

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REPORT

City of Odessa, Missouri – Board of Aldermen

September 2025



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INTRODUCTION

EverStrive Solutions was engaged to facilitate a strategic planning retreat for the Odessa Board of Aldermen on Monday, June 2, 2025. This summary report offers brief descriptions of workshop activities and outcomes. The facilitation slide deck is available online: [click here](#). Participants are listed below.

Board of Aldermen:

1. Mayor Bryan Barner
2. Mickey Starr – Ward 1
3. Karla Polson – Ward 1
4. Mike Plachte – Ward 2
5. Donna Ehlert – Ward 2
6. Collin Carrigan – Ward 3
7. Bruce Whatsitt – Ward 3

Odessa Staff:

1. Shawna Davis – City Administrator

Following the strategic planning retreat, city staff developed action steps to address the board's top priorities. These action steps are captured in Exhibit A: Implementation Plan along with measures of success that may be used to communicate progress to the public.

WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

The mayor and aldermen were asked to consider their motivations for their public service and the legacy they hope to leave as a Board of Aldermen. The following themes emerged.

Motivations for Public Service

Participants expressed a deep personal connection to their communities as a primary motivation for public service. Many cited a desire to care for Odessa—a community where they grew up or currently reside—and a commitment to ensuring the city continues to thrive. This sense of belonging and emotional investment was often rooted in childhood experiences and a strong identification with local values and culture.

Several individuals emphasized the importance of managing community growth, including physical development, business investment, and expansion of the tax base. Others were driven by a passion for advocacy and a desire to give residents a voice in local decision-making.

Some were recruited into public service or felt it was the right time to give back to their communities. Curiosity about governmental processes and a belief in the value of their ideas also played a role in their decision to serve.

Vision for Community Legacy

A shared aspiration among participants was to build a community that residents are proud of and eager to invest in. They envisioned a place where civic engagement is revitalized and where progress

is visible and meaningful. There was a strong emphasis on addressing current challenges while planning for future needs.

Participants highlighted the importance of preserving community character—described as kind, humane, and forgiving—and fostering a sense of unity between government and citizens. Overcoming divisions and working collaboratively were seen as essential to achieving this vision.

Commitment to Organizational Legacy

The conversation also reflected a collective commitment to transparency, trust, and cooperation. The Board hopes that citizens will understand that elected leaders are doing their best with available resources. There is a desire to routinize regular planning processes to ensure community plans remain dynamic and responsive to current conditions. The group expressed a strong desire to care for people and leave behind a legacy of thoughtful, inclusive governance. Ultimately, the group expressed a strong desire to care for their people and leave behind a legacy of thoughtful, inclusive, and effective government.

CONTEXT FOR THE CONVERSATION

Prior to the workshop, city staff administered a survey to the public to gather input about the city's approach to economic development. EverStrive Solutions conducted two focus groups with fifteen total participants who represented various community perspectives including the school district, Lafayette County, older adults, youth, business, media, and faith based. The facilitators presented the input gathered from these public engagement opportunities, summarized as follows:

Key Strengths Identified by the Community (Economic Development Survey)

- **Small Town Feeling** – Most valued aspect of living in or visiting Odessa.
- **Access to I-70** – Important for connectivity and convenience.
- **Affordable Housing** – Recognized as a major benefit.
- **Community Pride & Events** – Strong sense of belonging and active local engagement.
- **Quality of Life** – 90.3% rated it three or higher on a 5-point scale.

Top Challenges Facing Odessa (Economic Development Survey)

1. Deteriorating Roadways
2. Lack of Retail and Basic Services
3. Limited Restaurant Options
4. Job Opportunities
5. Aging Infrastructure

Community Sentiment on Growth

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of survey respondents support growth (rated three or higher). The focus group participants affirmed this rating. Participants understand that growth is necessary for the community to continue to thrive and to generate the tax income necessary to maintain quality services. One participant noted that, “small town is a feeling, not a size.” The city can be proactive about growth while simultaneously pursuing development that is consistent with the community's scale and character. There is strong interest in revitalizing the outlet mall, continuing to support

downtown, and attracting new businesses like a grocery store, restaurants and retail. There is also desire for different types of housing (senior housing and more affordable single-family homes) and commercial/industrial development that includes good-paying jobs.

