

# COMMUNITY-DRIVEN VISION

TOPIC REPORT

**TRENTON 250**  
1792-2042  
Adopted February, 2017









Artwork courtesy of Marina Ahun

"The present day Trenton still showcases the opportunity for diversity to thrive and the encouragement of innovation. The freedom won in the past on these very streets should inspire us still. These streets are where giants walked, built, danced, ate, loved and fought. We do need to look back to go forward. Will we measure up to our historical giants? If we roll up our sleeves like Trenton past, I surely believe we can."

- Tom Kelly  
As displayed at The Trenton City Museum

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# Introduction

New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law requires that a master plan is to contain a mandatory element that is “[a] statement of objectives, principles, assumptions, policies and standards upon which the constituent proposals for the physical, economic and social development of the municipality are based.” (N.J.S.A 40:55D-28.19.b(1)) The vision statement, guiding principles, goals, and strategies fulfill that requirement.

As part of the Trenton250 Master Plan Phase I - Community Visioning process, Group Melvin Design (GMD) worked with the City of Trenton - Division of Planning to develop a community-driven consensus vision for the City. From February through August, 2014 more than 10 different methods were used to reach out to the community and get their input. The result is a Vision statement and set of Guiding Principles that have broad community support and will serve to guide the Master Plan through 2042.

The following document is divided into three sections:

- **Process Summary and Key Achievements:** this section is an executive summary that outlines the steps taken to write the community-driven vision and guiding principles.
- **Vision Statement and Guiding Principles:** this section details the community-driven vision that will guide the City through its 250th anniversary of incorporation in 2042.
- **User Guide:** a section dedicated to explaining how the vision and guiding principles can be used by the public, elected officials, and stakeholders to help shape Trenton’s future.



# Process and Key Achievements

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## 1. Informational Campaign

The first step in public outreach was informing the public about the Trenton250 Master Plan. The project team utilized the radio, newspapers, social media, posters, public events, a launch party, and a unique “chalkboard” advertising effort to ensure that as many residents as possible were informed about the process. As of August 2014:

- Trenton250 was the major focus of eight print and online news stories.
- Jeffery Wilkerson, from the City, and Adam Tecza, of Group Melvin Design, were interviewed on Trenton365, a weekly radio show that profiles individuals and organizations in the Trenton Region.
- The Trenton Master Plan facebook page reached 1,000+ friends on facebook, 90+ followers on Twitter, and 30+ followers on Instagram.
- The project team estimates that more than 10,000 people were exposed to Trenton250 at Art All Night. More than 500 took away a brochure that explained the Master Plan.

## 2. Project Website

The project team built a custom website that allowed users the option to learn about and participate in the Master Plan. Among other features, the website allowed users to view the City Profile Report and identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Constraints (SWOCs). Users watched a presentation by Jeff Wilkerson, Principal Planner, which clearly articulated the master plan framework and gave answers to frequently asked questions. As of August 2014:

- There were more than 2,100 unique visits to the website, and more than 13,400 page views.
- 175 surveys had been completed.
- 100 Vision statements were posted (approximately half were posted by Trenton250 on behalf of Youth Summit participants).
- 60 Comments were posted on the Trenton250 blog.
- 40 images were submitted to the Image Contest.
- 22 SWOCs were identified.
- 3 Love notes were written by City Residents.

## 3. Public Meetings

The project team used a crowdsourcing methodology to generate preliminary vision statements, themes, and goals. Throughout the outreach process people were able to submit visions on the website, and identify SWOCs. In addition, the Project Team held a Youth Summit, four ward meetings, a Latino community meeting, and four stakeholder meetings. As of August 2014:

- 200 high-school students attended the Youth Summit and submitted over 50 visions for the future of Trenton
- 89 people attended the five public meetings, including 17 attendees of the Latino Community Meeting. Combined they identified 11 visions and corresponding goals, as well as more than 100 SWOCs.
- 110 stakeholders attended four meetings that focuses on businesses, non-profits/religious institutions, education, and the arts. Combined they identified more than 80 goals and cast more than 300 votes in an effort to prioritize previously identified goals.
- More than 300 visions were submitted at Art All Night, and more than 1,000 dot “votes” were cast.
- In total, more than 3,000 dot votes were cast online, in the public meetings, stakeholder meetings, and at Art All Night.



# Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

## *Trenton First: A Premier Economic and Cultural Center Built on Arts, Industry, and Education*

By 2042, Trenton will be known throughout the region as an attractive, resident-friendly urban environment, where students are well prepared to make economic and social contributions to society, where business and industry stimulate innovation, and where people are active in the arts. The City, County, and State - in partnership with a variety of stakeholders - will work together to be responsive to residents and businesses, invest wisely in civic institutions, and build safe, high-quality public spaces. All together, this will make Trenton a model capital city that citizens, businesses, and government are proud to call home.



Jgcornuocpla on Instagram



Trenton Division of Planning



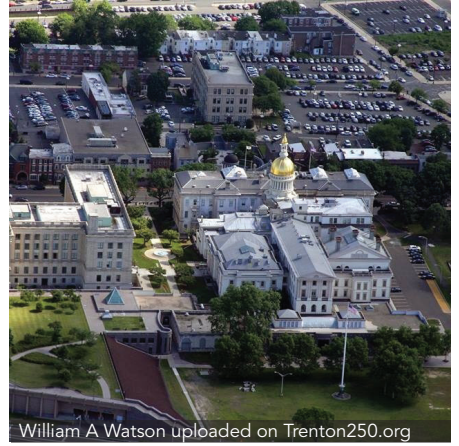
Marina Ahun uploaded on Trenton250.org



Scott Chrisner uploaded on Trenton250.org



Danfatton on Instagram



William A Watson uploaded on Trenton250.org



Rev. Samuel Atchuson uploaded on Trenton250.org



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From Karl Flesch uploaded on Trenton250.org



# 1. Foster Social Opportunity and a Vibrant Economy through Education

Trenton will have established a mutually reinforcing relationship between business and civic institutions that will make it a national model for how investments in people can support a diverse local economy, and vice-versa.

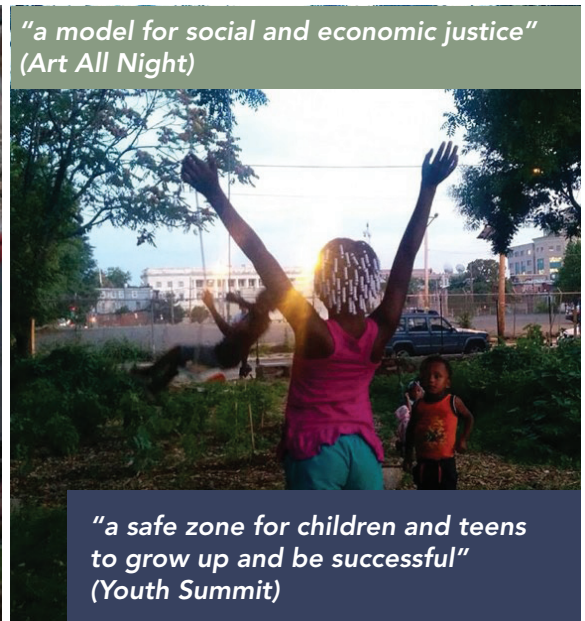
**In 2014:** The City's economy is fundamentally intertwined with the City's social structure. The high level of social inequality relative to surrounding municipalities highlights the obstacles many Trentonians face when trying to achieve the basic quality-of-life that their neighbors enjoy. A weak economy provides limited opportunities for personal growth and reinforces a social structure that contributes to economic hardship. Equally important, the deficient quality of and limited access to education, cultural/civic amenities, and social services adversely affects many resident's ability to contribute to a vibrant economy. As one resident clearly pointed out, "I cannot tell if poverty is the cause or the symptom." (East Ward Meeting)

**In 2042:** Trenton will be the economic and cultural center of the mid-Jersey region with a innovative and diverse local economy. Trenton's advantage will come from its well trained workforce, educated citizenry, physical location, and diversity of cultures.

**Key goal topics:**  
education, job readiness, retention and growth of businesses, regulatory barriers, and job growth, among other issues.

