

Grand Island, Nebraska

Livable Community Action Plan

2020-2023



Facilitated by:



Lead Partners:



“Livable communities are good for people and good for business. They are places where Americans increasingly want to live, work and play. Whether a person is young or old, starting a family or a business, livable communities provide a host of appealing advantages that enhance the quality of life of residents, the economic prospects of businesses, and the bottom lines of local governments.”

-The Livability Economy; People, Places and Prosperity (AARP)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

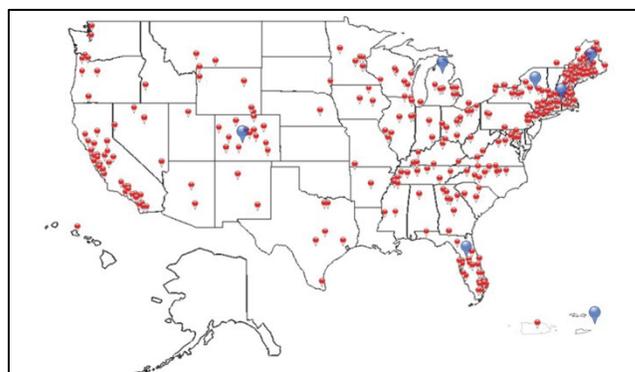
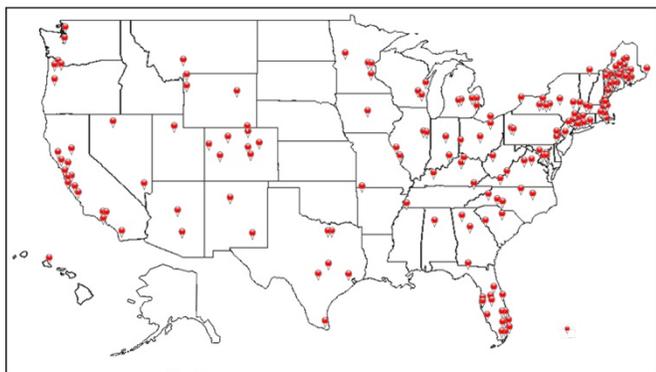
During 2014, the communities of Hall County, including Alda, Cairo, Doniphan, Wood River and Grand Island joined together to create a cohesive vision and action plan called “**Grander Vision.**” The goal of this effort was to create an overall “roadmap” for the area to use in the future, and to help steer the energies of the people toward a set of identifiable action steps and efforts.

In that same timeframe, another comprehensive visioning effort took place endorsed by the Chamber, Economic Development Corporation, and Convention and Visitors Bureau focused on business development. **Market Street’s research** revealed a variety of challenges and opportunities, as well as solid recommendations with achievable outcomes to keep our area vibrant and growing.

The resulting plans from these two visioning efforts were combined into one program of work; and, **Grow Grand Island** was established as a 501c3 in 2016 to facilitate implementation and ongoing visioning.

Grow Grand Island functions as an **area partnership** whose leading organizations include the Chamber, Economic Development Corporation, Convention and Visitors Bureau, City of Grand Island and Hall County. Collectively and collaboratively, Grow Grand Island has vigorously pursued the program of work.

Grow Grand Island began taking steps to join the **AARP Livable Community Network** in the fall of 2018. Our application was formally accepted that December—the 311th community. We are proud to be part of this growing network, and proud to be the first community in Nebraska.



The domains that underlay the Livable Community Network line up well with Grow Grand Island's program of work. Below are the "8 domains of livability" for AARP's Livable Community Network:

1. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings: Availability of safe and accessible recreational facilities.
2. Transportation: Safe and affordable modes of private and public transportation.
3. Housing: Availability of home modification programs for aging in place as well as a range of age/ability-friendly housing options.
4. Social Participation: Access to leisure and cultural activities, including opportunities for older residents to socialize and engage with their peers as well as with younger people.
5. Respect and Social Inclusion: Programs that promote ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as multigenerational interaction and dialogue.
6. Civic Participation and Employment: Paid work and volunteer activities for residents and opportunities to engage in the formulation of policies relevant to their lives.
7. Communication and Information: Access to communications technology and other resources so residents can connect with their community, friends and family.
8. Community Support and Health Services: Access to home-based care services, health clinics and programs that promote wellness and active aging.

