

JULY 2025

City of Willows

2025 Strategic Priorities Refresh Report



Table of Contents

2	Introduction and Purpose
3	Work Session Overview
4	Updated Policy Priorities and Goals
6	Financial Stability
8	Economic Development
11	Public Safety
13	Infrastructure Improvement
16	Quality of Life
18	Cross-Cutting Priority: Community Engagement
19	Next Steps



Introduction and Purpose

In 2024, the City of Willows engaged in a strategic visioning and goal-setting process to establish a set of clear priorities that would guide the city's direction over the next several years. That effort resulted in the adoption of six major policy priorities—financial stability, economic development, public safety, infrastructure improvement, quality of life, and community engagement—each supported by a set of actionable goals. These priorities reflected a unified vision for a thriving, safe, and economically resilient Willows.

In the year since that plan was adopted, the city has made meaningful progress in several areas, most notably with the passage of Measure I, which has significantly improved the city's financial outlook and created new capacity to move forward with critical initiatives. In light of these developments, the City Council convened on May 5, 2025, for a 2-hour facilitated workshop to reflect on progress, assess changes, and refresh its priorities to ensure continued alignment with community needs and available resources.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Reaffirm the city's long-term vision;
- Reflect on the progress made since the original 2024 report;
- Refine and focus the council's policy priorities for the next 2–3 years;
- Provide city staff with clear direction on what the council wishes to prioritize, while empowering staff to determine how best to implement those priorities.

This report is intended to serve as a policy framework, guiding the development of a staff-led implementation workplan. It also provides the public with a transparent view of the council's evolving priorities, rooted in collaboration, progress, and a renewed sense of opportunity.



Workshop Overview

On Monday, May 5, 2025, the Willows City Council held a two-hour facilitated work session from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM to revisit and refresh the strategic priorities established in 2024. The session was designed and facilitated by Jovanni Tricerri of Ría Collaboratories, whose work focuses on helping public agencies and communities translate diverse perspectives into clear, collaborative direction. This follow-up session offered an opportunity for the Council to reflect on progress, respond to evolving needs, and prioritize next steps—particularly in light of the successful passage of Measure I, a 1.5% sales tax measure that significantly improves the city's fiscal position.

The session began with a review of the original 2024 priorities and goals, noting areas of progress, shifts in context, and goals already underway. With Measure I creating new financial capacity and stability, the conversation turned toward identifying the most immediate and impactful focus areas for the next fiscal year and beyond. Council emphasized the need for clarity, realism, and alignment with staff capacity, stressing that while the broader priority areas remain relevant, the city should now concentrate on a focused set of policy goals that can generate visible results.

Throughout the discussion, council members noted a renewed need to:

- Shift public messaging from crisis to opportunity;
- Strengthen community trust and communication;
- Clarify Willows' identity and direction;
- Focus on implementation through achievable, measurable goals.

To support this, the Council participated in a weighted ranking exercise to determine the top policy priorities for FY 2025–2027, providing city staff with a sharper lens through which to develop and execute a strategic workplan.



Updated Policy Priorities and Goals

Following the workshop discussion and review of 2024 priorities, the Willows City Council reaffirmed its commitment to the six major policy areas identified in the previous year: Financial Stability, Economic Development, Public Safety, Infrastructure Improvement, Quality of Life, and Community Engagement. While these priorities continue to reflect the city's long-term direction, the Council expressed a clear desire to focus on a smaller number of actionable goals that will guide the city's work over the next fiscal year and beyond.

To support this, Councilmembers participated in a weighted ranking exercise, each identifying their top three priorities:

- 5 points for their first choice
- 3 points for their second
- 1 point for their third

This process allowed the Council to surface shared areas of urgency without disregarding the broader strategic framework. The outcome reflects a consensus on which initiatives should be emphasized in FY 2025–2027, giving city staff a sharper lens for developing a focused workplan.



Council Priority Ranking for FY 2025–2027 Focus

Policy Goal	
Develop a strategy to offer a clear methodology for business support and outreach	12
Invest in the startup of the Willows Police Department	10
Fund the General Fund Reserve and Apparatus Replacement Plan	8
Seek cost savings and revenue generation opportunities	5
Invest in deferred maintenance	5
Implement the Community Improvement Plan (streets, sidewalks, lighting)	3
Expand youth and adult activities (e.g., children’s librarian/youth role)	1
Complete and refine the municipal code update to support business growth	1

These results signal the Council’s strong alignment on immediate priorities, particularly around business and economic development, public safety, and long-term financial planning. While the other goals identified in the 2024 report remain important and may continue to progress, the items ranked above will serve as the anchor goals for staff focus and action in the near term.

