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Aerial video still: "A Great Distance: Venice of the Lakes," THIS METAL SKY (YouTube).

KEEGO HARBOR

2026 Strategic Plan

Visioning Process, Emerging Pillars, and Implementation Framework

Adopted by City Council: September 17, 2026

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Plan at a Glance

The vision, four strategic pillars, and top six consensus priorities that guide this plan — the full analysis and methodology begin on the following pages.

OUR VISION

"Keego Harbor is an inviting lakeside community built on neighborly connections, where thoughtful growth preserves small-town character, stewards natural resources, and channels investment into lasting opportunities and shared community benefit."

FOUR STRATEGIC PILLARS

1 Natural Resources & Stewardship Protect, enhance, and increase resident use of natural assets.	**2 Small-Town Character**Strengthen safety, belonging, walkability, volunteerism, and neighborly ties.	**3 Thoughtful Growth & Opportunity** Create lasting fiscal and economic value shared across the city.	**4 Quality of Life Across Generations** Support services, housing, mobility, recreation, infrastructure, and effective governance.

TOP 6 CONSENSUS PRIORITIES

Rank	Priority Initiative (Consensus, Aug 12)	Focus Area	Votes
1	Six-year Capital Improvements Plan aligned with the community vision and corridor priorities	Citywide	18
2	Dollar Lake Park and boardwalk concept	Dollar Lake corridor	14
3	Cass Lake Road diet and streetscape feasibility package *tie	Cass Lake corridor	12
3	Redevelop and promote vacant properties *tie	Cass Lake corridor	12
5	Waterfront preservation and public access	Dollar Lake corridor	11
6	Streamline redevelopment processes	Citywide	10

** Tied rank; combined with related redevelopment actions in Section 9. Voting note: participants received 7 dots each; ties received equal marks.*

