

City of Watson

Strategic Plan 2016



Prepared by the:



Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

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City of Watson Vision Statement

The year is 2030, and Watson is promoting its beautiful open-space and upgraded parks, and annually hosting a city-wide festival. The community utilizes the Watson Town Hall, Corner Store and Goose Bar often, and there is a crosswalk that safely connects the community.

The community enjoys rural living, access to rivers and lakes and a safe environment. Housing rehab projects over the past 15 years have fixed up homes and a sense of pride has come back to Watson. Welcome signs and landscaping have been added to community entrances.

Showcasing the community's beautification efforts, the city has attracted new businesses to the downtown area. The city has explored reuse of the area of the elevator and railroad track spur, and is set to redevelop this area in the coming years.

Services in Watson are high quality. Water and sewer rates are reasonable, and the quality of the service adds value to homes. New homes have been built that enjoy what Watson has to offer. The city has been able to increase revenue and is able to keep up with needed city-wide projects.

Residents are engaged in planning events, maintenance of the parks and municipal buildings, their local government and other volunteer activities. The city holds regular town hall meetings to keep the community engaged the city's decision making. Young families live in town and multi-generational activities also help keep people connected. Volunteers have revived the Watson Town Hall as a regional event center, and help with both the event planning and maintenance of the building.

Entrepreneurs and families alike enjoy good internet and cell phone service. This also has attracted niche businesses to town.

Watson is proud of what they have accomplished in the past 15 years and look forward to another 15 years of success!

Work Plan (details are located in the Project Matrix on page 8)

Already started as of April 2016

Resolve the sewer rate issue
Revise/Update Zoning Ordinance
Ball Field Renovation
Roadside Landscaping
Wellhead Protection Plan

May 2016

Get estimated costs for the following:
 Remove the railroad tracks
 Remove the elevator, address brownfield (grant writing)
Get proposal for Future Land Use Planning process

June 2016

Start Future Land Use planning process and address areas to be re-zoned
Select location for cell phone service tower

July – December 2016

Consider SCDP grant for 2017 – commercial and housing
Work to get USDA into town to offer housing programs
Consider TAP funds for crosswalk across Hwy 7

Ongoing

Reconnect the people and organizations of Watson
Improve roads with pavement and gravel
City Park Renovation
Address Nuisance properties
Develop downtown business

Volunteer efforts

Beautification of Watson - committee meetings
Watson Town Hall Committee
Create a welcome sign for Watson

Potential future projects

Develop business along Hwy 7
Remove elevator
Remove railroad tracks
Add new housing
Improve Internet Service
Natural Gas
Develop new manufacturing businesses in town

Top Themes

The public process provided feedback about which projects the City and community should invest time and resources in. The following are an overview of the top themes and some general recommendations:

1. Project an attractive image

Significant support was expressed for a variety of projects that address the public's number one concern: projecting an attractive image.

Recommendations: Look to low cost items such as **city-wide clean up days and volunteer efforts to improve city parks** would be a great start in helping the city move towards a positive image. Continue to work with MNDOT to address beautification of the highway – this can have a trickling effect through the community encouraging individuals and businesses to improve their properties too.

2. High water and sewer rates

As expected, the need to resolve the high water rates came through loud and clear when collecting feedback. The public meeting provided a great opportunity for city to hear from the Mayor and Clerk who provided an up-to-date summary of where the City is at with their efforts to resolve this issue. It was clear that the meeting attendees appreciated an update and the ability to ask questions.

Recommendations: Regularly provide communication on the status of this effort using social media or updates each month with the utility bill. Consider another public meeting when the City has reached a resolution for the community to learn the details, ask questions and understand the changes.

3. Housing

This is a large topic to tackle but it was clear from the responses a few things need to be done to address current and future housing. Here are some potential actions:

City-wide Housing Assessment – Take current snapshot of how many homes are vacant, how many homes are dilapidated beyond repair, how many could use a bit of rehabilitation, how many are for sale. The UMRDC in collaboration with community volunteers is mapping these assessments for communities to look at their housing stock in comprehensive format using the information to determine what to work on today and what to plan for the future. They are also using the results to guide future investments.