A network of public and private institutions - including civic groups, schools, colleges, businesses, philanthropic organizations, churches, and fraternities/sororities, among others - will excel at preparing residents to make social and economic contributions to society. Trenton students will be as well, or better, educated than their peers who live in surrounding municipalities. Students will have opportunities for both occupational training as well as college preparedness. Equally important, City residents will live within a "culture of graduation", where residents have the support to complete the degrees they strive to achieve. The result will be a creative, highly-trained workforce that provides businesses and industry with the support they need to grow Trenton's economy.

In addition, the City's history and rich cultural diversity will provide a competitive advantage in the region. Trenton will have capitalized on an influx of immigrants to grow its private sector. The City will have repurposed inherited industrial assets - including buildings and infrastructure - to serve both social and economic goals. These spaces will be among the many places where creativity and innovative people come to work on their projects and grow their businesses. The result will be a City that capitalizes on its history and unique cultural assets to provide a diversity of goods, services, and social opportunities not available anywhere else in the region.



## 2. Establish a Preeminent Arts and Culture Destination

Trenton will be a place where a culture of creativity attracts people and businesses.

**In 2014:** Trenton is the hub of an under-the-radar music and visual arts scene which is supported by strong institutions. Manufacturing and industrial production are closely linked to the arts in Trenton and continue to be important activities that help define what it means to live in the City. The burgeoning arts community is complemented by a diversity of cultures from around the world. Many see this rich mix of arts and culture as an opportunity to distinguish Trenton from its neighbors, spur economic development, and build a positive image for Trenton. Nonetheless, the relative absence of on-going arts and culture programming, lack of opportunities for youth, and a need for more spaces for artists to work are seen as major obstacles.

**In 2042:** Trenton will be a City known for using fine arts, industrial arts, niche manufacturing, history, and cultural heritage to expand social and economic opportunities. The City will proactively recruit and retain cultural institutions and arts groups that will provide opportunities for residents, inspiration for visitors, and support for aspiring local artists. As a result, creative-oriented businesses will cluster in the City, helping to build a culture of innovation. Unique neighborhoods that are anchored by strong cultural institutions and historic architecture will attract talented and diverse residents. The City, County and State - in partnership with a variety of for-profit, not-for-profit, and philanthropic stakeholders - will support these efforts by working collaboratively to help grow and sustain this vibrant sector, ensuring the result is expanded arts and culture opportunities for all Trentonians.

**Key goal topics:**  
creative business  
incubation, expanding  
arts initiatives, cultural  
heritage, and leveraging  
roots of industrial arts





### 3. Build a Safe City

Trenton will provide a safe environment for people of all ages and be perceived as a secure place to live, work and visit.

**In 2014:** The number one issue concerning Trentonians is safety. No constituency expressed this with more vehemence than the City's youth. Residents and stakeholders are concerned not only with violent crime, but also with the stigma that excessive crime related news coverage creates. All feel strongly that in order for the City to change, the high levels of crime, especially violent crime, must be reduced.

**In 2042:** Trentonians and visitors will feel safe in the city, and there will be significantly less violence and fewer crimes. The City will have implemented a multipronged and innovative approach to creating a safe environment for all. At the same time, Trenton will be perceived to be a safe place by people who live in the surrounding community.

A safe Trenton is about more than just reduced crime: The city will also be a place where people can feel secure expressing their opinions publicly without fear of retribution. Streets must also be safe to travel on foot, by bike, by bus, or by car. A safer Trenton is a place where there is trust in the community.