In the sections that follow, each priority area is revisited with refined goals and new context to reflect progress, staff capacity, and alignment with the city’s post-Measure I environment.

Financial Stability

The successful passage of Measure I in late 2024 marked a turning point for the City of Willows, creating a more stable financial foundation after years of fiscal constraint. With new revenue streams secured, the Council has emphasized the importance of not only stewarding these funds wisely but also using them to build long-term financial resilience. This includes reinforcing reserves, improving internal efficiencies, and exploring additional cost-saving and revenue-generating opportunities.

In the May 2025 workshop, Council reaffirmed financial stability as a critical policy area and elevated two related goals among the top-ranked priorities for the next two to three years. These goals provide both structure and direction for city staff as they develop the implementation workplan.

Goal 1: Fund the General Fund Reserve and Apparatus Replacement Plan

Purpose: To ensure the city is prepared for future economic fluctuations and major equipment costs by rebuilding its reserves and adopting a strategic approach to asset replacement.

Why It Matters: Fiscal sustainability requires more than short-term solvency. By strengthening reserves and planning for large capital needs (e.g., fire apparatus), the city protects itself from future shocks and demonstrates responsible stewardship of public funds.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Establish reserve targets and annual contribution levels.
- Inventory large equipment and vehicles; develop a replacement schedule with funding milestones.
- Include asset planning in annual budget updates.

Goal 2: Seek Cost Savings and Revenue Generation Opportunities

Purpose: To optimize the city's financial health by identifying efficiencies and creating new revenue streams.

Why It Matters: While Measure I brings new capacity, fiscal responsibility demands that the city continue to look inward for areas to save and outward for opportunities to grow sustainable revenue.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Review service contracts and explore cost-saving alternatives.
- Assess underutilized city-owned properties for revenue potential.
- Explore shared service models or inter-agency agreements where applicable.

Goal 3: Optimize In-House Staffing to Improve Financial Efficiency

Purpose: To ensure staffing levels are aligned with core service needs while maximizing the value of in-house expertise.

Why It Matters: As the city scales its operations, investing in the right staffing model will help reduce long-term costs, improve service delivery, and retain institutional knowledge.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Conduct an organizational assessment to identify key staffing needs.
- Prioritize hiring local talent where possible to retain resources within the community.
- Align staff roles with implementation of council priorities.

Goal 4: Develop a Grant Strategy to Pursue Supplemental Funds

Purpose: To leverage external funding to support services and capital projects without overburdening the city's core budget.

Why It Matters: While internal revenue has improved, many strategic projects still depend on external funding. A proactive grant strategy can multiply the city's impact.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Identify priority funding areas aligned with the refreshed goals.
- Seek regional or consultant support if in-house grant capacity is limited.
- Maintain a centralized grants calendar and reporting system.

Economic Development

The City Council continues to view economic development as foundational to Willows' long-term success and vitality. During the 2025 workshop, the Council emphasized the need to sharpen the city's economic identity, create a more supportive environment for business, and better leverage existing assets like tourism and agriculture. A key theme was the importance of having dedicated leadership and infrastructure to support business growth.

Councilmembers ranked Developing a single point of contact for business outreach and a business support center as the highest priority for the next two to three years, reinforcing the need for visible progress and measurable outcomes in this area.

Goal 1: Develop a Strategy to Offer a Clear Methodology for Business Support and Outreach

Purpose: To establish a clear strategy for attracting, supporting, and retaining businesses in Willows.

Why It Matters: Businesses often struggle to navigate local processes without clear support. A designated point of contact and visible support center would help position Willows as a welcoming, business-friendly city, increase private investment, and create jobs.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Designate a staff member focused on economic development and business liaison responsibilities.
- Launch a business resource center (online and/or physical) with permitting guidance, licensing support, and access to regional resources.
- Offer pre-development meetings with prospective applicants that include the City Manager, the CD&S Director, and Planning.

Goal 2: Complete and Refine the Municipal Code Update to Support Business Opportunities

Purpose: To modernize outdated zoning, permitting, and development codes that may hinder growth or create unnecessary barriers.

Why It Matters: An efficient and transparent development process reduces delays, builds confidence in the city, and allows businesses to focus on growth—not red tape.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Finalize current code revision efforts already underway.
- Provide staff training to ensure consistent interpretation and application of revised codes.
- Provide training to the Planning Commission on the new code (once updated).
- Promote key code changes through outreach to developers and business owners.

