

## **Executive Summary**

A number of clear themes emerged throughout the Vision 2025 process. While many were identified early on, others were validated or clarified through surveys, committee meetings and presentations of draft findings.

In terms of overall priorities in Rogers, support from community leaders and citizens to pass an anticipated late 2010/early 2011 bond issue to extend the current one-cent sales tax for significant projects related to streets and parks will be absolutely vital. In Lowell, the current one-cent sales tax for infrastructure will expire in 2012, and it will be essential for community leaders to rally for its reauthorization. Additionally, continued efforts to advance Lowell through consistent planning and leadership will be critical.

The themes that were consistently named as urgent priorities for our community at meetings across all sectors are as follows:

### **Lowell Priorities**

1. Infrastructure improvements
2. Land use planning
3. Consistent long-term leadership and planning
4. Growing city services, facilities and amenities
5. Adequate funding through growing the tax base (2012 sales tax extension)
6. Aggressive marketing and identity branding

### **Regional Priorities**

1. Regional transportation
2. Projects of regional significance: Bella Vista Bypass, Springdale Northern Bypass, Interstate 540, Western Beltway, Airport Access Road, 265 completion/extension, water/wastewater
3. Childcare and after-school care
4. Newcomer communication
5. Regionalism

### **Rogers Priorities**

1. Local street improvements
2. Community appearance and beautification
3. Parks, facilities and green space
4. Advancement of downtown Rogers
5. Workforce recruitment and retention
6. Trails, bike trails and community connectivity
7. Proposed arena/community gathering place
8. Engagement of emerging leadership
9. Public school district promotion

## Lowell Priorities

**Infrastructure improvements**, particularly roads and sewer, are the most critical step for ensuring future growth and development. Proactive measures to complete street, sewer and other necessary infrastructure improvements are key to the city's ability to attract businesses and spur economic growth.

**Land use planning** must be addressed with a regional perspective toward the completion of projects that serve as connectors between Lowell and neighboring cities. Collaborate with other cities to coordinate master plans, align boundaries and pave the way for shared training and projects which benefit multiple municipalities. Infrastructure improvement recommendations include I-540 access and overpass improvements, improvements for Monroe Street to Old Wire Road, and sign ordinance enforcement, along with a commitment to being a "green" and aesthetically pleasing city are suggested.

**Consistent long-term leadership and planning** will create a sense of continuity and consistency for Lowell as it plans for the future. No matter how successful any administration, elected official, board or commission may be, a lack of continuity will prevent the city from continuing to make advancements in a timely and effective manner.

**Growing city services, facilities and amenities** such as ambulance service, 911 dispatching, storm warning and disaster systems, additional police and fire facilities, trails, parks and landscaping will continue to position the city as a desirable community in which to live, work and play. Future proposed amenities such as a community center or swimming pool will ensure competitiveness of Lowell related to quality-of-life issues.

Most importantly, **adequate funding through a growing tax base**, dependent upon the reauthorization of the one-cent infrastructure sales tax due to expire in 2012, will guarantee the city's ability to fund the proposed priorities identified through Vision 2025.

**Aggressive marketing and identity branding**, responsiveness to reasonable development needs and ongoing community support for economic development efforts will be all essential to the successful attraction of new businesses for the city of Lowell.

## Regional Priorities

**Regional transportation** is one of the most critical components to our community's future success, and all other Vision 2025 sector committees rank accomplishment of projects of regional significance very high, including the Bella Vista bypass, Springdale northern bypass, Interstate 540, western beltway, airport access road and funding appropriations to ensure appropriate project timing. The connection of Highway 265 from Fayetteville through Lowell to Rogers to complete a north-south corridor on the eastern boundary of the communities was also cited as an emerging priority.

Throughout northwest Arkansas and particularly among employers, a strong need was expressed for reliable, high-quality, affordable **childcare and after-school programming** during a variety of times throughout the day and evening in order to serve working professionals, single parents, dual-career families and shift workers.

One of the most surprising findings in the Vision 2025 was the lapse in **newcomer communication** for transplants to northwest Arkansas, particularly those employed by Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and consumer product (supplier) companies. While many sector members cited numerous amenities and "wish list" items for northwest Arkansas, the vast majority were already in existence, but awareness and promotion was lacking. Key action items included better and more frequent orientation of newcomers through employer coordination, a regional, non-commercial information website, increased wayfinding signage throughout northwest Arkansas, and dedicated regional maps identifying attractions related to culture, sports, history and shopping by color-coding.