**Key goal topics:** crime and safety, perception of Trenton as dangerous, friendly environment, walkable, etc.





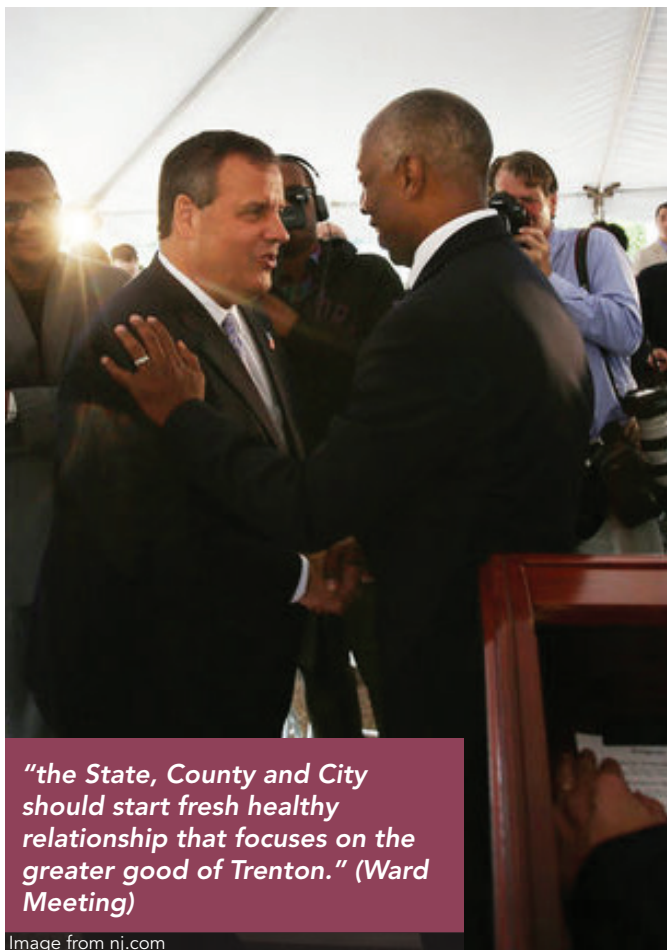
## 4. Advance Good Governance

Trenton will be a place where the City, County, and State work together for the greater good of Trenton and be responsive to residents and businesses.

**In 2014:** Many Trenton residents and stakeholders feel strongly that government has not conducted public affairs and managed public resources in a responsible manner. Issues range from the State not supporting Trenton to complaints about property tax rates and over regulation of business. Regardless of what core issue is most important to residents, the result is overwhelmingly a mistrust of City, County and State government. Nonetheless, there is hope that a new mayoral administration will be able to rebuild trust and improve governance.

**In 2042:** The City, County, and State will consistently work together to ensure that Trenton succeeds. The various levels of government will coordinate efforts to improve communication; increase quality and access to programs and services; and reduce regulatory barriers to starting businesses. All governments will operate under the understanding that a stronger Trenton is a stronger mid-Jersey Region and a stronger New Jersey.

**Key goal topics:** great customer service for businesses and residents, regulatory reform, inter-governmental cooperation, alleviating government hindrances to Trenton's growth, etc.



## 5. Promote Civic Unity and Pride

Trenton will be a place where sustained community collaboration builds a city that residents and businesses are proud to call home.

**In 2014:** The City of Trenton has a long history of attracting diverse populations who have enriched the culture of the city and help distinguish it from many of its suburban neighbors. Moreover, Trenton has many tight knit neighborhoods where people know, support, and celebrate each other. For many residents, this is seen as a possible driver of economic development.

Although Trenton is diverse, it is also divided. Residents' apathy and reluctance to cooperate are seen as major obstacles to change. Residents attribute many of their current struggles to institutional ineffectiveness. Nonetheless, they also feel that they themselves need to take more ownership over the problems. Although this manifests in many ways, residents feel that people "do not take care of the community", that "the community is broken", and that there is a "lack of communication amongst community members".

**In 2042:** There will have a unified approach and greater communication amongst residents, government, businesses, and non-profit partners in promoting the vision for the City. Likewise, Trenton will be a place where its variety of cultures are celebrated. This unified but diverse Trenton will be one of the major elements that distinguishes Trenton from the surrounding areas, giving it a competitive advantage when attracting residents and businesses.

**Key goal topics:** celebrating the diversity of cultures in Trenton, coordination amongst civic groups and businesses, capitalizing on immigration, promoting a better image of Trenton, etc.





## 6. Cultivate A Healthy City

Trenton will be a clean city where there is access to natural resources, fresh foods, and high-quality healthcare facilities.