This **Livable Community Action Plan** emphasizes five of the eight domains, which are:

- 1) Housing,
- 2) Transportation,
- 3) Community Support and Health Services,
- 4) Outdoor Spaces and Places, and
- 5) Civic Participation and Employment.

These five domains were chosen because of their close tie-in to the existing Grow Grand Island program of work. Being part of the Livable Community Network has enhanced the program of work by ensuring our initiatives and future visioning is done through the lens of age and ability—to be an inclusive place for all people.

This plan should be viewed as a starting place and should in no way limit the fostering and implementation of additional goals. Our best foot forward will be to instill the principals of a Livable Community in all we do at all levels in Grand Island, whether outlined in this plan or not.

How might you make a Livable Community impact?

There are many ways to get involved. A good first step is to visit the Grow Grand Island website and use the CONNECT link (www.growgrandisland.com). Mention your areas of interest, passion, and skills-sets. To get a sense for work to be done in this Community Action Plan, **read on.**

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COMMUNITY PROFILE

“In 1857, 35 German settlers left Davenport, Iowa, and headed west to Nebraska to start a new settlement on an island^[8] known by French traders as *La Grande Isle*, which was formed by the Wood River and the Platte River. The settlers reached their destination on July 4, 1857, and by September had built housing using local timber. Over the next nine years, the settlers had to overcome many hardships, including blizzards and conflicts with Native Americans.^[9] They set up farms but initially had no market to sell their goods until a market opened at Fort Kearny. When the Pike's Peak Gold Rush began, Grand Island was the last place travelers could obtain supplies before they crossed the plains.^[8]

Surveyors from the [Union Pacific Railroad](#) (UP) laid out a town called Grand Island Station and many settlers living on Grand Island moved to the new town, located slightly inland from the island.^[10] In 1868 the railroad reached the area, bringing increased trade and business. Grand Island became the end of the east division of the railroad and UP built service facilities for their locomotives in the town as well as an elegant hotel for passengers providing a boost for the local economy. The cost of the railroad coming into town was the denudement of most of the hardwood trees on the island for use as ties for the railroad.^[8] By 1870, 1,057 people lived in the town and in 1872 the town was incorporated as Grand Island.^[9] “

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Island,_Nebraska)

Today, the population is estimated to be 51,267, up 5.4% from the 2010 Census (48,520).

The **Grand Island metropolitan area**, as defined by the United States Census Bureau, is an area consisting of four counties in Nebraska, anchored by the city of Grand Island. It was upgraded from a micropolitan area and Hamilton County was added in 2012 when Grand Island's population surpassed 50,000.

The Grand Island metropolitan area consists of Hall, Merrick, Howard and Hamilton counties.

Other defining and helpful Census data (estimated 2019):



	Grand Island	State of Nebraska	United States
Age: Under 18	28.0%	24.6%	22.3%
Age: 65+	13.8%	16.2%	16.5%
Ethnic: White	62.6%	78.2%	60.1%
Ethnic: Hispanic or Latino	31.0%	11.4%	18.5%
Foreign Born	15.7%	7.0%	13.5%
High School/Some College (age 25+)	83.2%	91.1%	87.7%
Bachelor or higher (age 25+)	20.2%	31.3%	31.5%
No health insurance (under age 65)	15.5%	9.7%	10.0%
Housing owner-occupied	58.6%	66.1%	63.8%
Persons in poverty	14.2%	11.0%	11.8%

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/grandislandcitynebraska,NE,US/PST045219>

This data illustrates both our strengths and our challenges as a community.

Our strengths include:

- ✓ We are a great place to raise a family with 28% of our population is under age 18.
- ✓ We are a welcoming community who recognizes the value of diversity, leading both the state and the nation in percent of our population being Hispanic or Latino, as well as foreign born.
- ✓ Our population continues to grow, opening opportunities to serve our residents in new and expanding ways.

Our challenges include:

- Although our population lags among those age 65+ when compared to the state and the nation, we know that number will grow as our baby boomers continue to age and we need to be better prepared.
- We trail the state and the nation in education level which limits our opportunities for high-wage jobs.
- We lead the nation and the state with number of persons in poverty, which is also reflected in the high percentage of uninsured and lower percentage of owner-occupied residences.