Current Housing – consider a Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) application and budget for it, the cost of an application for a single community is \$8,000 using the UMRDC a Hedgehog grant could lower the application cost to \$4,000 – when successful the cost of implementing a program is typically \$10,000. A safe budget is between \$15,000 - \$20,000. The ROI on project like this is a direct investment into the community ranging from \$250,000 - \$1,000,000 depending on the community interest and number of properties participating in the program. At a minimum for every one dollar the City invests sixteen more are being invested into improving the housing stock.

For more information:

<http://mn.gov/deed/government/financial-assistance/community-funding/small-cities.jsp>

New Housing – this was briefly touched on at the meeting acknowledging the City has limited space to expand. Some time and resources are needed to be put into determining the options and the costs and develop the property specs. Additional work may be needed to determine the best type of housing for the available property and matching that with the needs of the community. The Southwest MN Housing Partnership (www.swmhp.org) can provide technical assistance to help build out the specs for a specific project. Their help to get some basic information and ideas together would be very helpful at a pretty minimal cost of around \$1,000 for the initial look into the project.

Looking ahead, think about if there is a need, desire, and appetite to discuss annexation opportunities.

4. Public Participation

This process started to scratch the surface of some large topics that ranged from infrastructure to housing to business development and community outreach. Moving forward the Council is going to need the help of the community. In lieu of a formal planning commission, consider **forming task forces** to provide recommendations on specific topics such as:

- Clearing up the railroad option could be essential to moving forward with business development. A task force with the help of the clerk could work on obtaining the costs involved for removing the tracks and reporting to the council a recommendation to pursue the removal or not.
- There is already a re-development committee. Consider doing some marketing to let the community know what they are working on.
- If the holiday event is important to the community, the city could consider offering a nominal financial contribution to create a small budget and ask for volunteers to start planning.

The community survey outlined that community members want to bring back a sense of pride to the community. To do this the City must **market and promote** the good work that is being done. Use social media to connect with the community – help them know about the things that they can be a part of and proud of!

And finally, continuing to hold **town hall type meetings** to create an ongoing dialogue may help move volunteer efforts forward and create an overall positive feeling in Watson.

5. Future Land Use

There is not enough available land for the desired development in Watson. The right-of-way for the both highway and railroad prevent development along Hwy 7. The Minnesota Department of Transportation would also like to improve the right of way through Watson to make it wider and safer for residents and vehicles. Access to the Corner Store is awkward, and the Goose Bar is unable to expand because of the tight quarters. New housing is desired, but lots are not readily available.

Recommendations: In order to know how the City of Watson can move forward with future land use, the following could be done to make informed decisions:

1. Find out what it would **cost to remove the railroad spur.**
 - a. If it is financially possible remove the railroad, this land would be available to develop.
2. Find out what it would **cost to remove the elevator** and write grants to address the brownfield issue.
3. **Explore future land use.** Work through a process to identify current actual land use and develop a future land use map that addresses these issues and makes it possible for the Watson to accomplish their goals.