Additional Focus Group Insights

- **Points of Pride:** Committed citizens, strong schools, friendly atmosphere, downtown investments. There were several positive comments about the quality of staff.
- **Top Priorities for the Next 5 Years:**
 - Development – need to improve customer service to make the process clear and efficient for applicants; the city needs to update keep regulatory tools such as the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance.
 - Infrastructure upgrades (power, sewer, water)
 - Street and sidewalk maintenance
 - Police station
 - Code enforcement
 - Parks and Recreation – the current facilities and programming are admirable for the size of community.
- **Community Engagement:** Participants appreciated the opportunity to provide input and cautioned the city to follow-through on planning efforts. Several prior citizen-driven processes resulted in recommendations that were rejected by the Board of Aldermen, causing frustration among the volunteers who dedicated time to the process. The community is eager for more informal opportunities to engage with the Board of Aldermen. Regular business meetings do not offer a forum for open dialogue. Several prior ballot questions have failed, so the city must be intentional to rebuild trust with the public and develop funding strategies that can gain public support.
- **Willingness to Help** – Participants are proud that Odessans support their neighbors and come together to solve problems. This willingness to help neighbors does not always translate to the community at large. Work is needed to help re-establish a mindset of teamwork and collaboration between city hall and the public.

PRIORITY SETTING

Board members worked individually and then in small groups to brainstorm their ideas for priorities that the city can influence. Ideas were grouped in one of four quadrants on a matrix according to their urgency and criticality. Duplicates indicate differences of opinion about categorization because all input was captured at this stage.

1. Critical – essential need for the community that must be addressed
2. Not Critical – nice to do, but not MUST do
3. Urgent – By the end of the next fiscal year
4. Not Urgent – 2027 and beyond

Category	Ideas
Critical + Urgent	Police station (4)
	Redundant utility sources (water and electric) (3)
	Road repair and maintenance (no chip seal) (2)
	Solid infrastructure (2)
	Redundant water source (2)
	Community engagement (2)
	Use I-70 traffic to our advantage in growth
	Use tax income
	New electric rates
	Fix the dam
	Rent control – resident protection (housing affordability)
Critical + Non Urgent	Industrial business development – old outlet mall (3)
	Historic - People wanting to visit Odessa – tourist draw
	Shopping destination to increase sales
	Improve city ordinances for development (trailer storage, resolutions)
	Emergency shelter
	Street maintenance
	Utility costs
	Better way to encourage community feedback – community forums
Not Critical + Urgent	Grocery store (2)
	Sidewalk & walking safety
	Grants – more time for staff to access
	Industry
	Rental, AirBnb, Hotel
	New builds for housing
	Water pressure and quality
	Annexation
	Pride in property
Not Urgent + Not Critical	Activities for seniors
	Grocery stores / variety of stores
	Dog park
	More community events
	Chickens
	Sidewalks
	Emergency management volunteers
	1912 building
	Community center with multiple activities
	Keep growing park activities
	Recycle/yard waste
	Animal ordinance (dog)

The ideas identified as critical were grouped into common themes. The mayor and aldermen used sticky dots to indicate their preferences among the themes with the following results.

Theme	Priority Preferences
1. Planning	10
2. Community engagement	6
3. Police	5
4. Electric utility	5
5. Water utility	5
6. Streets	5
7. Grocery Store	3
8. Business industry	2
9. Sidewalks	1
10. Destination & tourism	0
11. Fix the dam	0

PROBLEM DIAGNOSIS

After identifying the top six themes for further discussion, participants wrote one sentence for each focus area to capture the problem that needs to be solved. Then the full group discussed and consolidated their work into the following problem statements. Note: topics are listed in alphabetical order and do not reflect a rank order of priorities.

1. Community Engagement

There is a persistent lack of trust and transparency between the government and residents, resulting in low civic participation, ineffective communication, and inadequate support from voters for critical ballot initiatives.

2. Electric

The city's aging electric infrastructure lacks redundancy and dedicated funding for improvements, leading to reliability concerns and high utility rates that hinder economic development.

3. Planning

Odessa lacks a consistent, community-driven strategic planning process that endures beyond election cycles and ensures long-term implementation and accountability.

4. Police

The police department operates in an inadequate temporary facility. Among other space challenges, accused offenders and victims often interact, causing safety concerns. Past efforts to secure support to fund improvements have failed due to community mistrust and lack of consensus on cost.

5. Streets

Deteriorating road conditions and insufficient long-term funding have led to public dissatisfaction, with residents demanding more visible and lasting improvements beyond temporary fixes.

6. Water

The city's water system lacks a redundant source, posing a risk to supply reliability, though the issue remains largely unnoticed by the public compared to other infrastructure concerns.

