

City of Geneva City Council Strategic Plan (2026–2027)

February 13, 2026 **DRAFT**

I. Executive Summary

Purpose of the Strategic Plan

The City of Geneva City Council Strategic Plan for 2026–2027 establishes a clear, disciplined framework to guide the Council’s legislative, oversight, and policy-setting work over the next two years. The plan is intended to move the Council from reactive decision-making toward a focused, transparent, and results-driven governing approach.

This Strategic Plan is not aspirational in nature. It is a working document designed to:

- Clarify City Council priorities
- Improve coordination between City Council, City staff, and partner agencies
- Strengthen fiscal responsibility and long-term sustainability
- Build public trust through accountability and measurable progress

How We Got Here

This Strategic Plan was developed through a deliberate, inclusive, and Council-driven process.

- **Individual Input Sessions:** Mayor Jim Cecere conducted one-on-one discussions with members of City Council and other key parties to understand the issues each Councilor & other key individuals believe are most critical to Geneva’s future.
- **Identification of Shared Challenges:** While Councilors brought different perspectives and ward-specific concerns, a strong consensus emerged around a core set of shared challenges facing the City, including housing, fiscal sustainability, infrastructure, downtown vitality, governance, and public trust.
- **Prioritization Process:** These shared challenges were evaluated during a structured prioritization session, where initiatives were discussed, scored, and ranked based on importance, urgency, and potential impact.
- **Tiered Framework Development:** The results of this exercise were organized into a **tiered priority structure**, distinguishing between critically important initiatives, very important initiatives, and ongoing or integrated efforts.
- **Action-Oriented Design:** Finally, priorities were sequenced into a **month-by-month Strategic Action Plan for 2026**, ensuring focus, preparation, and disciplined decision-making throughout the year.

This approach ensured that the Strategic Plan reflects **collective ownership by the full governing body**, rather than the agenda of any single individual or committee.

Implementation & Capacity Statement

The City Council recognizes that the City operates with limited administrative and operational staffing, and that departments are concurrently managing capital projects, grant compliance, system modernization, and core service delivery.

The Strategic Plan establishes policy direction and priority sequencing. Implementation timing will be informed by staffing capacity, regulatory obligations, grant deadlines, and fiscal constraints. Not all initiatives are expected to be fully implemented within a single fiscal year; however, Tier 1 priorities will receive primary focus and structured advancement during 2026.

The Council will review implementation progress quarterly to ensure that new initiatives do not compromise core service delivery, capital execution, or fiscal discipline.

Strategic Focus

The Strategic Plan is organized around several overarching themes that reflect City Council's shared priorities:

- Stabilizing and growing Geneva's housing base
- Strengthening fiscal transparency and long-term financial sustainability
- Revitalizing downtown and supporting economic development
- Investing in infrastructure and quality-of-life assets
- Maintaining strong public safety and core city services
- Improving governance, oversight, and accountability
- Advancing inclusion, equity, and community engagement

Each theme is supported by clearly defined priorities, assigned timeframes, and expected deliverables.

Sequencing & Operational Alignment

The Council affirms that strategic priorities must be aligned with existing departmental work programs and externally driven deadlines. Where conflicts emerge between strategic sequencing and operational requirements, Council will evaluate adjustments through transparent discussion.

Priority initiatives may be phased to preserve implementation quality. Tier 1 initiatives remain the primary focus of 2026, and lower-tier initiatives may be deferred if necessary to maintain service stability.

What This Plan Does Differently

This Strategic Plan introduces several important shifts in how City Council conducts its work:

- **Create a calendar prioritizing issues to be addressed**, reducing fragmentation and distraction
- **Clear expectations for preparation** by staff and committees
- **Defined outcomes and deliverables**, not just discussion
- **Built-in accountability**, through measurable progress and structured reporting
- **Flexibility with documentation**, allowing for adjustments while preserving transparency
- **Alignment with current work programs and externally driven deadlines** allows for potential adjustments
- **Phased development of dashboards & reporting tools**, prioritizing core finance and operational metrics first

Clarification on Reporting & Metrics

The Council acknowledges that expanded reporting requirements require staff time for data validation, system configuration, and analysis. The first year of new metrics implementation may serve as a baseline data collection period. Performance targets will be refined once reliable baseline data is established to ensure that benchmarks are realistic and meaningful.

City Council Participation

This Strategic Plan was developed through the direct participation of the Geneva City Council, as well as input from key members of City Hall. All members contributed input, perspective, and prioritization that shaped the strategic themes, tiered initiatives, and 2026 action framework outlined in this document.

The following elected officials participated in the development of the 2026–2027 City Council Strategic Plan:

- **Jim Cecere**, Mayor
- **Ahmad Whitfield**, Councilor at Large
- **John Brennan**, Councilor at Large
- **Chris Lavin**, Councilor, 1st Ward
- **Ben Gummo**, Councilor, 2nd Ward
- **Pat Grimaldi**, Councilor, 3rd Ward
- **Peter Gillotte**, Councilor, 4th Ward
- **James Petropolous**, Councilor, 5th Ward
- **Jamie Kaim**, Councilor, 6th Ward

Each member provided substantive input and participated in the prioritization process that produced this Strategic Plan.