Goal 3: Leverage and Promote Existing Tourism Opportunities

Purpose: To draw visitors to Willows by showcasing its recreational, agricultural, and cultural assets.

Why It Matters: Tourism can bring new dollars into the local economy with relatively low infrastructure costs. Enhancing the city’s image and visibility will also build civic pride.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Improve freeway signage and downtown wayfinding to increase accessibility and interest.
- Promote Willows’ agricultural heritage and other developing regional industries (e.g., car racing) through events or themed spaces (e.g., antique farm equipment displays, food truck courts).
- Ensure the city website includes updated, appealing tourism and visitor information.

Goal 4: Add an Economic Development Element to the General Plan

Purpose: To create a long-term strategic framework for growing Willows’ economic base.

Why It Matters: Embedding economic development into the city’s planning documents provides alignment across departments and signals that Willows is planning for growth with intention.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Draft an economic development chapter in the General Plan that identifies target industries, land use strategies, and workforce goals.
- Coordinate the plan with infrastructure and housing elements to support job creation.
- Use the document as a tool to guide future public-private partnerships and grants.

Goal 5: Improve City Appearance to Attract Businesses and Visitors

Purpose: To enhance Willows' curb appeal and sense of place through beautification and strategic improvements.

Why It Matters: A clean, welcoming city center and visible investment in community appearance send a message that Willows is open for business and cares about its future.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Launch a façade improvement program and/or matching grant for commercial storefronts. This could be achieved through a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to provide matching funds.
- Target cleanup and signage improvements along major corridors and downtown.
- Coordinate beautification efforts with local civic groups and volunteers to build community ownership.

Public Safety

Public safety remains a core concern and central to the City of Willows' vision of being a thriving and secure community. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening local safety infrastructure, with a specific focus on reinvesting in law enforcement services and enhancing emergency medical capabilities through fire department improvements. The success of Measure I presents a timely opportunity to begin addressing these priorities more aggressively and with greater public transparency.

In the May 2025 workshop, the Council ranked "Invest in the startup of the Willows Police Department" as the second-highest priority for focused implementation over the next 2–3 years.

Goal 1: Invest in the Startup of the Willows Police Department (WPD)

Purpose: To build the foundation for re-establishing a local police department that aligns with the city's needs, values, and available resources.

Why It Matters: Rebuilding the Willows Police Department is a long-standing community priority and a tangible way to demonstrate public investment in safety, responsiveness, and trust.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Seek a 2-year contract extension with the Glenn County Sheriffs Office
- Develop a projected start up budget and roadmap with timeline for the re-establishment of the Willow Police Department.
- Identify funding allocations from Measure I to support phased startup costs (staffing, equipment, facility needs).
- Launch a public communication campaign to educate residents about the timeline, scope, and intent of re-establishing WPD.

Goal 2: Right-Size and Enhance the Willows Fire Department, Including Expanded ALS Services

Purpose: To strengthen emergency response by ensuring the fire department is appropriately staffed, resourced, and trained to meet growing community needs.

Why It Matters: As the city grows and evolves, reliable emergency medical and fire services are essential to protect life and property. Enhancing capacity—particularly 24-hour Advanced Life Support (ALS) services—will raise the standard of care and reduce response times.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Conduct a staffing and service level assessment to determine optimal structure.
- Evaluate financial feasibility of adding ALS services within the next 2–3 years.
- Update fire department equipment and apparatus in alignment with the city’s asset replacement plan.

Goal 3: Improve Road and Pedestrian Safety

Purpose: To address long-standing concerns about pedestrian visibility, crosswalks, and signage in key areas throughout the city.

Why It Matters: Road and pedestrian safety are critical to a safe, walkable community. Visible investments in these areas help prevent accidents and signal citywide care for public well-being.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Continue the implementation of enhanced crosswalk visibility improvements already underway.
- Install additional signage and lighting in high-traffic pedestrian corridors.
- Coordinate road safety improvements with broader infrastructure goals (e.g., Community Improvement Plan).

Infrastructure Improvement

Maintaining and modernizing infrastructure is foundational to delivering essential services supporting economic growth, and improving the daily quality of life for Willows' residents. During the May 2025 workshop, the City Council emphasized the importance of reinvesting in basic infrastructure—particularly deferred maintenance—and beginning to address long-range system needs, such as sewer upgrades and street improvements.

Two infrastructure-related goals—investing in deferred maintenance and implementing the Capital Improvement Program (CIP)—emerged among the Council's top priorities for FY 2025–2027.

Goal 1: Invest in Deferred Maintenance

Purpose: To address aging and neglected infrastructure that has been postponed due to financial constraints.