HOW IT WORKS

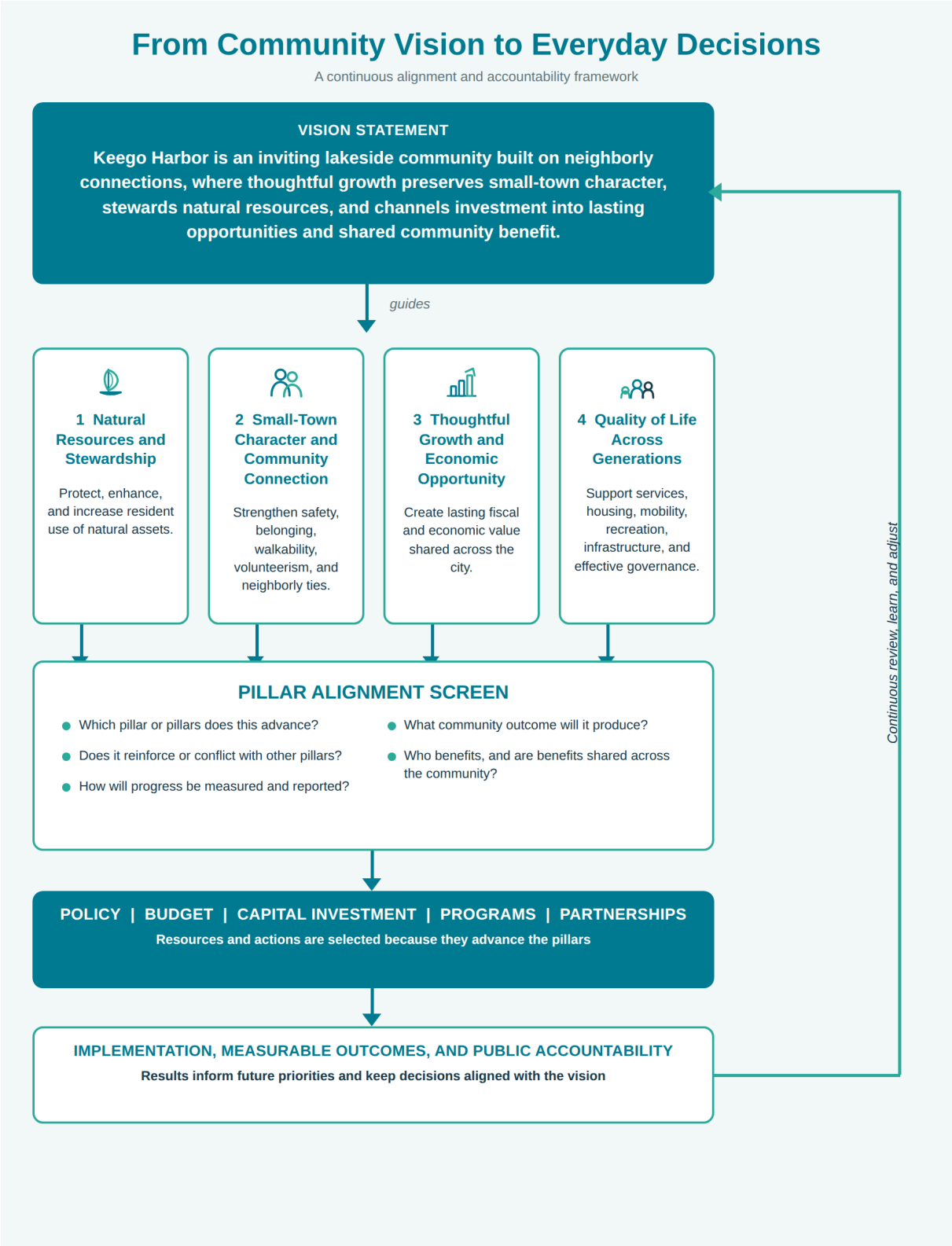

Figure 1. Vision-to-decision alignment and accountability framework.

September 15, 2026

TO: Members of the Keego Harbor City Council, Planning Commission, TIFA Board, and Parks and Recreation Board

Dear Board and Commission Members:

I appreciate the opportunity to facilitate this strategic planning process for the City of Keego Harbor.

Strategic plans often fall short—not because their ideas lack merit, but because the systems needed to carry them forward are not designed alongside them. Without a clear connection to everyday decisions, even strong plans can sit on a shelf while immediate pressures, political realities, and operational demands compete for attention.

Keego Harbor approached this process differently. Members of four public bodies gathered with enthusiasm and a shared intention to listen, contribute, and build a thoughtful vision for the community's future. That collaboration produced more than a vision statement. It established a framework for aligning policies, budget priorities, capital investments, and City initiatives with the qualities and outcomes the community values.

This alignment is especially important for a small community such as Keego Harbor, where resources must be used deliberately and individual decisions can have a lasting effect. The vision, strategic pillars, and prioritized initiatives presented in this report are intended to help the City maintain that alignment as circumstances, opportunities, and leadership evolve.

I applaud the positive attitude, energy, and neighborly care each participant brought to this effort. Throughout the process, I also came to appreciate the neighborly authenticity that distinguishes Keego Harbor—a genuine familiarity, concern for one another, and willingness to contribute to the community's future.

Thank you for your trust, participation, and thoughtful engagement. I look forward to seeing Keego Harbor carry this shared vision into action.

Sincerely,

Joseph Gacioch
Principal
Gacioch Civic Advisory

Executive Summary

Keego Harbor began a collaborative strategic visioning process to form a shared vision for the community's desired future and to create a practical framework for aligning public decisions with that future. The process engaged members of the City Council, Planning Commission, Tax Increment Financing Authority Board, and Parks and Recreation Commission through a pre-session reflection survey, facilitated exercises, group synthesis, and follow-up review.

Across the work completed to date, participants consistently described Keego Harbor as an inviting lakeside community whose natural resources, small-town character, neighborly connections, and local economic potential are central to its identity. They also expressed a desire for thoughtful growth that protects these qualities while creating lasting opportunities and shared benefits across the city.