As the third largest city in the state of Nebraska, Grand Island has many amenities. We have numerous parks, hike and bike trails, and recreational areas to enjoy being outdoors. We have quality public and private schools for children, as well as a public library that remains a tremendous asset to people of all ages. Our vibrant downtown caters to the diverse interests of our residents, which includes being a gathering place for community events. And, if there is something you need for home, life, career, or pleasure, it is likely around the next corner or down the street.

Since joining the Livable Community Network, we find ourselves looking at our community with higher age-friendly acuity when implementing projects and planning for our future. This lens raises the bar on our expected outcomes and our ability to meet the needs of all people of all ages and abilities. As you read the following pages, you will see this reflected in our action plan.

..... The Livability Index.....

“The Livability Index is a groundbreaking tool of the AARP Public Policy Institute (PPI) that scores every neighborhood and community in the United States for the services and amenities that affect people’s lives the most. Using more than 50 national sources of data, the AARP Livability Index provides the clearest picture yet of how well a community meets the current and future needs of people of all ages.” (aarp.org/livabilityindex)

Grand Island’s Total Index Score: 57

- 59 ... Housing
- 49 ... Neighborhood
- 61 ... Transportation
- 68 ... Environment
- 45 ... Health
- 53 ... Engagement
- 61 ... Opportunity

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAN

The mission of Grow Grand Island is to cultivate bold ideas that create business and quality of life opportunities in the region through **planning, partnering and doing**.

Grow Grand Island was established in 2016 as a 501c3 in response to the comprehensive visioning effort that took place in 2014. This came two years after Grand Island surpassed the 50,000 population mark and became known as the Grand Island Metropolitan Area (GIMA). These milestones have been key to setting Grand Island on a new path of growth and development.

The original program of work (appendix B) that was laid out in 2015 was the result of bringing together citizens in the four-county metropolitan area, as well as business and community leaders. The priorities in that program of work remain as beacons that lead the path forward today. Our ongoing challenge is to adapt the action plan as we go forward while keeping our eyes on the priorities and the long-term change reflected in the program of work.

In addition to the program of work described above, the Grand Island Metropolitan Service Organization has led major studies to develop a long-term transportation plan, as well as a long-term bike and pedestrian study. Their process was highly engaging and public input was key in their findings.

A major housing study was also recently conducted (2019) under the leadership of the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation. This study took an in-depth dive into local housing data to determine our gaps and make future recommendations. This study is professionally conducted every five years and presented for feedback and brainstorming to a wide range of individuals—realtors, organizations, agencies, community leaders, etc.

You will read more about these major studies in the pages ahead, as they have become important resources when developing our action plan. You will also read more about focus groups and committees that have incorporated additional voices. **It is our community and our action plan. Ownership of the plan is revealed in implementation.**

.....A Clear Vision with Values.....

Visioning is not a singular activity that is checked off a list. It is ongoing and ever changing. As much as this action plan serves as a roadmap to help us move forward with direction and purpose, with each step, with each mile, we must be willing to adapt and willing to refocus on the road ahead.

The values that guide us forward include:

- ❖ Inclusivity – it is vital that voices are sought and heard.
- ❖ Diversity – the voices need to come from a variety of ages, abilities, cultures, social and economic levels, etc.
- ❖ Civility – differences in thoughts, ideas, and opinions are encouraged and respected.

As we move forward with this action plan and with ongoing visioning, we will take advantage of AARP tools such as The Livability Index, the Roadmap to Livability Guides, and Rural Lab for guidance, support, and ideas. AARP provides a wide variety of resources, worksheets, guides, etc. to help communities navigate their way to success.

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HOUSING:

Availability of home modification programs for aging in place as well as a range of age-friendly housing options.

Essential Framework

As a community above 50,000 population, a housing study must be completed every five years. The study is professionally conducted every five years and presented for feedback and brainstorming to a wide range of individuals—realtors, organizations, agencies, community leaders, etc.

The **Housing Study conducted in the Fall of 2019** has identified the following priority priorities:

1. Create Community Housing Partnerships (CHPS), under the direction of the Grand Island Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP), to conduct housing projects/activities.
2. Develop a Grand Island Workforce Housing Initiative/Employee Assistance Program.
3. Maintain the Grand Island Continuum of Care Program (elderly and special needs).
4. Create a Grand Island Community Land Bank program via locally-based organizations.
5. Plan and implement an annual Grand Island Housing Summit.