Why It Matters: Small investments in maintenance today can prevent larger, more expensive breakdowns in the future. Addressing long-deferred needs also demonstrates visible progress to residents and helps build public trust.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Develop an inventory of deferred maintenance needs across city-owned facilities and public spaces.
- Allocate a portion of Measure I funds toward prioritized maintenance projects.
- Create a public-facing project tracker to report progress on maintenance backlogs.

Goal 2: Implement the Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Purpose: To begin phasing in priority elements of the city's CIP, focusing on safety, accessibility, and long-term functionality.

Why It Matters: Streets, sidewalks, and lighting are among the most visible and commonly experienced services in a city. Investing in these areas improves safety, encourages pedestrian activity, and reflects community pride.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Prioritize high-need areas for initial implementation based on safety and use.
- Integrate improvements with pedestrian safety and beautification efforts.
- Seek matching or supplemental funds through grants to extend impact.

Goal 3: Enhance the Public Works Team to Support Effective Service Delivery

Purpose: To ensure the city has adequate staff capacity to implement, manage, and maintain infrastructure projects.

Why It Matters: Even well-funded plans will stall without the internal capacity to carry them out. A strong Public Works team is essential to follow through on Council direction.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Evaluate current staffing levels and identify gaps in project management or technical expertise.
- Recruit and retain qualified staff to support new infrastructure investments.
- Provide ongoing training and equipment needed to maintain service standards.

Goal 4: Implement the Sewage Repair Plan

Purpose: To upgrade outdated wastewater infrastructure and ensure long-term system reliability.

Why It Matters: A functioning sewage system is critical for public health, environmental protection, and the city's ability to support future development.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Finalize assessment of current system condition and map priority repairs.
- Identify funding pathways through grants, state infrastructure programs, or phased budget allocations.
- Communicate with the public on the scope and timeline of work.

Goal 5: Begin Early Planning to Develop Willows as a Transportation Hub (Long-Term Goal)

Purpose: To explore Willows' potential as a regional transportation and logistics hub through rail and truck access.

Why It Matters: While aspirational, transportation planning can lay the groundwork for economic development and regional connectivity in the future.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Conduct an initial feasibility review of potential transportation assets.
- Engage regional partners and transportation agencies in early planning discussions.
- Incorporate transportation hub planning into the Economic Development Element of the General Plan.

Quality of Life

Enhancing the quality of life for all residents remains a core aspiration for the City of Willows. This priority reflects the community's desire for vibrant public spaces, access to recreation, and family-friendly amenities that foster connection, health, and well-being. During the May 2025 workshop, the Council affirmed that investments in parks, youth and adult activities, and community gathering spaces are essential to Willows' long-term vitality—even as some initiatives may be implemented gradually over time.

One quality-of-life-related goal—expanding youth and adult activities through a potential shared librarian/youth services position—was ranked by the Council as a near-term priority, highlighting the desire to do more with existing resources while planning for future investment.

Goal 1: Expand Youth and Adult Activities (Potentially Through a Combined Children's Librarian/Youth Activities Role)**

Purpose: To increase access to enriching activities for residents of all ages, particularly youth, by leveraging creative staffing and community programming.

Why It Matters: Engaging youth through educational and recreational offerings supports healthy development and fosters long-term community connection. A combined role would create cost-effective leadership for two valued service areas.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Develop a hybrid job description that includes youth programming and library services.
- Partner with local schools and organizations to co-sponsor after-school or weekend programs.
- Conduct a community needs assessment to identify activity gaps.

Goal 2: Open the City Pool and Build Community Engagement Around It

Purpose: To create a vibrant, family-friendly hub for recreation, wellness, and community gathering.

Why It Matters: A public pool provides year-round benefits—not just as a recreational asset but as a visible symbol of city investment in residents' well-being.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Complete remaining pool improvements and establish an opening timeline.
- Develop seasonal programming such as swim lessons, family events, or summer youth camps.
- Promote the pool opening as a “win” for Willows in post-Measure I communications.

Goal 3: Enhance Maintenance and Appearance of City Parks

Purpose: To ensure that city parks are safe, clean, and welcoming places for recreation and community gathering.

Why It Matters: Well-maintained parks boost civic pride, encourage healthy lifestyles, and increase property values.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Allocate resources for regular maintenance, equipment upgrades, and groundskeeping.
- Develop a park improvement plan with clear priorities and estimated costs.
- Engage residents through park clean-up events or “Adopt-a-Park” programs.

Goal 4: Plan for Hiring a Full-Time Recreation Director (Long-Term)**

Purpose: To lead the development of year-round recreational programming, manage facilities, and coordinate with community partners.