Four strategic pillars emerged from the process: Natural Resources and Stewardship; Small-Town Character and Community Connection; Thoughtful Growth and Economic Opportunity; and Quality of Life Across Generations. The pillars are intended to function as an implementation framework. Policies, budgets, capital investments, development decisions, programs, and partnerships should be evaluated according to how they strengthen one or more pillars and contribute to realizing the community's vision. A second phase of the session translated this framework into an initial action plan through group consensus and dot voting. The strongest support centered on coordinated capital planning, waterfront and corridor investments, and a proactive approach to redevelopment.

> A follow up survey was issued to form consensus around a vision statement. Based on 15 responses and an 80 percent preference for a vision that emphasizes growth-and-shared-community-benefit, this report presents a refined vision statement for review at the September 15 study session and potential adoption with the strategic plan in October.

1. Session Overview

On Wednesday, August 12, 2026, the City of Keego Harbor convened a joint strategic visioning session with representatives of the City Council, Planning Commission, Tax Increment Financing Authority Board, and Parks and Recreation Board. A quorum was present for each of the four public bodies. The City Clerk conducted the official roll call, and the complete attendance record will be incorporated into the final report.

The session brought the four bodies together to develop a shared understanding of Keego Harbor's defining qualities, consider the needs of current and future residents, and begin identifying the principles that should guide the city's long-term direction.

2. Pre-Session Reflection Survey

Before the session, members of all four bodies were invited to complete a pre-session reflection survey. 13/20 responses were received. The survey used an reflective, experience-based approach intended to prepare participants for the visioning process.

Through the survey, participants identified words describing the community at its best, existing assets that should be protected or strengthened, elements of community identity that have been lost or may be at risk, and examples from other communities that could provide useful inspiration.

This sequence encouraged participants to begin with lived experiences rather than immediately focusing on problems or projects. It revealed not only which community assets people value, but also why those assets matter and which qualities should be preserved as the community changes.

Themes from the responses

- Keego Harbor's lakes, waterways, parks, trails, and other natural resources are central to its identity and quality of life.
- The city's small-town character is associated with familiarity, friendliness, safety, belonging, and everyday connections among neighbors.
- Walkability and bicycle access are valued strengths, but major roads and incomplete connections can make travel between neighborhoods, businesses, trails, and waterfront areas difficult or unsafe.
- Local businesses, community events, and informal gathering places contribute to the city's vitality and sense of connection.
- Participants expressed concern about the loss of schools, family-oriented businesses, everyday services, gathering places, and community trust.
- Respondents identified opportunities to strengthen downtown activity, support local businesses, improve access to natural assets, invest in public spaces, and position Keego Harbor as a welcoming lakeside destination.
- Successful change was generally understood as growth that protects or enhances the city’s tax base, community scale, the natural setting, and close-knit character.

Together, these responses established an important premise for the session: Keego Harbor's future should build upon the qualities people already cherish while addressing the physical, economic, and social conditions that could weaken them.

3. Opening Generational Exercise

The facilitated session opened with a generational perspective exercise. Participants considered how community needs and priorities vary across different stages of life and how an individual's relationship with the community may change over time. The exercise encouraged members to look beyond their own immediate experiences and consider Keego Harbor from the perspectives of teenagers, young adults, young families, established adults, and retirees.

Teenagers and young adults

Participants emphasized community connections and the services, facilities, and resources that help create them. Lake and trail access provide recreation, while bicycle connections and public transportation support mobility and independence. Because this stage of life often includes a first job and the development of new social relationships, employment opportunities and welcoming social spaces were also considered important.

Young families

Participants identified affordable housing, strong schools, access to childcare, quality public library resources, parks, playgrounds, and other outdoor public spaces as important community assets. Convenient access to daily needs and activities can reduce demands on families. Participants repeatedly emphasized that supportive relationships with neighbors help create a safe and welcoming environment in which to raise children.

Established adults and families

Adults with more established families shared many of these priorities, including access to quality education and summer employment opportunities for young people. For their own quality of life, they valued year-round recreation, social spaces, local services, and Keego Harbor's regional access to employment, Detroit Metropolitan Airport, Downtown Detroit, and the wider metropolitan area. Grocery stores, restaurants, and local retail establishments serve both practical and social purposes by creating places where residents routinely encounter one another.