**In 2014:** A healthy physical environment and a healthy population are strongly linked. The physical cleanliness of streets, public spaces, and recreational amenities in Trenton is a major issue that prevents them from being used. At the same time, changing demographics are altering the open space demands of residents and complicating the ability of the City to continue to meet the city's recreational needs. Unfortunately, the City must address these issues at the same time it copes with the environmental impact of its industrial past and the possibility of future climate change, both of which pose serious threats to the health of residents.

**In 2042:** Trentonians will have the opportunity to live a healthy life in a healthy environment. They will have access to locally grown fresh foods and opportunities for urban gardening. The city will be home to high-quality healthcare facilities that serve residents and the surrounding community while providing opportunities for health literacy and learning.

Public spaces will be safe, well designed, and maintained. Trenton will have capitalized on its wealth of built and natural amenities — including the waterfront — to re-establish a network of public spaces that reinforce Trenton's historic and urban character. This network will ensure residents and visitors have a diverse array of active recreation opportunities where they can walk, bicycle, and play.

The City will have taken significant steps to adapt to a changing climate and address the environmental impacts of its industrial past. The city will promote green infrastructure, sustainable building practices, walkable neighborhoods, and multi-modal transportation options, among others. Equally important, there will be a continuing effort to remediate brownfield sites and return those lands to productive use.

**Key goal topics:** cleanliness, access to recreational amenities, access to healthy foods, addressing contamination/pollution, and expanded access to natural resources, adaptation for climate change, capital budgeting and capital improvement programming.

*"build a sustainable city: green infrastructure, walkability, alternative transportation, encouraging innovation"*  
(Ward Meeting)



*"An urban agricultural meca"*  
(Art All Night)



*"Trenton should be a clean city. Remediate environmental brownfields to facilitate equity between communities."*  
(Ward Meeting)



*"Attention to green space, river access and river views. Improve scenic drives and walking."*  
(Ward Meeting)



## 7. Reinforce High-Quality Neighborhoods and a 24/7 Downtown Trenton

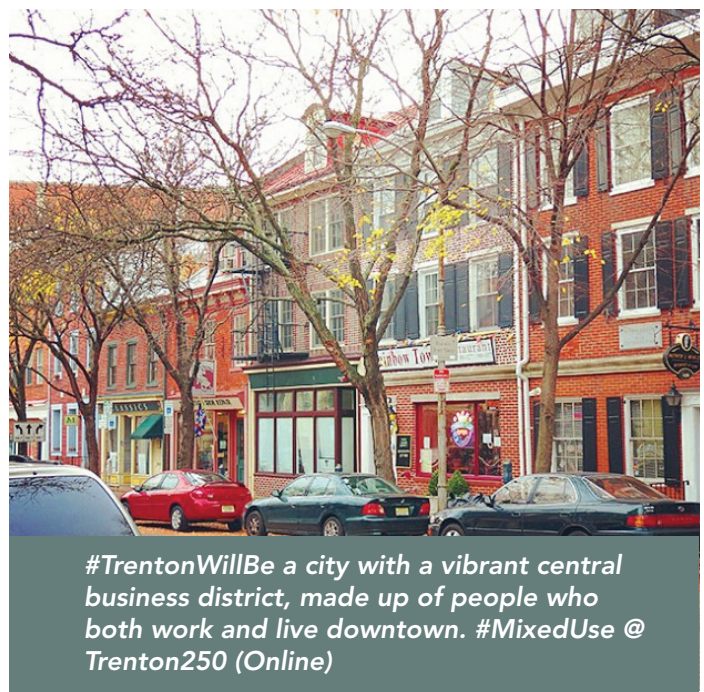
*Trenton will be a beautiful regional destination defined by a network of walkable communities where residents and visitors are a short trip to nodes of businesses, entertainment establishments, and high-quality civic institutions.*

**In 2014:** Trenton is a mid-sized city with a strong community orientation which makes it attractive to those who want to live in urban environments but do not want to live in the large metropolises of New York and Philadelphia. The City's neighborhoods are walkable, and residents have inherited a significant stock of high-quality but often under-maintained architectural assets. The City's Downtown is dominated by nontaxable government and non-profit uses, lacks a strong residential community, and in the words of one residents is "terrifyingly ugly". These deficiencies in the core of the city limit homeownership in surrounding areas and contribute to a negative perception of the city.

