoing goal of the community.

**Goal #8: Improve the municipal water and sewer infrastructure within the Village of Firth.**

Concerns/Issues

- Growth and development is going north. East of 8<sup>th</sup> and Abraham will need a lift station.
- The Village's lift station is located near the ball field.
- Age of systems is an issue.
- 1200 ft. project underway for slip lining of sewer line.
- Water tower cleaning and coating should be completed next Spring.
- Community has good quality water without issues.
- Village has three operative wells. One well is nearing 8.5 ppm in nitrates.
- Within next 10 years the Village will be looking at upgrading 15,000 ft of 4" water line to 6" or 8".
- Village currently is in \$200K debt for new well.
- Sewage system is a three-cell lagoon and can handle a population of 1200. One cell will need to be cleaned within next five years. Village has not had any emergency discharge from the system.

Objective #1: Evaluate the physical capacity of the existing municipal water system and determine the feasibility of long-term capital improvements.

- Action Step #1: Engage the services of a Professional Engineer to conduct a Water System Preliminary Engineering Report and Utility Mapping Plan.
- Action Step #2: Evaluate of the Village's municipal water system in terms of physical condition, capacity, security, vulnerability, efficiencies and inefficiencies, and reliability.
- Action Step #3: Identify deficiencies within the existing municipal water system.
- Action Step #4: Establish population projections to estimate the projected future water needs of Firth.
- Action Step #5: Outline recommended water system upgrades, offer other feasible alternatives to correct deficient conditions, and provide an opinion of costs for recommended upgrades.
- Action Step #6: Select the most appropriate alternative for long-term water system upgrades.
- Action Step #7: Consider the impact the selected alternative will have on long-term water rates.
- Action Step #8: Prepare a Preliminary Engineering Report in accordance with the criteria set forth in NDEQ Title 131, Ch. 4.004, and the most recent guidelines for Preliminary Engineering Reports as outlined by the Nebraska Water and Waste Water Advisory Committee.

Timeline: 2014-2016.

Objective #2: To evaluate the physical capacity of the existing municipal sewer system and determine the long-term feasibility of compliance upgrades.

- Action Step #1: Engage the services of a Professional Engineer to conduct a Sewer System Preliminary Engineering Report and Utility Mapping Plan.

- Action Step #2: Evaluate the Village’s municipal wastewater system in terms of physical condition, capacity, security, vulnerability, efficiencies and inefficiencies, and reliability.
- Action Step #3: Identify deficiencies within the wastewater system.
- Action Step #4: Smoke test or televise sanitary sewer mains to isolate sources of inflow/infiltration.
- Action Step #5: Establish population projections to estimate the future wastewater needs of Firth.
- Action Step #6: Calculate future sewerage capacity requirements for the Village of Firth.
- Action Step #7: Outline recommended wastewater system upgrades, offer other feasible alternatives to correct deficient conditions, and provide an opinion of costs for recommended upgrades.
- Action Step #8: Create a GIS mapping system showing the precise location of the municipal wastewater system.
- Action Step #9: Prepare a Preliminary Engineering Report in accordance with the criteria set forth in NDEQ Title 131, Ch. 4.004, and the most recent guidelines for Preliminary Engineering Reports as outlined by the Nebraska Water and Waste Water Advisory Committee.

Timeline: 2014 - 2016.

Objective #3: Determine the Village's fiscal capacity to finance large-scale capital improvements to the municipal water and wastewater system.

- Action Step #1: Meet with the Village's fiscal agent to determine the long-term debt capacity of the Village.
- Action Step #2: Identify local, state and federal resources for water and wastewater system upgrades.
- Action Step #3: Maximize project impact by leveraging local funds with outside resources.
- Action Step #4: Adjust user rates to make the water and wastewater system financially self-supportive.
- Action Step #5: Secure appropriate financing to make long-term improvements to the municipal water and wastewater system at a rate that is affordable to the average Firth households.

Timeline: 2015 - 2016

Objective #4: Secure plans, specifications and cost opinions for long-term water/wastewater system improvements.

- Action Step #1: Enter into a professional services agreement with the Professional Engineer.
- Action Step #2: Prepare plans and specification for water/wastewater system improvements, pursuant to the Preliminary Engineering Report.
- Action Step #3: Obtain all necessary permits from regulatory agencies.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #5: Construct long-term water/wastewater system improvements.

- Action Step #1: Coordinate water distribution replacements with other subterranean utility improvements.
- Action Step #2: Bid phase to include advertising, letting and contract award to lowest responsible/responsive bidder.
- Action Step #3: Undertake construction related activities.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #6: Long-range operation and maintenance of the community's water and wastewater system.

- Action Step #1: Develop a long-range Capital Improvements Plan for the water/wastewater system to ensure that future improvements follow a planned schedule of capital expenditures, rather than suddenly calling upon taxpayers to finance large-scale water system upgrades all at once.
- Action Step #2: Conduct annual water user rate studies to ensure self-sufficient operation of the municipal water/wastewater system.
- Action Step #3: Conduct annual review of operating procedures to make sure that the water and wastewater system is properly maintained and operating efficiently.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Group/Agency

Firth Village Board, water and wastewater users, Professional Engineer.