Residents approaching or entering retirement

Participants emphasized dependable infrastructure, safe access to lakes and trails, year-round recreation, community events, and close relationships with familiar and supportive neighbors. Appropriately sized housing requiring less maintenance and offering features such as first-floor living was identified as important for allowing

residents to remain in the community as they age. Some participants also recognized the value of access to a local faith community and other supportive institutions.

Across the perspectives discussed, natural resources, a welcoming small-town atmosphere, strong resident connections, opportunities for local businesses, accessible recreation, affordability, and quality of life remained important. The exercise demonstrated that people may experience the community differently as their circumstances change, but safety, access, belonging, opportunity, walkability, supportive relationships, and active public and social spaces benefit residents at every stage of life.

4. Future Headlines Exercise

Following the reflection exercises, attendees divided into two groups and were asked to imagine Keego Harbor in 2035-2040. Each group collaborated to create three newspaper-style headlines describing achievements they hoped the community would be celebrating in the future. The exercise bridged participants' reflections on the past and lived experience with a forward-looking vision for community and economic redevelopment.

Group A headlines

1. "Up North City Without the Drive"
2. "Oakland County's Best-Kept Secret"
3. "100 Years Later, the Downtown Is Back"

Group A associated these headlines with Keego Harbor's lakes, parks, trails, walkability, history, local eateries, and small-town atmosphere. Its vision included a renewed downtown, active businesses, waterfront destinations, and a stronger public identity built around the city's natural setting.

Group B headlines

1. "Keego Improves Water Access for All Residents"
2. "Population Boom Increases Tax Revenue for Keego Harbor"
3. "Keego Harbor Nationally Recognized for Reducing Blight"

Group B focused on measurable community improvements and their economic effects. Its headlines envisioned greater resident benefit from natural assets, population growth that strengthens the municipal tax base, and visible reinvestment in properties and commercial areas.

Although the groups approached the exercise differently, both imagined a future in which Keego Harbor capitalizes on its lakeside setting and small-town identity, restores activity to commercial areas, welcomes new residents and investment, and makes community assets more useful and accessible to residents. Successful redevelopment was expected to be visible and broadly experienced through active storefronts, improved properties, stronger public spaces, enhanced public amenities, and renewed community pride.

5. Synthesis of Common Elements

After sharing their headlines, each group reviewed the full sequence of exercises - the pre-session reflections, generational perspectives, and future headlines - to identify the feelings, attributes, and physical conditions that appeared consistently across its discussions.

Group A synthesis

Group A described a future Keego Harbor as vibrant, welcoming, and rooted in its small-town character. Members emphasized the city's lakes and natural resources, connections among generations, and an environment that welcomes residents, visitors, businesses, and entrepreneurs. Positive change, resident-focused decisions, year-round activity, and openness to opportunity were important conditions for achieving this future.

Group B synthesis

Group B described Keego Harbor as charming, walkable, and closely connected to its lakes and trails. Its discussion emphasized quality of life, year-round recreation, and economic development working together so that community investment and business activity strengthen rather than diminish the natural resources and small-town character residents value.

Both groups wanted Keego Harbor to feel welcoming, friendly, vibrant, charming, safe, and connected. They associated those feelings with walkable neighborhoods, protected lakes and trails, year-round recreation, active social spaces, quality public services, thriving local businesses, and opportunities for residents and entrepreneurs. These common elements became the basis for the four strategic pillars.

6. Vision Statement Development

A vision statement describes the ideal future the city is working to achieve. It gives elected and appointed officials, staff, community partners, residents, and businesses a shared long-term direction that can remain consistent as individual projects, budgets, and leadership change.

In planning and governance, the vision helps decision-makers evaluate whether policies, budget priorities, capital investments, development proposals, partnerships, and initiatives advance the community's desired future. Externally, it supports consistent public messaging and can inform branding, logo development, economic development materials, grant applications, partnerships, and communications.