**In 2042:** Trenton will distinguish itself by offering easy mobility between high-quality neighborhoods in a mid-sized city environment. A mix of preserved, adaptively-reused, and contemporary buildings will reinforce Trenton's unique urban streetscapes. The city will capitalize on its historic districts as a way of promoting a place character that is attractive to home buyers who see the benefit of living in older urban cities.

Neighborhoods will provide diverse income groups with high-quality living opportunities. They will be anchored by activity nodes which provide residents with many of their day-to-day consumer, community, cultural, and spiritual needs. The city's mix of cultures, a result of centuries of immigration, will provide a natural energy and vibrancy that businesses and residents value.

These nodes and neighborhoods will be well linked to a high-quality central mixed use district that serves as the downtown to the mid-jersey region. In 2042, the downtown will have a vibrant residential population as well as a diversity of businesses which contribute to building the City's tax base. City, County and State Governments will use their land efficiently and in a manner that supports a multi-modal urban environment. As a result, government maintain its prominent presence while significantly reducing the quantity of land it occupies, allowing for more ratable private development.



## 8. Capitalize on Location and Urban Form to Support a Multi-Modal Transportation Network

*Trenton will have a multi-modal transportation network that is accessible throughout the city and connects to mid-Jersey and northeast corridor destinations.*

**In 2014:** Located between New York and Philadelphia, Trenton is the natural center for Mercer County and uniquely situated to be “the Downtown” for the mid-Jersey region. The City has excellent automotive and regional rail connections to New York City, Philadelphia, and Camden, as well as other destinations along Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor. There are also clear opportunities to connect public transit to businesses and residents along the Route 1 Corridor. Internally, the city is walkable and with improvements could be very bike-able. Nonetheless, the City’s surface infrastructure is often under-maintained and the bus network difficult to navigate. Parking in the Downtown is inefficient, needlessly occupies valuable land for development, and does not provide the level of service necessary to support a 24/7 mixed use district. Equally important, highway infrastructure has created physical barriers that prevent the City from capitalizing on major assets, the waterfront chief among them.

**In 2042:** Trenton will distinguish itself by offering easy mobility between high-quality neighborhoods in a dense, mid-sized city environment. The City will be known as a place where people of all ages and abilities utilize a variety of mobility options to meet their transportation needs. Neighborhoods and the downtown will be a safe place to walk at all times. A network of easily identified and well-maintained bike lanes will make it easy for residents and visitors of all ages and genders to bike throughout the City. Public transportation, including buses, will provide residents commuting options that are quick and comprehensible.

Likewise, the City will have strong links to its surroundings. The city will be connected into an extensive regional trail network (e.g. East Coast Greenway, Delaware Heritage Trail, and the D&R Canal Trail). The City will continue to support and expand rail and bus services that connect the City to regional and mega-regional destinations. In the event that high-speed rail is built, the City will have capitalized on the opportunity to expand its residential and economic base.

Efforts to promote a multi-modal local and regional transportation network will have facilitated an efficient use of land for parking. As a result, there will be more space available for residential and commercial development, resulting in increased tax revenue and a larger residential population who can support local businesses.



# User Guide

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The following provides a brief summary of the framework for the Visioning document. For a more detailed explanation of how the vision statement and guiding principles will be used in conjunction with the elements of the Master Plan, please visit the [Trenton250.org](http://Trenton250.org) website.

## **1. Legal Requirement and Intent**

New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law requires that a master plan is to contain a mandatory element that is “[a] statement of objectives, principles, assumptions, policies and standards upon which the constituent proposals for the physical, economic and social development of the municipality are based.” (N.J.S.A 40:55D-28.19.b(1)) The vision statement, guiding principles, goals, and strategies fulfill that requirement.