Project Matrix

Projects identified through council meeting, survey and public meeting

	Urgent Top Priority	Concept stage	Estimated Costs \$, \$\$, \$\$\$ (low, moderate high)	City OR Fundraise	City working with volunteers	Notes	Anticipated completion
ALREADY IN PROGRESS: 2016							
Resolve the sewer rate issue Currently working with the city of Montevideo (see appendix)	x		\$\$ City Staff Time Consultants / Legal as needed	City			2017
Revise/Update Zoning Ordinance In progress. To be completed in after the strategic plan.			\$ Staff time Council time	City			2017
Ball Field renovation A youth league has been started by three businesses in town. This league is using the field and doing maintenance where possible. The city worked with volunteers to write a Twins community fund grant to create dugouts, install a higher fence and improve the turf.			\$	Fundraise	X	\$6,300 awarded from the Twins Community Fund	2016
City Park renovation Need new signs, shelter and playground equipment.			\$\$	City, Grants & Fundraise	X		ongoing
Roadside Landscaping Working with MnDOT to put landscaping in near the Goose Bar and across the highway. Replanting community Christmas tree.			\$\$	Fundraise	X	Need to get MNDOT approval	2016, 2017, 2018
Wellhead Protection Plan In progress. To be completed in 2016				\$		MN Depart of Health	2017
VOLUNTEER EFFORTS: 2016							
Beautification of Watson Fix up highway entrances, remove junk around town, an improve overall image of Watson	x	x	\$	City/Fundraise	x	Coordinate ROW with City	

Watson Town Hall Committee Set up a committee to address building issues and plan events. Utilizing SMAC resources as identify it as a performance arts space.			\$\$\$	City/ Fundraise	x	?	
Create a welcome sign for Watson Volunteer effort		x	\$\$	City/ Fundraise		Need to get MNDOT Permit/ Approval	
PLANNING: 2016							
Reconnect the people and organizations of Watson Set up committees, hold town hall meetings, organize fix up days	x	x	\$	Fundraise	x		
SCDP Grant Application/USDA housing and commercial rehab Small Cities Grant for commercial business and housing. Also bring in USDA to work with homeowners that qualify.		x	\$\$\$ Staff time Consultants Infrastructure (rehab)	City			Apply 2017
Future Land Use Planning and Zoning Work to identify land use for future development, housing and business. Rezone areas as needed.	x	x	\$	City		Getting a proposal from UMVRDC	2016
Crosswalk across Hwy 7 Improve walk and biking in Watson and to connect both sides. TAP funding needs a crosswalk to connect two trails.		x	\$ Staff time Consultants Infrastructure (rehab)	City			2018
Improve roads with pavement and gravel Improve the base and the gravel on Highland Ridge. Ongoing projects.			\$\$	City			
Address Nuisance properties Although many properties have been cleaned up, there are additional hazardous properties that need to be addresses.		x	\$\$	City		Coordinate with County	Ongoing
Revitalize existing housing by pursuing grants and loans for low income families The city can pursue a SCDP grant and work with USDA. Develop Revolving Loan Fund.		x	\$\$	City			Apply for SCDP in 2017

Improve cell phone service Provide a site for a tower to improve cell phone service.			\$\$	City		Must let residents know what they can do to help.	
PLANNING: 2017							
Develop downtown business Small Cities grant for commercial businesses, TIF district, and general marketing.		x	\$\$\$ Staff time Consultants Infrastructure (rehab)	City			
Develop business along Hwy 7 Explore possibilities with current elevator and railroad tracks. Consider demolition of Elevator and address brownfield issue. Explore potential and cost to purchase and remove tracks to redevelop as a Highway business district.		x	\$\$\$ Staff time Consultants Infrastructure (rehab)	City			
LONG TERM PLANNING: 2018 and beyond							
Add new housing The city would like to eventually add to the number of households to help fully utilize the water and sewer system. The first step will be to identify areas for new construction including empty lots.		x	\$\$\$ Staff time Consultants Infrastructure Development	City			
Improve Internet Service Would cost the community \$300,000.			\$\$\$	City		Connect with local providers to determine options	
Natural Gas Work to develop a natural gas line through Watson.			\$\$\$	City		Connect with local providers to determine options	
Develop new manufacturing businesses in town			\$\$\$ Staff time Consultants Infrastructure Development	City			
Evaluate law enforcement & fire protection services The city should monitor essential services and determine if there is a need for restructuring or expanding current services.			\$\$	City			

Planning Process

The UMRDC was hired in August 2015 to assist the City of Watson determine a direction, identify priorities, engage the community, and develop a work plan complete with next steps.