Recommended vision statement

Keego Harbor is an inviting lakeside community built on neighborly connections, where thoughtful growth preserves small-town character, stewards natural resources, and channels investment into lasting opportunities and shared community benefit.

Final follow-up survey results

Following the facilitated session, participants received two draft vision statements for review. Each option was grounded in the same workshop themes and four strategi pillars but carried a distinct messaging emphasis: one centered on community identity and experience, while the other emphasized thoughtful growth and shared community benefit. Respondents were asked to rank the two statements in order of preference and provide contextual comments identifying the language they supported and additional ideas they believe should be better captured.

- 12/15 respondents (80 percent) ranked the growth-and-shared-community-benefit option first, while three respondents (20 percent) preferred the identity-and-experience option. The final response reinforced the direction of the results and expressed confidence in the visioning process and its outcome.

The written feedback supported retaining Keego Harbor's lakeside setting, small-town character, lasting opportunities, and shared community benefit. It also called for clearer language around thoughtful growth, natural-resource stewardship, safety, sidewalks, walkability, infrastructure, and durable local businesses. These ideas informed both the recommended statement and refinements to the four strategic pillars.

Participants repeatedly used close-knit to describe good neighbors, volunteerism, familiarity, and a place where people know one another. One respondent, however, identified a tension between close-knit and inviting, noting that close-knit can also suggest an established circle that is difficult to enter. The recommended language - built on neighborly connections - preserves the positive meaning expressed during the workshop while emphasizing openness and belonging.

Selected participant comments

> *"I feel the points of close-knit lakeside represent one of the biggest assets of Keego which is our small city being on the lake."*
> -- Follow-up survey respondent
>
> *"Not sure if 'tailored, sensible growth' is right wording. Maybe 'thoughtful growth' instead?"*
> -- Follow-up survey respondent
>
> *"I wish it included something about protecting natural resources / environmental stewardship..."*
> -- Follow-up survey respondent
>
> *"To me, 'close-knit' is the opposite of inviting or welcoming."*
> -- Follow-up survey respondent
>
> *"It ended up in a great way and just by getting everyone thinking in this direction, it moved us forward. Whatever vision statement is chosen will be great for our city.."*
> -- Follow-up survey respondent

7. Four Strategic Pillars

The four pillars translate the emerging vision into a practical framework for governance and implementation. A proposed action does not need to advance every pillar. It should clearly support at least one pillar, demonstrate how it contributes to the vision, and avoid unnecessarily undermining the others. I have provided sample decision-oriented questions that a City Council member or board member may ask themselves.

1. Natural Resources and Stewardship

Protect and responsibly enhance the lakes, waterways, parks, trails, tree canopy, and other natural features that define Keego Harbor's identity, while increasing their accessibility and usefulness for residents.

The health of the community is inseparable from the health of its natural environment. Decisions should promote environmental stewardship, protect water and land resources, maintain public recreational assets, and increase residents' ability to access, use, and enjoy publicly available natural amenities. Investments should help these resources serve recreational, social, environmental, and quality-of-life purposes throughout the year. Growth and development should respect the city's environmental setting and contribute to long-term resilience.

> **Decision question:** Does this action protect or enhance Keego Harbor's natural resources while increasing their accessibility, usefulness, or enjoyment for residents?

2. Small-Town Character and Community Connection

Preserve an inviting, safe community built on neighborly connections by strengthening relationships among people, neighborhoods, local institutions, businesses, and public spaces.

This pillar reflects the value residents place on familiarity, neighborly relationships, volunteerism, walkability, local gathering places, community events, and Keego Harbor's distinctive small-town atmosphere. Decisions should reinforce belonging, improve physical and social connections, welcome people across neighborhoods and generations, and ensure that growth remains compatible with the city's scale and character.

> **Decision question:** Does this action strengthen safety, belonging, connectivity, walkability, or the small-town character residents value?

3. Thoughtful Growth and Economic Opportunity

Encourage appropriately scaled investment, redevelopment, entrepreneurship, and lasting local businesses that strengthen the city's fiscal health and create benefits shared across the community.