Potential Resources

Firth Water Fund, Sewer Fund, Water/Wastewater user rates fees, U.S.D.A. Rural Development, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Systems Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, and Municipal Revenue Bonds, General Obligation Bonds.

Measurable Outputs

Most residents of modern communities are unaware of the costly and complex infrastructure systems – operating almost exclusively underground – that support public health, safety, general welfare, aesthetic and environmental quality of life in the community. In this way, public infrastructure, such as municipal water and wastewater systems should be viewed as essential components to community living, rather than mere luxuries.

Because most public infrastructure systems are located "out-of-sight," they are oftentimes taken for granted. Simple aging can downgrade the physical condition of the system and an increasing population base can exceed the design capacity of the service, consequently quality and functional capacity of these utility systems are usually diminished overtime.

The necessity of eventually enhancing or replacing all public infrastructure systems within a community remains a mammoth commitment and economic challenge for most local governments. According to

the Environmental Protection Agency's 2003 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment (released in 2005), our nation's 54,000 drinking-water systems need to invest \$276.8 billion over the next 20 years in order to continue to provide clean and safe drinking water to their consumers. This staggering funding deficit includes the cost to replace aging facilities that are near the end of their useful life and to comply with existing and future federal water regulations, but does not account for any growth in the per household demand for drinking-water by 2023.

Water infrastructure needs for Nebraska's smaller systems (defined as systems serving less than 10,000 people) are not exempt. According to EPA's 2003 Assessment, Nebraska small water systems have a current funding deficit of \$635.7 million; \$360.5 million of that amount has been identified as current infrastructure needs (new facilities or deficiencies in existing facilities identified by the State or system for which water systems would begin construction as soon as possible to avoid a threat to public health), while the balance (\$275.3 million) has been identified for future infrastructure needs (infrastructure deficiencies that a system expects to address in the next 20 years due to predictable deterioration of facilities. Future infrastructure needs do not include current infrastructure needs. Examples are storage facility and treatment plant replacement where the facility currently performs adequately, but will reach the end of its useful life in the next 20 years. Infrastructure needs to accommodate future growth are not included in the Needs Survey).

Likewise, since 1972, Congress has directly invested more than \$77 billion in the construction of publicly owned treatment works and their related facilities. State and local governments have spent billions more over the years. Total nonfederal spending on sewer and water between 1991 and 2005 was \$841 billion. Nevertheless, the physical condition of many of the nation's 16,000 wastewater treatment systems is poor due to a lack of investment in plants, equipment, and other capital improvements over the years.

In 2008, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that the total investment needs of America's publicly owned treatment works as of January 1, 2004, were \$202.5 billion. This reflects an increase of \$16.1 billion (8.6%) since the previous analysis was published in January 2004.

If by chance this financial gap is somehow bridged, simply throwing public monies at the situation will not solve the problem. In addition to initial capital construction costs, local governments must do a better job at addressing their long-term operational needs via "holistic" infrastructure planning, better asset management, innovative technologies and greater efficiencies.

This situation is certainly evident within the Village of Firth. The age and physical condition of the Firth water and wastewater system has raised concerns about the physical condition of the system. Despite a number of unique challenges, the Village realizes that costly upgrades to both systems are inevitable. A period of consistent policy, planning and action will be required for the Village to make progress towards replacing these aged facilities that are nearing the end of their useful life, as well as providing capable backup facilities. This can be realized if there is an effective, "holistic" and professional evaluation of the entire municipal water and wastewater system.

A Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) involves a comprehensive evaluation of a community's entire municipal water and wastewater system so that a Professional Engineer can develop recommendations for necessary upgrades and future needs. This planning approach allow the Professional Engineer to accurately develop computer models to determine what impact, if any that recommended upgrades will have on the remainder of the integrated water/wastewater system. From these analyses, the Project Engineer will offer opinions of costs for potential alternatives aimed at bringing the Village's water/wastewater system into compliance with current state regulations, as well as to provide a reliable system that will continue to serve the Village in the coming years.

The final PER should be detailed and sufficient in scope to fully address the criteria set forth in NDEQ Title 131, Ch. 4.004, and the most recent guidelines for Preliminary Engineering Reports as outlined by the Nebraska Water and Waste Water Advisory Committee (WWAC).

To further compliment the PER, the Village should consider a GIS utility mapping system to show the precise location of the various components of the water distribution system and wastewater collection system. This information will enable Village Utility officials to quickly respond to concerns in their water distribution and sanitary sewer collection system, should an emergency exist.

A PER & Utility Mapping Plan will be a focused and deliberate public investment into the community's future. Not only will the planning initiative provide the framework to ensure that Firth is able to provide sanitary sewer service to its customers for the next twenty years, but it will also support and compliment the Village's efforts to promote the ongoing community, housing, and economic development.

Improving the municipal water/wastewater system is an ongoing goal of the Village.