City Council work session - September 21, 2015

UMVRDC staff met with the Watson City Council during a special work session to provide information for the strategic plan and to develop a preliminary list of projects.

The city council identified important goals for the public meeting:

- People will be heard
- How can we reconnect people within the community?
- Baseline for planning decisions
- Identify what the community wants Watson to be in 10- 20 years

It was decided to conduct a community-wide survey in hopes to gather information from more residents, and then to follow up with a public meeting.

Watson Community-wide Survey

A survey was developed in October and November and sent out in late November. We extended the survey to attempt to get additional feedback. The final deadline was February 18th. UMRDC staff put together a comprehensive survey results for the city council to review on March 8th.

A survey was sent to every household in the utility bill and hard copies were distributed around the community at the following locations:

- Post office
- Corner store
- Goose bar
- Community center
- Centennial Apartments
- Online version

The city received 34 responses from the survey. The survey results are listed in this plan.

Public meeting - March 15, 2016

A public meeting was held at the Watson Community center on March 15, 2016. There were 19 residents and business owners in attendance. The meeting reviewed the survey results, developed the vision statement for Watson and gathered feedback on priority projects. It was a very engaging discussion with the community.

Community-wide Survey Results

We received 34 responses to the survey.

- 26 homeowners
- 1 renter
- 5 business owners
- 2 work in Watson

Most respondents work in Montevideo or are retired. WE received the most responses from the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups. (15/34, 44%)

“The Goose Bar is cool”

“Feels safe”

“A nice quiet town to live in”

“Small and quiet, yet close to a larger town”

2016 Watson Survey

Summary

Issues and challenges

- There are not a sufficient number of all types of housing in Watson: Senior, Rental, Low, Medium and High income.
- Sidewalks are needed, and crossing the highway is an issue.
- Quality of the parks is an issue and perhaps a reason the parks are not being used.
- Positive image is lacking.
- Bought house, now can't afford to sell
- High water and sewer bill.
- Run down look of town.
- Lack of trust between residents, and city admin/city council.
- Fire Department not in town

Positive aspects in Watson

- Awesome bar in town.
- Quiet, peaceful, great location near Montevideo, close to Lac qui Parle Lake and rivers. Rural feel of community yet close to larger town.

What is most important?

1. Project an attractive image
2. Grow in population
3. Rehab residential buildings
4. Rehab commercial buildings
5. Encourage highway businesses
6. Attract Niche businesses

Residents are looking for these changes:

- Affordable sewer and water rates.
- Improvements to housing and commercial buildings.
- Improve city parks and baseball fields.
- More businesses in town
- More trust of local government.
- Overall better look of the community – gateway signage, less junk.
- Safe way to cross the highway. More sidewalks.
- Better cell phone service.
- More events and engaged community.
- Develop new businesses along Hwy 7 and downtown.
- Take down elevator (??)
- Natural Gas service

The survey told us:**Housing:**

Senior housing and High income housing are not sufficient in Watson

Rental, Low income and Medium income housing was not sufficient to over half of respondents.

Roads and streets:

Quality is a concern to over half of the respondents.

Pedestrian-friendly:

Half of respondents feel Watson is pedestrian-friendly. More sidewalks are needed.

Bike-Friendly:

Over half of respondents feel Watson is bike-friendly. Crossing the highway is the challenge.

Prairie Five Bus service

Over half of respondents feel Prairie Five provides adequate service to Watson. Many of those who answered “no” also stated that they did not know.

Parks and ball fields

Received many comments

Those who felt there were not enough quality parks answered that they need work and are run down.

Those who felt that yes there are enough quality parks commented that they never see the parks get used and suggested tournaments.

Positive Image – MAIN ISSUE

Overwhelmingly not positive (27/34 79%)
Rundown and lack of interested people.

Downtown

Most say not attractive (21/34 62%)

Highway entrances appealing

Most say no (19/34 56%)
Would like to see something fixed up for the entrance.