Further Discussion

After discussing the problem statements, the facilitators asked the Board of Aldermen to discuss and confirm that these are the six top priorities for the next five years. The priorities identified indicate that ***Odessa is a community that wants to rebuild public trust to generate the plans and resources necessary to deliver exceptional basic services: electric, water, streets, and police.***

The Board of Aldermen concurred. For the next five years, the City of Odessa will focus on establishing a firm foundation of long-range plans for community development, street maintenance, public safety and utilities. This doesn't preclude delivery of other services or addressing issues as they arise, but the city will focus its limited resources on community engagement and basic services.

DEFINING SUCCESS

After discussing the problems to be solved in each focus area, the Board worked in small groups to define success for each topic. Groups were asked to consider the ideal future state if the City of Odessa is successful at solving the problems identified in the next five years: What's different? Who's impacted? What are people saying? How will we measure success? The discussion is summarized below.

1. Community Engagement

In five years, community engagement extends beyond formal meetings, with residents actively participating in focus groups and collaborative problem-solving efforts. The city and its citizens work together to identify priorities and develop solutions, fostering a culture of mutual trust and shared responsibility.

Measures of Success:

- Increased citizen satisfaction survey ratings related to engagement
- Broader participation in community-led initiatives and forums

2. Streets

A multi-year, community-supported street improvement plan is in place and actively implemented. Regular maintenance and visible progress have altered public perception, with residents recognizing the city's commitment to improvement.

Measures of Success:

- Adoption and execution of a long-term street improvement plan
- Improved citizen satisfaction survey ratings related to street conditions

3. Police

A modern, well-maintained police facility has been constructed and is fully staffed. The Odessa Police Department operates efficiently, collaborates effectively with other departments, and enjoys strong public support. The facility symbolizes the community's investment in safety and professionalism.

Measures of Success:

- Voter approval of funding for the facility
- Reduction in property and violent crime; improved clearance rates
- Increased citizen satisfaction survey ratings related to public safety
- Debt service is on schedule or ahead of schedule

4. Electric

The city has established a reliable electrical backup system, significantly reducing outages. Business rates have been restructured to attract new industry, enhancing Odessa's reputation as a business-friendly community. Infrastructure is prepared to support future growth, and the city may explore its own power generation capabilities.

Measures of Success:

- Growth in business assessed valuation
- Decreased frequency and duration of power outages
- Infrastructure readiness for industrial expansion

5. Planning

A successful industrial park has been developed, generating jobs and contributing to lower utility costs. Odessa is no longer viewed solely as a bedroom community, with more residents living and working locally. The city experiences economic growth, and the community acknowledges the positive transformation.

Measures of Success:

- Increased city revenues
- Population growth tied to local employment
- Evidence of follow-through on plans by current and past leadership

6. Water

The city has secured an emergency water source and upgraded its treatment facilities. A clear, long-term plan guides infrastructure improvements, and water quality is consistently high. Public complaints about water taste and hardness have significantly declined.

Measures of Success:

- Improved and consistent water quality
- Reduced frequency of water-related complaints

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Odessa Strategic Planning Retreat marked a pivotal step in aligning the City's leadership around a shared vision for the future. Through thoughtful dialogue, the Board of Aldermen identified six strategic priorities that will guide the City's efforts over the next five years. These priorities reflect a commitment to rebuilding public trust, strengthening core infrastructure, and fostering inclusive, long-term planning. With a unified Board, a dedicated staff, and a community eager to be involved, Odessa is well-positioned to make meaningful progress.

EXHIBIT A: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Following the strategic planning retreat, city staff developed action steps to address the board's top priorities and further refined the measures of success that can be used to demonstrate progress to the public.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT			
Problem Statement	Measures of Success	Action Items	
There is a persistent lack of trust and transparency between the government and residents, resulting in low civic participation, ineffective communication, and inadequate support from voters for critical ballot initiatives.	Number of social media posts and impressions	1.1	Host a civic academy.
		1.2	Create a public relations internship.
	Percentage of employees who have completed training in conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and plain language communication	1.3	Conduct citizen-led focus groups by topic area to gather public input on key decisions.
		1.4	Complete an annual city operations report.
	Percentage increase in meeting and event participation over baseline	1.5	Implement a transactions based survey tool to monitor customer experience.
		1.6	Implement a work order management process so the public can report and monitor service needs.
	Percentage of customers who indicate satisfaction in transaction based surveys	1.7	Recognize and celebrate community contributions.
STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: ELECTRIC			
Problem Statement	Measures of Success	Action Items	
The city's aging electric infrastructure lacks redundancy and dedicated funding for improvements, leading to reliability concerns and high utility rates that hinder economic development.	Average outage duration (SAIDI) and frequency (SAIFI) reduced year over year	2.1	Conduct a detailed rate study to ensure electric rates are fair, cost-effective and support the long-term financial and operational sustainability of the utility.
		2.2	Develop and implement a utility communication plan.