Why It Matters: A dedicated Recreation Director would expand the city’s capacity to deliver high-quality programs and manage multiple quality-of-life initiatives effectively.

Possible Initiatives Identified:

- Include the position in future budget planning with clear metrics to evaluate return on investment.
- Begin outlining potential job scope and department needs.
- Explore grant funding or shared-service models to support initial costs.

***These goals do not appear to be 2-3 year goals and will need to be assessed by city staff in a workplan that may be addressed in a 2027 update to Council Priorities.*

Cross-Cutting Priority: Community Engagement

In the original 2024 report, Community Engagement was identified as one of six core priority areas. Over the course of the past year—and especially during the May 2025 workshop—Council acknowledged that **community engagement is not a standalone initiative, but rather an essential strategy embedded across all priority areas**. Whether addressing public safety, economic development, or infrastructure, engaging the community must remain a central approach to ensure transparency, build trust, and foster shared ownership of Willows' future.

A recurring theme during the session was the need to shift from reactive messaging to proactive storytelling—highlighting successes, building civic pride, and clearly articulating where Willows is headed in this new chapter post-Measure I. Councilmembers also recognized the influence of community skepticism and negativity, reinforcing the importance of delivering clear, consistent communication to both inform and inspire.

Community Engagement Principles for All Priority Areas

- **Transparency:** Communicate openly about city priorities, budgets, and timelines.
- **Accessibility:** Offer multiple channels for residents to participate and provide input (e.g., town halls, surveys, social media, direct outreach).
- **Civic Pride:** Celebrate progress and highlight stories of local success.
- **Trust Building:** Reinforce the city's accountability and responsiveness by following through on visible initiatives.

Recommended Approaches to Embed Engagement

- Include **community outreach components** in each major staff-led project.
- Use city **communication platforms** (e.g., website, newsletters, social media) to provide regular updates on progress and impact.
- Convene **issue-specific town halls or workshops** to involve residents in priority topics (e.g., public safety planning, park improvements, economic development).
- **Partner with civic groups**, schools, and business associations to expand the city's reach and strengthen local networks.

Rather than being treated as a separate workstream, community engagement is now positioned as a cross-cutting priority that must inform how every other priority is approached and implemented.

Next Steps

The May 5, 2025 workshop marked an important turning point for the City of Willows—shifting from vision-setting and financial recovery toward focused implementation and visible progress. The Council’s work to reflect on the past year, reassess city needs, and collaboratively identify 2–3 years of actionable policy priorities provides city staff with a strong foundation to move forward.

To ensure the momentum continues, the following next steps are recommended:

1. Staff Workplan Development

City staff will use this updated policy document as a framework to develop a clear, actionable workplan aligned with the Council’s ranked priorities. This plan will outline:

- Key initiatives and milestones
- Lead responsibilities
- Timeline for implementation
- Resource allocation and potential funding strategies

2. Regular Reporting and Accountability

To build trust and maintain transparency, staff will provide quarterly updates to the Council on the progress of priority initiatives. These updates should include:

- Achievements to date
- Any delays or challenges encountered
- Community-facing successes and stories of impact

3. Communication and Public Engagement

As emphasized throughout the workshop, communication is key to shaping public perception and reinforcing civic pride. City leadership will prioritize:

- Public-facing updates that tell the story of progress (e.g., “early wins” like the pool reopening or crosswalk improvements)
- Community forums and town halls that offer two-way dialogue
- Clear messaging about how Measure I is being implemented and the outcomes it is enabling

4. Focused Follow-Through

The Council expressed strong consensus around the importance of narrowing its focus to a select number of achievable goals and executing them with excellence. This report identifies and clarifies those near-term priorities for FY 2025–2027, while preserving alignment with the broader vision and goal areas from the 2024 strategic planning effort.

City staff are encouraged to pursue initiatives that generate early momentum and demonstrate visible progress, while also laying the groundwork for longer-term impact. In recognition that some valuable ideas may exceed current capacity or timing, a set of future-oriented considerations has been outlined for discussion during the next full strategic planning cycle in 2027. These include ideas such as establishing a Recreation Director role, exploring a joint Library/Youth Activities Coordinator position, positioning Willows as a regional transportation hub, and evaluating opportunities for annexation. These items remain important and are preserved here as part of the city's evolving strategic outlook.

Together, this document and the process behind it reflect the City of Willows' shared commitment to building a resilient, welcoming, and forward-looking community—one where leadership is clear, progress is visible, and every initiative is carried out with purpose.



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