Growth should be intentional and suited to Keego Harbor. Economic activity should reduce blight, support durable businesses, expand opportunity, make productive use of the city's location and lakeside economic strength, and contribute to a stable municipal tax base. Public and private investment should produce visible, lasting value for residents while protecting natural resources and community character.

> **Decision question:** Does this action generate lasting economic or fiscal value while ensuring that the benefits of investment extend across the community?

4. Quality of Life Across Generations

Provide the infrastructure, services, housing choices, walkability, mobility, recreation, community amenities, and effective local governance people need to live safely, participate fully, and thrive throughout every stage of life.

Community needs change across stages of life, while dependable services and responsible governance remain essential across generations. Decisions should consider families, young people, working adults, older residents, and future generations. Priorities include dependable infrastructure, walkable neighborhoods, safe streets and

sidewalks, year-round recreation, accessible services, appropriate housing choices, and social spaces that strengthen daily life. The City must also maintain the capacity to deliver these outcomes through long-term planning, fiscal responsibility, coordinated capital investment, effective administration, transparent decision-making, and responsible stewardship of public resources. Quality of life depends on both what residents experience today and the City's ability to plan, fund, maintain, and improve it over time.

> Decision question: Does this action improve residents' quality of life while strengthening the City's ability to plan responsibly, maintain fiscal sustainability, provide effective services, and meet community needs over the long term?

8. From Vision to Decisions

The vision and pillars are intended to shape routine governance, not remain separate from implementation. The vision defines the desired future. The pillars identify the conditions needed to reach it. Policy, budget, capital, program, and partnership decisions then become the means by which the city delivers measurable progress.

The diagram on page 3 illustrates the Vision to Execution relationship at the core of this framework.

Applying the framework

1. Identify which pillar or pillars the proposal advances.
2. Describe the specific community outcome the proposal is expected to produce.
3. Explain who will benefit and whether benefits extend across the community.
4. Consider whether the proposal reinforces or conflicts with the other pillars.
5. Evaluate whether the investment is financially and operationally sustainable.
6. Define how progress and results will be measured and communicated.

Using these questions consistently will connect individual decisions to the city's long-term direction. Budget requests and policy recommendations should identify the relevant pillar or pillars, state the expected result, and describe how the request advances the vision. Over time, outcome reporting should help officials and residents assess progress and adjust priorities.

KEEGO HARBOR STRATEGIC VISION PLAN

PHASE TWO

PRIORITIZATION

Translating the shared vision and strategic pillars into an aligned action plan

Consensus building | Initiative selection | Dot voting | Implementation alignment

9. Phase Two: Prioritization

Exercise preparation and structure

Following a brief break, participants moved from developing a shared vision to identifying initiatives that could begin translating that vision into action.

In preparation for the session, GCA compiled economic redevelopment initiatives previously adopted through the 2025 TIFA Plan and the 2026 Master Land Use Plan. Group A reviewed seven initiatives related to Cass Lake Road, while Group B reviewed 14 initiatives related to Orchard Lake Road and Dollar Lake. Each group also reviewed the same 18 citywide or generally applicable initiatives.

The groups were not initially informed that their citywide lists were identical. This allowed the exercise to test whether they would independently identify similar priorities and reveal areas of natural alignment around a citywide vision.

Each group was asked to reach consensus on six initiatives: three from its assigned geographic focus area and three from the citywide list. After the groups reconvened and presented their recommendations, the results showed substantial overlap in both the priorities selected and the reasoning behind them.

Dot voting and final ranking

The related recommendations were organized on a master prioritization board. Each participant received seven voting dots to distribute among the initiatives, with no more than one individual dot assigned to any single initiative. During the report-out, participants directed that the two Capital Improvements Plan recommendations be treated as one coordinated action. Their support marks are therefore combined below.