Action Plan



TRANSPORTATION:

Safe and affordable modes of private and public transportation.

Essential Framework

The Grand Island Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GIAMPO) serves as the formal transportation planning body for the greater Grand Island, Nebraska metropolitan area. The GIAMPO Policy Board is the regional legislative body. The membership of this board is established by an agreement with the State of Nebraska.

Journey 2040 is the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the Grand Island metropolitan region. The LRTP is a 25-year plan which provides a list of transportation projects to meet the future transportation needs in the region. This is accomplished by analyzing demographic forecasts and current conditions of all modes of transportation including highways, roads, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, aviation, and rail.

The LRTP is updated every five years. The plans, projections, and proposed solutions aim to increase the quality of life for area residents. Additionally, in order to be eligible for federal funding, projects must be listed in the LRTP. To learn more about the LRTP: <https://www.grand-island.com/departments/public-works/metropolitan-planning-organization/giampo-long-range-transportation-plan>

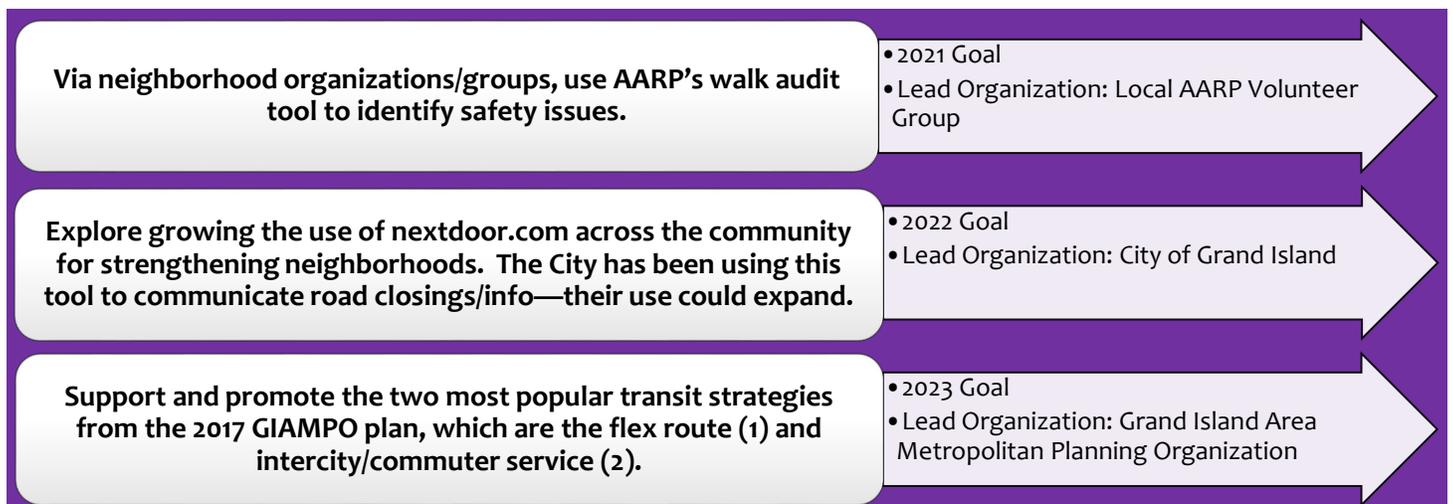
In June 2017, the Grand Island Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GIAMPO) initiated the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan project.

The purpose of the project was to:

- Assess the existing conditions and opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle transportation in the Grand Island region
- Develop a system that expands routine bike and pedestrian transportation/recreation use
- Recommend a sequence of future bicycle, pedestrian, and trail projects

The GIAMPO Policy Board adopted the **Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in August 2018**. This planning document guides the region's investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and programs. To learn more about the plan: <https://www.grand-island.com/departments/public-works/metropolitan-planning-organization/bike-ped-master-plan>

Action Plan



HEALTH SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS:

Access to home-based care services, health clinics and programs that promote wellness and active aging.