	Percentage of service area converted to larger voltage (12470)	2.3	Enhance operational efficiency, outage response, and system monitoring through phased integration of automation technologies into the electric distribution system.
	Reduce time to restore service for major outages	2.4	Attract and integrate industrial and commercial customers to increase revenue, improve load factor and enhance system efficiency.
	Increase the number of new industrial and commercial customers added each year	2.5	Create a 10-year capital improvement plan (CIP) with planned funding sources for all projects.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: PLANNING

Problem Statement	Measures of Success	Action Items	
Odessa lacks a consistent, community-driven strategic planning process that endures beyond election cycles and ensures long-term implementation and accountability.	Reduction in the number of variance and special exception requests	3.1	Update planning mechanisms including Comprehensive Plan, Unified Development Code and building codes to current and inclusive standards.
	Reduction in the average time to review and process development applications	3.2	Streamline development processes with modernization and digitization.
	Percentage of customers who indicate satisfaction in transaction based surveys	3.3	Develop and implement an economic development plan.
		3.4	Utilize partnerships with local business organizations to enhance economic development.
	Increase in the number of building permits	3.5	Improve relations with developers and existing businesses by regular, open, two-way communication.
	Successful resolution of legal challenges with no adverse rulings	3.6	Increase training for staff to improve consistency of plan and code interpretation across projects.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 4: POLICE

Problem Statement	Measures of Success	Action Items	
The police department operates in an inadequate temporary facility. Among other space challenges, accused offenders and victims often interact, causing safety concerns. Past efforts to secure support to fund improvements have failed due to community mistrust and lack of consensus on cost.	100% compliance with chain-of-custody procedures in audits	4.1	Approve a funding mechanism for a new police facility.
		4.2	Establish a modern, climate-controlled evidence storage area.
	Decrease in average time to retrieve case-related records	4.3	Implement a digital records room with secure, restricted access.
		4.4	Design a multi-purpose training room for in-house training and community events.
	Increase in officer retention rates year over year	4.5	Create a secure holding area and interview room with controlled access.
	100% compliance with detainee safety protocols	4.6	Ensure adequate personnel for operational needs.
	Zero security breaches within facility grounds.	4.7	Establish separate public and operational spaces to increase confidentiality.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 5: STREETS

Problem Statement	Measures of Success	Action Items	
Deteriorating road conditions and insufficient long-term funding have led to public dissatisfaction, with residents demanding more visible and lasting improvements beyond temporary fixes.	Percentage of roads rated poor or below that receive treatment	5.1	Implement routine road condition assessments.
		5.2	Utilize asset management systems with GIS and software to prioritize maintenance needs.
	Ratio of dollars spent to lifecycle extension received for street projects	5.3	Create a 10-year capital improvement plan (CIP) with planned funding sources for all street and sidewalk projects.
		5.4	Collaborate with the private sector for road maintenance and investment.

	Miles of roads resurfaced each year	5.5	Research and train staff on alternative methods for durable repair materials and modern maintenance procedures.
	Linear feet of sidewalk replaced or added annually	5.6	Develop and implement a storm water improvement plan.
		5.7	Development a maintenance tracking system to monitor all completed repairs.
	Ratio of costs for preventative maintenance to reactive maintenance	5.8	Implement sidewalk and stormwater cost share programs.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 6: WATER

Problem Statement	Measures of Success	Action Items	
The city's water system lacks a redundant source, posing a risk to supply reliability, though the issue remains largely unnoticed by the public compared to other infrastructure concerns.	Percentage of water staff trained on Emergency Response Plan (ERP) protocols annually	6.1	Create an ERP for water supply disruptions.
		6.2	Conduct a feasibility study and cost analysis for secondary source upgrades.
	Number of emergency water drills or exercises conducted annually	6.3	Create a 10-year capital improvement plan (CIP) with planned funding sources that prioritizes redundancy, resiliency, and replacement projects.
		6.4	Utilize asset management software to monitor infrastructure conditions and prioritize improvements.
	Percentage of system mapped and assessed for condition.	6.5	Increase collector well resiliency.

