



HOW FERNDAL SIMPLIFIES, EXECUTES & COMMUNICATES A \$20 MILLION PLAN

The City of Ferndale is a densely populated city located on Detroit's Northern Eight Mile border. With \$20 million of new investment, city leaders have a bona fide "megaproject" on their hands. When it came to incorporating that investment into their strategic plan, they knew they had to engage the community and execute like never before.

"This level of investment and change hasn't come to the community since the 60s," explains City Manager, Joseph Gacioch. "We were wondering how we were going to communicate that investment to our community. Our plan has 120+ items. How do we prioritize it? How do we manage progress updates and foster interdepartmental collaboration?"

“ We knew we had to organize to manage the growth and change. ”

EARLY GOAL SETTING LIKE “CARRYING THE RING TO MORDOR”

Like many cities, Ferndale has had mixed results from past strategic planning. While there have been plenty of successes, they’ve had their fair share of plans being left on the shelf and a lack of alignment between action plans and the big, strategic picture. When describing some of their early efforts, Joseph equates organizing city council goal setting sessions to “a bit like carrying the ring all the way to Mordor. Frankly, Mordor was more organized than we were.”

With the highest level of investment in their community for over 40 years, the Ferndale city management team were particularly keen to show responsible use of resources and accountability to the public.

A VISION OF MODERNITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVITY

The City of Ferndale team kick-started their strategic planning with a city council retreat. They brought together not only city council members and the city leadership team, but numerous partnership agencies, in order to get the lay of the land and input from all stakeholders.

Next, they conducted a visioning session and mission statement workshop with both council members and staff to build help alignment. Out of that process came the city’s first official community vision:

“*Ferndale Community: The benchmark for a modern community, that embraces the richness of diversity and brings inclusive hospitality to light.*”

“Our community vision is who we aspire to be,” explains Joseph. “We should be a modern community, which means we should be monitoring trends and making smart technology investments. We also embrace richness, diversity, and bring inclusivity to light... that sets the tone for how we set goals around organizational performance and work culture performance.”

4 KEY AREAS TO EXECUTE

From the community vision flowed the definition of what Joseph describes as “critical success factors”—outcome areas that must prosper in order for the City of Ferndale to achieve its vision. These six **outcome areas** form the top layer of the plan. The next layer are the initiatives that support the outcomes—the **project areas**. At the bottom level of the plan sit the **actions**. From the action level, the city reports out to the community on how they’re doing.

With their plan defined, the team needed to execute. They worked with Envisio to address four key challenges.

1 - Prioritization: breaking the plan down

In order to prioritize and manage their plan, the team first broke it down into bite-sized chunks. They then used Envisio as the place for all those smaller pieces of the plan to live together in an organized way. This approach has made the plan feel more manageable and given departmental directors a sense that achieving the outcome areas is possible. And, where previously there was a tendency for every project to be a fire hose of stuff taken on simultaneously, the various city teams are now able to focus on what's important right now, knowing that there is a plan in place for everything over time.

"Envisio is really a source of sanity," explains Jordan Twardy, Community and Economic Development Director. "Without Envisio, you might as well wrap up all the moving parts and fire them at me in a t-shirt cannon because there would be no way to keep track of them and keep all the balls in the air."

2 - Alignment: everyone pulling in the same direction

Having everyone working from the same, central place has been a game-changer for the City of Ferndale. The team has focused on alignment at each stage of their planning and it's paying off in execution. Every department is plugged into their plan, from City Planning to Public Works to Sanitation, and every project is connected to a top-level outcome area. This has made it easier to keep the team engaged and allocate resources.

Joseph describes how budgeting and strategic planning sessions have now become focal points for his team: "When we get ready for budget time, my team know to tie their requests to one of our goals. It also helps them to answer questions such as "What am I doing, where am I going and why does it matter?" I really see my team embrace this and it's exciting."

3 - Managing progress: implementation, reflection & accountability

Another change that has been working well for the city management team is a shift to focus on quarterly updates. The team has built an attitude of managing their plan one quarter at a time. They do a couple of months of progressive implementation, then essentially clear out the junk drawer. So every quarter, they cycle through implementation, reflection and then accountability. At the end, they compile all their information, report up to City Council and out to the community. Then they calibrate for the next quarter.

Using Envisio to manage their progress updates has not only made reporting easier, but has helped to highlight everything that has been accomplished and should be celebrated. It's also surfacing up bottlenecks.

In many cases, the team has found that they are identifying problems early and are able to address them through better resource management, re-prioritization and greater collaboration.

4 - Communicating progress: council, staff & community

When it comes to sharing progress with City Council, Ferndale's city management office has a close relationship with their council members. They provide clear, quarterly reports that help to instil confidence about where they're at in terms of executing their plans and give council members the tools they need to communicate with citizens when out in the community.

Ferndale's communications team also put a lot of focus on connecting with the people actually doing the work. These are the people going out and working in the community—replacing light bulbs, installing equipment or putting on programs in the park. If they know where they fit into the overall city strategy, they help to get the broader community invested and engaged.

And for the Ferndale team, community engagement is all about targeted storytelling.

As Kara Sokol, Director of Communications, explains it: "If I were to go out there and say, 'Hey everybody, look we have this really cool maturation plan and we're going to do 182 things over the next three years,' not a single person would care or engage with that. People care about things that relate to them. So if you don't really care about development or parks or the school system, but you're very invested in sustainability, then that's the piece you're going to want to know about."



Having an Envisio-powered performance dashboard available from the City of Ferndale website allows Ferndale citizens to engage in the pieces of the city plan that interest them. They can drill down into as much detail as they need, see what has already been achieved and understand how their requests fit into the work and plans already underway.

Most importantly, the Ferndale team is able to clearly show how the new investment is being used to benefit the community and that they are accountable to the public for executing the plan.

ABOUT US

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