A sense of **regionalism** throughout northwest Arkansas cities is imperative to our ability to grow as a region, and more importantly, to our ability to attract, expand and retain a world-class workforce. A regional approach is essential in planning for transportation, amenities, education, water and wastewater treatment as well as essential safety and social services. We must approach certain economic development projects on a regional basis, and we must cooperate regionally even as we take action locally.

## **Rogers Priorities**

**Street improvements** continue to be an essential priority for the community's growth, and much work remains critical in the coming years. A bond issue to extend the existing one-cent sales tax in Rogers is anticipated in late 2010/early 2011, and community support will be critical to ensure passage of this issue.

Across all sectors, **community appearance and beautification** was cited in the vast majority of Vision 2025 sector meetings, along with the need for a concerted, city-led effort to improve the community's appearance and safeguard its emerging reputation as one of the most desirable places in the nation to live and visit. In particular, city entryways, medians and public spaces throughout the entire city must set the standard in showcasing the city and conveying its commitment to quality of life. Landscaping, mowing and maintenance are also critical to ensuring high appearance standards.

"Green issues" were of particular significance in the Vision 2025 process. **Parks, facilities and green space** are frequently cited as the most urgent issue for quality of life in our community. The city of Rogers finds itself behind its peers in the quantity and caliber of parks and community green spaces, and the potential 2010 bond issue is anticipated to begin addressing these needs through a master parks plan that would specifically focus on revitalization of Lake Atalanta, improvements to existing parks and sports facilities and the possible addition of an aquatic facility befitting the community.

Similarly, **advancement of downtown Rogers** was a resounding theme during Vision 2025, with individuals across all sectors as well as throughout Rogers, Lowell and beyond, desiring an effort to improve the economic health and vitality of downtown Rogers. Most critical is the definition of a downtown “Central Business District” of nearly 60 blocks, which provides the critical mass of both households and businesses necessary for economic development. Next, an individual who will operate separate from but in concert with Main Street Rogers and focus on marketing, employer recruitment and economic development will be a key. Appearance, safety and lighting, landscaping and maintenance, and clear and attractively designated downtown entries and wayfaring signage are all factors in downtown marketability, and specific projects such as upgrades to Lake Atalanta and the Farmers’ Market are also proposed.

**Workforce recruitment and retention** continues to be a critical issue for the community, specifically related to employee recruitment and retention for skilled labor and trade positions. Many job applicants are not qualified and lack basic skills, and employers continue to cite concerns related to lack of childcare/after-school programming and public transportation. Coordination with guidance counselors to ensure students are knowledgeable about the assets of both technical/trade schools and college was suggested as an important step for progress related to employee recruitment.

**Trails, bike trails and connectivity** among parks and key points throughout the community are related issues. By 2025, more than 50 miles of recreational trails should be completed throughout the community, but maintenance of these connectors, as well as increased community awareness and use, will be just as critical. Currently, bike routes are proposed along many existing thoroughfares but do not include separate lanes and signage, which will prove essential for safety and awareness of trails and bike routes as alternative transportation options.

A **community gathering place** was frequently mentioned throughout the Vision 2025 process. Committee members repeatedly cited the lack of a common space in the community, and consensus for the pursuit of a multipurpose family entertainment venue, such as an arena, emerged as a stated goal of the Vision 2025 process. This potential arena could not only host large events and meetings but, most importantly, create a facility where the community plays and interacts.

**Engagement of emerging leadership**, particularly a concerted effort to plug in future leaders and create a sense of urgency for legacy development, was of the utmost importance to Vision 2025 participants. The proposed solution involves the Chamber’s implementation of an Emerging Leaders program which will serve as a springboard for existing programs such as Leadership Benton County and Young Professionals, with a particular focus on substantive programming, mentoring and legacy-building.

**Public school district promotion** appears as a consistent issue among both newcomers and current residents. While the difference between test scores and academic performance between the Rogers School District and other districts is negligible, newcomers, realtors and current residents alike are not aggressively “sold” on the Rogers School District. Continued efforts in tandem with employers and realtors are essential for both a positive message related to the district and overall communication regarding the assets and amenities available in our community.

## **Conclusion**

Following extensive work by more than three dozen committees with more than 275 participants, more than 550 survey respondents and extensive efforts by sector chairs, the enclosed reports represent the findings and recommendations for Vision 2025.

The results and priorities will be shared with community leaders at the November 2008 Leaders Conference, and in summary or full-format countless times in the coming weeks and months with elected officials, city staff, public boards and commissions, and community leaders.

Many sectors elected to continue their work as short-term or standing committees, and the work of implementation is only beginning. The Vision process represents a cohesive effort to identify and address community issues, and ultimately, the next steps will depend upon our continued ability and willingness to present a united front when tackling challenges, and to maintain a reputation as communities that work together.