Overall well-kept

Most say no (20/34 59%)
Junk, rough looking houses

Safe Community

Overwhelmingly yes (25/34 74%)
Those who answered “no” also supplied comments
that it seems to be changing.

Rate the quality of each in Watson

4 = Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = Poor, 1 = Very Poor,
Weighted from all the surveys

In order of Very Poor to Very Good	
1.6	Cell phone service
1.6	Sewer and water utility RATES
1.9	Engaged community members and volunteers
2.0	Library services
2.2	Effective government
2.4	Community education programming
2.5	Police and law enforcement services
2.5	Internet service
2.5	Access to medical facilities
2.6	Schools and educational opportunities
2.7	Recreational opportunities (i.e. ball fields, etc.)
2.7	Parks and open-spaces
2.7	Street maintenance
2.8	Overall quality of life
2.8	Fire protection
3.1	Sewer and water utility SERVICE
3.1	Land line service
3.3	Garbage collection

Values in order of importance:

1. Project an attractive image
2. Grow in population
3. Promote rehabilitation of residential buildings
4. Encourage highway businesses
5. Promote rehabilitation of commercial buildings
6. Attract Niche businesses
7. Preserve its history

2016 Watson Survey

What projects should the community focus its time, energy and dollars in the next 5 years?

4 = High Priority

3 = Medium Priority

2 = Low Priority

1 = Not at all a priority

Focus projects in order of High Priority to Low Priority	Progress
3.8 Resolve the sewer rate issue	<i>In progress</i>
3.4 Revitalize existing housing	<i>Potential SCDP grant in 2017</i>
3.3 Re-connect people and organizations within the city	<i>In progress</i>
3.3 Develop new business along Hwy 7	
3.3 Develop new downtown businesses	
3.2 Add new housing	
3.1 Take down elevator and address brownfield issues	
3.1 Improve roads with pavement and gravel	<i>Ongoing</i>
3.0 More community events	<i>In progress</i>
3.0 Work towards getting natural gas service	
2.9 Develop new manufacturing businesses in town	
2.9 Improve internet service	
2.9 Railroad Tracks: Remove tracks and encourage highway business	
2.8 Improve law enforcement services	
2.8 Enhance baseball field	<i>In progress</i>
2.8 Create a welcome sign for Watson	<i>In progress (2017)</i>
2.8 Improve fire protection service	
2.7 Railroad Tracks: Keep track, and encourage rail-oriented business	
2.7 Improve city parks with signs and playground equipment	
2.6 Enforce the Minnesota State Building Code	
2.4 Improve access to bike trails	
2.4 Improve pedestrian walkability	

Wordle: Comments from the survey

Housing

Does Watson have a sufficient amount and/or choices of:

	Yes	No	Comment
Senior housing			
Rental housing			
Low income housing			
Medium income housing			
High income housing			

Transportation and Open Space

	Yes	No	Comment
Are the quality of streets and roads a concern?			
Is Watson a pedestrian-friendly town?			
Is Watson a bike-friendly town?			
Does the Prairie Five bus provide adequate service to the citizens of Watson?			
Are there an adequate number of quality parks and ball fields in Watson?			

Community Image

	Yes	No	Comment
Overall, does Watson have a positive image?			
Is the Watson downtown attractive?			
Are the highway entrances into Watson appealing?			
Overall, is housing in Watson reasonably well-kept?			
Is Watson a safe community to live in?			

Values and Vision

Please rate the following questions: High Importance, Medium Importance, Low Importance, Not Important.

How important is it for Watson to:

	High	Med	Low	Not	Comment
Retain a rural character?					
Preserve its history?					
Project an attractive image?					
Promote rehabilitation of residential buildings?					
Promote rehabilitation of commercial buildings?					
Grow in population?					
Encourage highway businesses?					
Attract niche businesses?					
Promote and embrace the city as a bedroom community?					

Please describe what you like or what you believe are the most positive/unique aspects about Watson.