## **2. Vision Statement**

### **Background:**

A vision statement describes what the City wants to be and how it wants to look at some point in the future. In Trenton250, specific emphasis is placed on creating a community-driven vision formulated with significant involvement from Trenton citizens. The Vision succinctly captures the essence of citizens’ goals and the underlying philosophies on how the City should develop. The vision statement signals what Trenton shall be to city staff, residents, businesses, and stakeholders. Most importantly, it ensures that the City always has its end goal clearly stated. In the final document, the vision statement will be followed by a 1-2 paragraph description that provides contextual details, images, sample quotes from the outreach effort, and similar material.

### **How to use the Vision Statement:**

The vision statement serves as the starting point for the creation and implementation of the City’s Master Plan. As such, it guides the policy and project recommendations expressed in every element of the Master Plan. It is also a “home base” that one can always use to determine if a specific action is consistent with where the community wants the city to go. As a result, city council members, the mayor, planning board members, and the public can refer to it when evaluating future projects and proposals.

Moreover, the vision is a form of branding. It should be prominently displayed at key civic locations, on City documents, and in regional advertising. All residents and business owners should be able to articulate the statement and express what the City is doing to achieve it.

## **3. The Guiding Principles**

### **Background:**

The vision statement is supported by seven “guiding principles” that together represent a unified picture of what Trenton will look like and how Trenton will achieve the vision. These statements are an overlapping, mutually reinforcing set of ideas. In the document, each statement will be followed by a 1-2 paragraph description that provides context and each will be supported by images, sample quotes from the outreach effort, and similar material.

### **How to use the Guiding Principles:**

On a very basic level, the guiding principles are an expression of the values of residents and stakeholders. As a result, they clearly articulate what is important, and by contrast, what is not important.



As projects and policies are proposed, the guiding principles are a tool for evaluating the best course of action. City staff, elected officials, and the public can ask themselves three key questions:

- Will this project or policy help the city support one or more of the guiding principles?
- Is there a way to change the project or policy so that it will support more guiding principles?
- Does the project or policy restrict in any way the City's ability to uphold the guiding principles?

The guiding principles represent the first measurable set of statements in the Vision250 Document. Over the course of implementing Trenton250, the City can periodically stop to ask itself, "Have we become more like the City we imagined? If not, what issues or problems are hindering our ability to achieve the Vision? What should be done to better align our actions to achieve it?"

As the master planning process continues, the Principles will also provide direction when creating the Elements. The guiding principles identify a clear end that residents, business owners, and stakeholders hope to achieve and the means for achieving it. As such, the goals and strategies identified in each element will always be targeted at moving the city closer to that end. If this is kept consistent, it will prevent the City from spending valuable resources in developing and implementing policies that are not consistent with the values of residents, business owners, and stakeholders.

#### **4. Goals, Strategies, Metrics and the Elements**

##### **Background:**

A **goal** is a future condition that will support the vision or a principle.

A **strategy** is a definite course of action taken by the City and/or the Community to achieve a goal.

A **metric** is the means for measuring whether a goal has been achieved.

As part of Phase I, the Trenton250 team amassed a list of community identified goals which will be the foundation for Phase II, the writing of the first six strategic elements. The Planning Board and public should anticipate that a detailed data analysis, combined with further community engagement as part of Phase II, will result in a thoroughly refined set of measurable goals and applicable strategies.

Goals, strategies, and metrics will not be included in the first adoption of the Visioning Element but instead will be identified in each of the individual elements as the Trenton250 planning process progresses. In each instance, the authors must articulate how their element's goals and strategies will help the City achieve the vision statement and any of the seven guiding principles and vision statement.

##### **How to use the Goals and Strategies:**

Goals and strategies are the most concrete components of the vision document. Anyone should be able to identify a goal and/or strategy and trace its logic all the way up to the Vision and Principles.

All of the goals and strategies from all of the elements will be included in the vision element. When a new element is adopted, the vision element will be amended and re-adopted to include goals and strategies identified in that new element. Additionally, goals and strategies that serve more than one of the guiding principles should be cross-referenced. If the Planning Board maintains this policy, the Vision250 Document will be the master document that one can review to ensure that all plans are moving the City towards a unified vision. It will also help the Planning Board, city staff, elected officials, and the public see if any strategies conflict.







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