Essential Framework

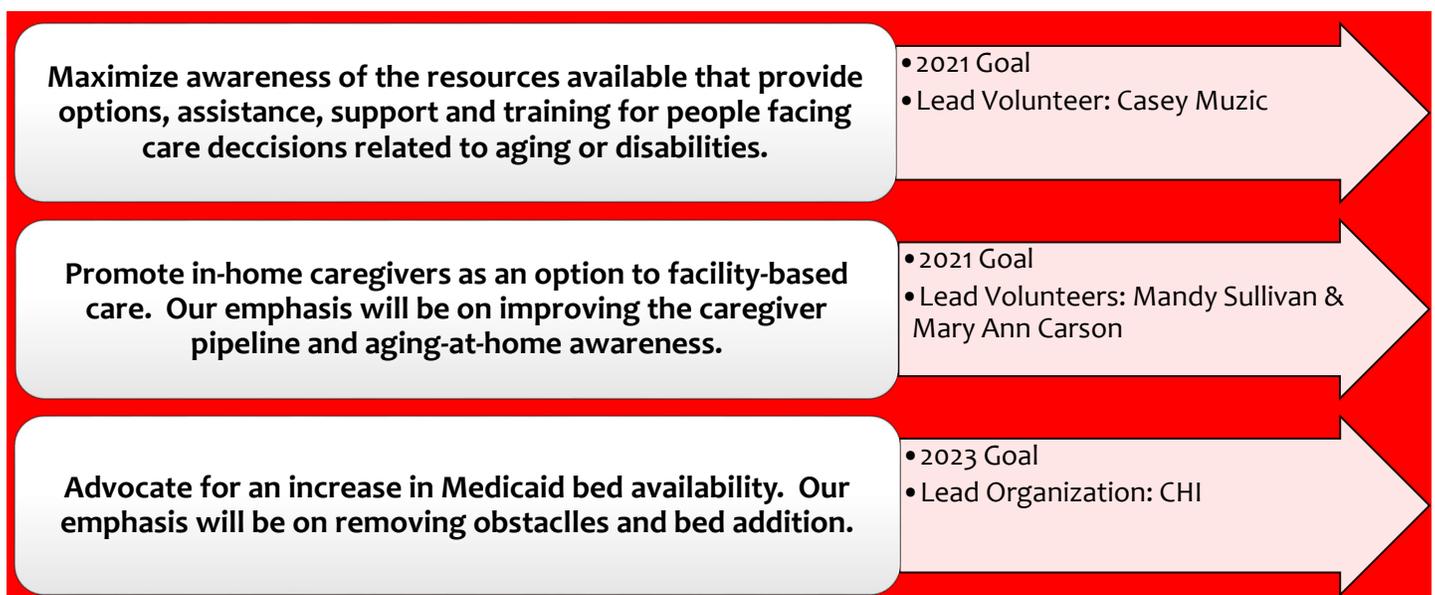
Community Health Needs Assessment of 2019 (produced every three years) is a cooperative study with CHI Health St. Francis and the Central District Health Department (CDHD). This report has identified and prioritized health needs for Hall County:

1. Access to care, to include ratio of population to provider and lack of health coverage.
2. Aging issues, to include housing and transportation.
3. Behavioral health, to include mental health and substance abuse.
4. Culture of health, identified as social determinants of health, such as unemployment, poverty, and single-parent households.
5. Maternal, infant and child health, to include prenatal care, teen births, and premature delivery.
6. Obesity, to include eating behaviors.
7. Violence, to include domestic assaults across all types.

A focus group was pulled together to discuss the 2019 needs assessment and to identify an action plan. Members included :

- Carol Schooley, AARP Volunteer
- Casey Muzic, Area Agency on Aging
- Ed Hannon, CHI Health St. Francis
- Teresa Anderson, Central District Health Department
- Linna Dee Donaldson, Resident (former City Council member)
- Peg Gilbert, Health Facility Inspector (former City Council member)
- MaryAnn Carson, Resident
- Mandy Sullivan, Nurse
- Harold Rosenkotter, Resident
- Tonja Brown, Chair, Grow Grand Island

Action Plan



OUTDOOR SPACES AND PLACES:
Availability of safe and accessible recreational facilities.