Moving Forward

The success of this Strategic Plan depends on consistent follow-through and shared commitment. It requires:

- Adherence by City Council to the adopted priorities and monthly focus
- Timely and thorough preparation by City staff and advisory committees
- Honest evaluation of progress, trade-offs, and outcomes
- Clear and ongoing communication with residents about goals and results

If implemented as intended, this Strategic Plan will position the City of Geneva to make measurable progress on housing stability, fiscal discipline, downtown revitalization, infrastructure investment, and public trust. This will lay a strong foundation for 2026 and beyond.

II. 2026 Strategic Priorities

(From the Prioritization Session)

Council priorities were ranked and grouped into three tiers based on combined scores.

TIER 1: Critically Important (Primary 2026 Focus)

These items will receive the greatest time, staffing, and policy attention in 2026.

1. Housing & Development (Highest Priority)

Why it matters: Housing stability underpins population growth, neighborhood health, affordability, and tax base sustainability.

2026 focus areas

- Homeownership incentives and pathways
- Zoning clarity and predictability
- Rental property accountability and licensing
- Vacant and blighted property enforcement

Target 2026 outcomes

- A clear and publicly adopted housing strategy guiding City policy and investment.
- Increase in primary home ownership rates
- Increase in market-rate housing stock
- Expanded pathways to homeownership, particularly for first-time and moderate-income buyers.
- Consistent accountability and standards for rental properties.
- Systematic reduction of vacant and blighted properties.
- Zoning rules that are clear, predictable, and aligned with housing goals.
- Visible improvement in neighborhood conditions citywide.

Implementation Phasing

Comprehensive housing reform—including rental licensing frameworks, zoning adjustments, enforcement expansion, and incentive program development—may require phased implementation beyond 2026.

Adoption of a housing strategy in 2026 establishes direction and framework. Program rollout and regulatory implementation may extend into 2027 based on legal review, staffing capacity, and fiscal considerations.

Tier 1 housing priorities remain a primary focus of 2026.

Primary launch period: April 2026

2. Budget & Finance Process

Why it matters: Council identified the need for greater transparency, predictability, and discipline in financial decision-making.

2026 focus areas

- Full understanding of cash position and debt obligations
- A clearer annual budget development process
- Creation or enhancement of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
- Waste reduction and prioritization discipline
- Review of current healthcare & benefit costs

Key 2026 outcomes

- A shared Council understanding of the City’s cash position, debt profile, and long-term obligations.
- Creation of a debt strategy
- A defined, repeatable, and transparent annual budget development process.
- Adoption and active use of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- Budget decisions explicitly aligned with Council’s strategic priorities.
- Grant strategy
- Tax reduction plan
- Improved public understanding and confidence in the City’s budget.

Primary work periods

- January-April (financial baseline)
- April (budget presentation & process review)
- September–November (budget development and adoption)

Financial Planning Approach & Implementation

Financial figures discussed during early framework sessions are planning-level estimates and may change based on updated pricing, procurement outcomes, and fiscal modeling.

Development of a Five-Year Financial Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, debt strategy, grant strategy, and tax policy framework may require sequencing across 2026–2027. The Council will prioritize foundational financial transparency and CIP framework development during 2026.

3. Downtown & Economic Development

Why it matters: Vacancy, underutilized buildings, and fragmented economic development structures undermine confidence and growth.

2026 focus areas

- Zero-based review of economic development entities (BID, LDC, IDA, City office)
- Downtown vacancy and activation strategies
- Events, partnerships, and corridor vitality
- Stronger coordination with HWS and nonprofits
- Maximize the impact of the visitor economy

Key 2026 outcomes

- Clear roles, goals, and accountability for economic development agencies.
- Reduction in vacant storefronts and underutilized downtown properties.
- Increased downtown activity through events, partnerships, and placemaking.
- Adoption of a visitor economy strategy.
- Strong collaboration between the City, BID, LDC, IDA, nonprofits, and HWS.
- Improved perception of downtown among residents and visitors.
- Should it be determined and adopted by Council and any corresponding agencies, an implementation plan will be outlined which may extend through 2027

Primary work periods

- February and August 2026

4. Infrastructure

- Long-term water, sewer, and stormwater planning
- Integrate watershed protection and stormwater resilience into capital planning
- Continue to support Shade Tree and Public Works efforts in maintaining and expanding the urban forest
- Encourage collaboration with environmental partners on lake protection and water quality initiatives
- Evaluate opportunities within the Castle Creek corridor for improved environmental design, including potential daylighting feasibility and pedestrian connectivity enhancements
- Grant readiness and capital sequencing
Primary months: April–June 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes:

- Adoption of a long-term strategy for water, sewer, and stormwater systems.
 - Stormwater and watershed considerations are integrated into infrastructure design decisions
- Clearly sequenced and financially realistic infrastructure priorities.
- Coordinated pursuit of state and federal infrastructure grants.
- Prioritized sidewalk, street, and drainage improvements.
- Infrastructure investments aligned with housing and economic development goals.
- Urban forest maintenance and planting programs remain stable or strengthened
- Formal coordination with environmental stakeholders, including local environmental leadership, on lake and creek-related initiatives
- Preliminary feasibility review of environmental design enhancements along the Castle Creek corridor

Capital Delivery Safeguard

Infrastructure strategy development will be coordinated with existing capital delivery schedules and grant compliance requirements.