Rank	Priority initiative	Focus	Support marks
1	Develop a six-year Capital Improvements Plan aligned with the community vision and corridor priorities	Citywide	18
2	Advance the Dollar Lake Park and boardwalk concept	Orchard Lake Road / Dollar Lake	14
3 (tie)	Prepare a Cass Lake Road diet and streetscape feasibility package	Cass Lake Road	12
3 (tie)	Develop plans to promote and redevelop vacant properties*	Cass Lake Road	12
5	Advance waterfront preservation and public access	Orchard Lake Road / Dollar Lake	11
6	Streamline redevelopment processes*	Citywide	10
7	Complete a zoning ordinance audit and establish an amendment schedule*	Citywide	9
8 (tie)	Complete Fran Leaf Park improvements	Orchard Lake Road / Dollar Lake	8
8 (tie)	Pursue strategic property acquisitions*	Citywide	8
10	Package and advertise redevelopment properties*	Citywide	7
11	Create a Keego Harbor public art plan	Cass Lake Road	5

Voting note: Support marks reflect the dots visible on the final master board.Tied initiatives received the same number of marks.

A shared direction for redevelopment

*The marked redevelopment priorities remain distinct actions and retain their individual rankings. Together, however, they represent a connected redevelopment strategy: identifying opportunities for vacant or underused

properties; creating efficient and predictable review and zoning processes; strategically acquiring or assembling property where public involvement can advance community goals; and packaging and marketing opportunities to appropriate businesses, investors, and development partners.

The five related redevelopment actions received 46 support marks in total. Those marks should not be interpreted as one combined ranking because participants voted on separate actions. Their distribution nevertheless demonstrates strong alignment around a shared view of change:

> Keego Harbor should take a deliberate, coordinated, and proactive role in shaping redevelopment so that investment is appropriately scaled, protects community character, and produces lasting public benefits.

How the priorities support the pillars

Each initiative has a primary relationship to one pillar and may support additional pillars. The six-year Capital Improvements Plan is primarily aligned with Quality of Life Across Generations because that pillar includes long-term planning, fiscal responsibility, organizational effectiveness, and coordinated capital investment. The CIP also enables implementation across all four pillars by translating priorities into projects, funding strategies, schedules, responsibilities, and measurable results.

Strategic pillar	Primary initiative alignment	Additional support
Natural Resources and Stewardship	Dollar Lake Park and boardwalk; waterfront preservation and public access	Fran Leaf Park; six-year CIP
Small-Town Character and Community Connection	Keego Harbor public art plan	Cass Lake Road streetscape; redevelopment strategy; parks and waterfront projects; six-year CIP
Thoughtful Growth and Economic Opportunity	Promote and redevelop vacant properties; streamline redevelopment; zoning audit; strategic acquisitions; package and advertise properties	Cass Lake Road improvements; public art; six-year CIP
Quality of Life Across Generations	Six-year CIP; Cass Lake Road diet and streetscape; Fran Leaf Park improvements	Dollar Lake Park and boardwalk; waterfront access; redevelopment strategy

Figure 2. Prioritized initiatives roll up through the four pillars to support the final vision statement.

POLICY, BUDGET, OR ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION -> PRIORITY INITIATIVE -> STRATEGIC PILLAR(S) -> COMMUNITY VISION -> MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Applying the initiative model

1. Identify the prioritized initiative advanced by the proposed action.
2. Identify its primary pillar and any additional pillars it supports.
3. Describe how the action moves Keego Harbor toward the community vision.
4. Establish the funding, timing, responsibility, and measurable result through the CIP, annual budget, or departmental work plan.
5. Report progress and use the results to inform future policy and investment decisions.

This model creates a continuous line of accountability between individual decisions and the community's long-term direction. It also allows future initiatives to be added without changing the vision or pillars: the City can evaluate each proposed action according to the same alignment questions and incorporate qualifying priorities into its capital plan, budget, policies, and work program.

Appendix A. Sources Reviewed

- August 12th Strategic Plan Roll Call attendance
- Keego Harbor Strategic Vision Pre-Session Reflection survey
- Facilitated generational exercise worksheets and group synthesis notes.
- 2035-2040 future-headline exercise worksheets from Groups A and B.
- Vision statement follow-up survey
- Group A and Group B initiative-selection boards.
- Final master prioritization board and dot-voting results.