Essential Framework

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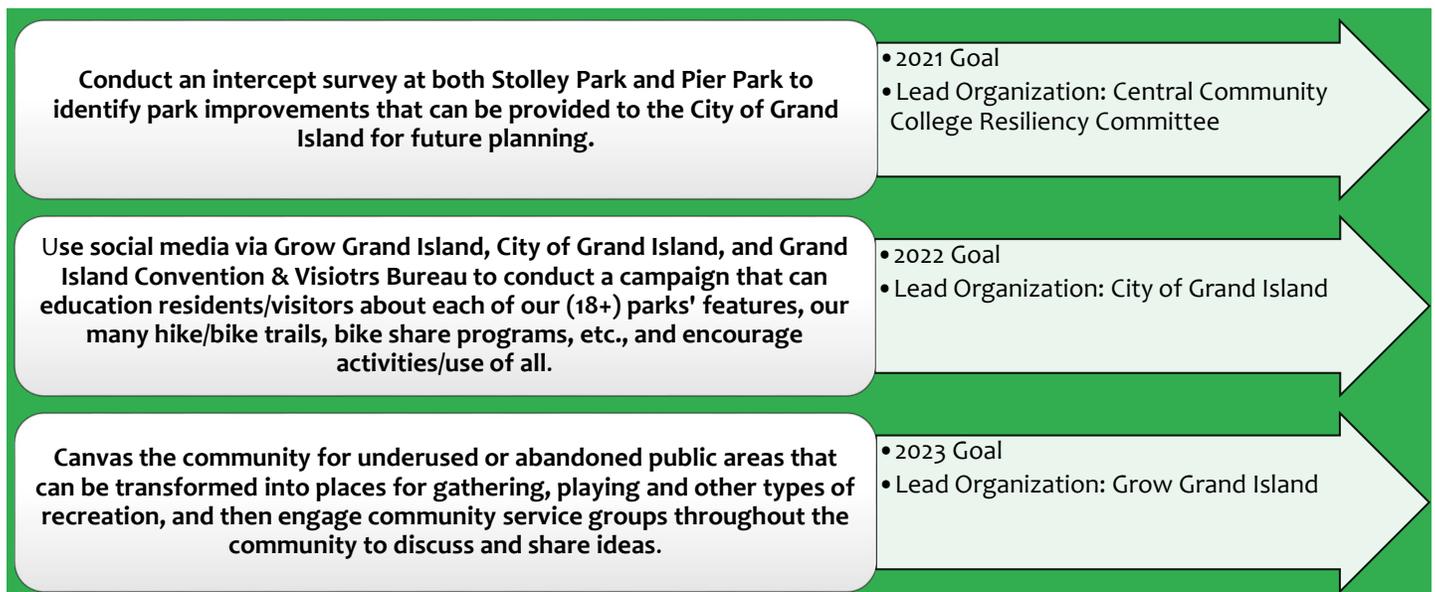
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Central Community College's Resiliency Committee supports projects found in the Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan, such as projects promoting safe bike and pedestrian crossing of US Highway 281 and Highway 34 adjacent to the campus, a bike lane on Stolley Park Road connecting to the St. Joe trail, and further connections to the trail system.

Moving forward with bike and pedestrian projects is crucial in Grand Island as the population is growing. Having multimodal transportation options in all neighborhoods will ensure an active healthy and engaged community for the future. Central Community College supports reducing commuter traffic through increased bike share use and achieving the overall goal of carbon neutrality by 2034 through implementing trail projects and increased education and awareness. Along with projects that are specific to CCC, the Resiliency Committee will support and engage in the Livable Community action plan goals.

Action Plan



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT:

Paid work and volunteer activities for residents, and opportunities to engage in the formulation of policies relevant to their lives.

Essential Framework

Workforce was declared the number one priority by the Grow Grand Island's Executive Committee in 2018. A taskforce was immediately established to develop a comprehensive workforce sustainability plan. Members of the taskforce include:

- Cindy Johnson, Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce
- Courtney Lierman, Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce
- Dave Taylor, Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation
- Randy Kissinger, Department of Labor
- Susan Hooker, Central Community College
- Will Armstrong, Edward Jones
- Kurt Haecker, Home Federal Bank
- Heidi Isley, Associated Staffing
- Jeff Palik, Olsson
- Karen Rathke, Heartland United Way
- Tonja Brown, Grow Grand Island Chair

Below are the three specific approaches from their work that are shaping current and future programs:

Targeted Recruitment:

At present, there is very little collaboration for recruitment. Key partners need to be brought together to discuss and determine concerted and specific ways to reach these audiences:

- **Area high school graduates & college graduates (come home/stay home).**
- **Midwestern states (relocation enticement).**
- **Displaced workers (via DOL rapid response team).**

Grow Our Own/Retention:

We have tremendous resources and opportunities in our area to create our own pipeline. When these opportunities line up well with workforce demand, we stand a great chance of filling local positions with those who complete comprehensive training, such as:

- **Career Pathway Institute (CPI)/Career Academies.**
- **Post-Secondary Education (to potentially include CPI-Adult).**
- **Apprenticeships/Internships/Job Shadows/Scholarships.**

Up-Skill/Re-Skill:

As automation impacts how work is done, as baby boomers retire, as our population evolves and changes, we need programs to help those who have already made this their home to stay and succeed, such as:

- **Staffing Agency/DOL programs.**
- **EDGE program (adult upskilling per employment goals).**
- **Institution-based (including CPI/Adult) & employer-based training programs.**

All of these programs require a high level of engagement by partner organizations. In some cases, specific work teams or focus groups are required for program refinement and implementation. There is also opportunity for volunteerism and mentoring. Workforce sustainability is a cornerstone for community success—stakeholders from all aspects of the community can play a role.

Action Plan

Develop and implement a 3-year targeted recruitment initiative utilizing Grow Grand Island grant funds. Seek long-term sustainability solutions for ongoing funding and partners.

- 2020-2022 Goal
- Lead Organization: Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce

Develop and implement a 3-year degree-based internship initiative utilizing Grow Grand Island grant funds. Seek long-term sustainability solutions for ongoing funding and partners.

- 2020-2022 Goal
- Lead Organization: Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce

Develop and implement a pilot up-skilling program called EDGE utilizing funding from Sherwood Foundation and others. Based on evaluation, determine the long-term initiative and funding partners.

- 2020-2021 Goal
- Lead Organization: Grow Grand Island

CONTINUOUS CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT

The Livable Community Network serves as a catalyst to educate, encourage and promote improvements that make communities supportive for residents of all ages, abilities and financial status. The network provides cities, towns and counties with resources by tapping into national and global research, planning models and best practices. Members of the network commit to a continuous cycle of improvement with these resources at our fingertips.

Grand Island is in the planning phase of the cycle. This phase is completed when this action plan is endorsed by AARP, then subsequently by the World Health Organization. The next 3-5 years of the cycle are spent in implementation and evaluation. This isn't to say that work can't and shouldn't begin on our action plan while awaiting endorsement—many of the goals are already underway. Endorsement is necessary to remain an active member of the network, as is reporting progress as we implement and evaluate our success.

This continuous cycle of improvement—planning, implementing, evaluating—is formally completed every five years. As a member of the Livable Community Network, we enjoy the following benefits:

- Organizational guidance from national experts
- Streamlined admission in the World Health Organization's network
- Resources for identifying and developing assessment and survey tools
- Information about identifying and developing community-success criteria
- Strategies for identifying and developing ways to monitor progress
- Access to a network of communities and best practices
- Access to a volunteer network of support
- Access to evaluation tools
- Invitations to organized trainings and networking events
- Resources at AARP.org/livable and AARP.org/agefriendly
- Support and guidance from AARP
- Recognition by AARP and others



AARP provides other resource opportunities such as the Quick Action Grant and Rural Lab. Grand Island received a quick action grant in 2019 that provided \$5000 toward the way-finding totems located throughout Railside (photo).

AARP Rural Lab is a new program specifically designed to address unique challenges faced by rural communities, but can also be an innovative laboratory for change. The program includes a monthly videoconference call to foster information-sharing exchanges *among and across rural communities* working on similar issues. Topics will be driven by participants, but may include housing, transportation, extreme weather/disasters, high-speed internet, and economic development, to name a few. An exclusive website is provided for resource development and sharing.

Being part of the Livable Community Network enhances the efforts of Grow Grand Island in many ways. Connecting with peer communities, learning about innovative approaches, and having access to resources, tools, models and best practices to name a few. Yet the old adage applies—we will get out of it what we put into it. Let's put this plan into action together. **What role can you play? Please join us!**