The Council recognizes that mid-year expansion of capital scope may affect contractor timelines and funding benchmarks. Strategic infrastructure priorities will be sequenced to preserve execution quality.

TIER 2: Very Important (Major Policy Work in 2026)

These areas receive structured attention once Tier 1 foundations are established.

5. Recreation & Youth Opportunities

- Ice rink future and cost containment
 - Youth programming and workforce pathways
 - Park utilization and partnerships
- Primary month:** April 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- A clear decision or long-term plan for the future of the ice rink.
- Expanded or better-coordinated youth programming.
- Increased utilization of City parks and recreational facilities.
- Partnerships that leverage City assets without increasing long-term costs.
- Recreation investments aligned with community needs and fiscal capacity.

6. Public Safety

- Police and fire needs assessment
 - Role of DPW and code enforcement
 - Traffic calming and infrastructure safety
- Primary month:** May 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- A shared understanding of the roles and needs of police, fire, DPW, and code enforcement.
- Clearly documented staffing, equipment, and facility needs.
- Systematic approach to traffic calming and street safety.
- Code enforcement aligned with neighborhood stability and housing goals.
- Sustained or improved resident confidence in public safety services.

Operational Impact Analysis Requirement

Any proposed structural changes to public safety services, including shared service restructuring or reassignment of specialized functions, will require a formal operational and fiscal impact analysis prior to implementation.

Such analysis will address:

- Staffing implications
- Recruitment and retention considerations

- Service continuity risks
- Regulatory compliance
- Fiscal sustainability

Needs assessments are evaluative and advisory unless otherwise directed by formal Council action.

7. Governance & Oversight

- Council–staff roles and accountability
- KPIs, dashboards, and metrics
- Boards and commissions review
- Ethics code, charter review, and comprehensive plan alignment
Primary focus: Q1–Q2 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- Clear definition of roles and responsibilities between Council and City staff.
- Review and alignment of boards and commissions with City priorities.
- Adoption and use of dashboards or performance tracking tools.
- Updated and consistently applied ethics standards.
- Efficient, focused, and policy-oriented Council meetings.

Governance Sequencing

Administrative improvements, dashboard development, and board reviews will be prioritized in 2026.

Structural charter changes and broader governance reforms may extend into 2027 to ensure proper legal review, public engagement, and orderly transition.

8. Shared Services & Efficiency

- Inter-municipal collaboration
- Cost reduction without service loss
- Institutional partnerships
Primary month: May 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- Identification and evaluation of opportunities for shared services.
- Expansion of inter-municipal and institutional partnerships where cost-effective.
- Maintenance or improvement of service quality while containing costs.
- Reduction of duplicative services and processes.

TIER 3: Important, Integrated Work

These priorities are woven into 2026 work rather than standing alone.

9. Comprehensive Plan Update

- Launch Q1 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- Launch and continued advancement of the Comprehensive Plan update.
- Broad and inclusive community engagement throughout the process.
- Alignment of Comprehensive Plan recommendations with Council priorities.
- Use of the Comprehensive Plan as a living policy reference.

Multi-Phase Approach

The Comprehensive Plan update is a multi-phase process that may span multiple fiscal years. 2026 milestones may include launch, community engagement, data gathering, and draft framework development rather than final adoption.

10. Charter Review

- Committee formation and scope definition
- Primary work beginning May 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- Establishment of a Charter Review Committee with clear scope and timeline.
- Identification and evaluation of priority governance issues.
- Delivery of actionable modernization recommendations to Council.
- Transparent and accessible public review process.

11. Inclusion & Equity Initiatives

- Reestablish Human Rights Commission
- Ward-level communication and town halls
- Integrated throughout 2026

Key 2026 Target Outcomes

- Reestablishment and activation of the Human Rights Commission.
- Improved communication and engagement across all wards.
- Accessible and inclusive public participation opportunities.

- Consideration of equity impacts in City policies and decisions.

Workforce Alignment

Performance accountability systems will be paired with employee development, succession planning, and retention strategies to strengthen institutional continuity and workforce stability.

III. 2026 Month-by-Month Council Work Plan (Condensed)

The month-by-month schedule represents intended focus sequencing, not a rigid execution guarantee. Adjustments may occur due to grant deadlines, procurement timelines, emergency operational demands, or staffing constraints.

Tier 1 initiatives will retain primacy in sequencing decisions.