Why do you live in Watson?

Quality

Rate the quality of each in Watson with 4= Very Good, 3=Good, 2=Poor, 1= Very Poor, and U = "Unknown."

	4	3	2	1	U
Street maintenance					
Fire protection					
Police and law enforcement services					
Sewer and water utility SERVICE					
Sewer and water utility RATES					
Garbage collection					
Access to medical facilities					
Schools and educational opportunities					
Community education programming					
Library services					
Internet service					
Cell phone service					
Land line service					
Recreational opportunities (i.e. ball fields, etc.)					
Parks and open-spaces					
Overall quality of life					
Effective government					
Engaged community members and volunteers					

What are the major challenges currently facing Watson?

Priorities

Please rate the following question High Priority, Medium Priority, Low Priority, Not at all a Priority or U="Unknown"

What projects should the community focus its time, energy and dollars in the next 5 years?

	High	Med	Low	Not	Unknown
Enforce the Minnesota State Building Code					
Re-connect people and organizations within the city					
Resolve the sewer rate issue					
Revitalize existing housing					
Add new housing					
More community events					
Railroad Tracks: Remove tracks and encourage highway business					
Railroad Tracks: Keep track, and encourage rail-oriented business					
Improve city parks with signs and playground equipment					
Enhance baseball field					
Improve roads with pavement and gravel					
Take down elevator and address brownfield issues					
Create a welcome sign for Watson					
Develop new manufacturing businesses in town					
Develop new downtown businesses					
Develop new business along Hwy 7					
Improve pedestrian walkability					
Improve access to bike trails					
Improve internet service					
Improve fire protection service					
Improve law enforcement services					
Work towards getting natural gas service					

What other projects (not listed on previous page) should the community consider focusing time, energy and dollars in the next 5 years?

Looking Ahead

What two or three words do you want others to use to describe Watson?

Looking ahead 20 years, what things do you hope will happen in Watson?

What services and/or recreational facilities would most add to the quality of life in Watson?



Upper Minnesota Valley
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Watson Community Survey

The City of Watson is working on strategic planning for the city. This survey is an opportunity for citizens to give input on how the community should guide development over the next 5-10 years.

**Return completed survey by
December 18, 2015**

By Mail:

UMVRDC, 323 W. Schlieman Ave., Appleton, MN 56208

Drop box at:

Community Center – Utility Payment Box in Watson

Online at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/watsoncommunity

Additional copies of this survey are also available at the Community Center, the Corner Store or at www.cityofwatson.com

1. Are you currently a homeowner, renter and/or business owner in the City of Watson? If so, for how long?

	No	0-1 year	2-5 years	6-10 years	10+ years
Home-owner					
Renter					
Business-owner					
Other(describe):					

2. In what community is your primary job located?

- ☐ Watson ☐ Granite Falls ☐ Unemployed
☐ Montevideo ☐ Milan ☐ Retired
☐ Benson ☐ Appleton ☐ Other (please specify)
☐ Dawson ☐ Willmar

3. What age group are you in? (Mark your response)

- ☐ under age 19 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 70-74 ☐ 80-85
☐ 19-34 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 75-79 ☐ 85+
☐ 35-44 ☐ 65-69

City Utilities Summary

CITY UTILITIES

WATER & SEWER SERVICES

Installing new water and sewer services in Watson was a financial strain on residents who for many years experienced exceptionally low water and sewer rates. It's understandable that a sense of shock was and still is being felt as a result of those utility improvements. As the examples illustrate below however, the costs of water and sewer are not as high as one would think when comparing the value of that product to other products you purchase on a daily basis.

Water



Considering your current water base fee of \$29.00 per month and a water usage rate of \$8.07 per thousand gallons of water, the cost of one thousand gallons of water is \$37.07. When divided by 1000 gallons, the cost for a gallon of water is \$0.037, nearly four (4) cents per gallon of water.

Showers

We all know that we have many uses for water in and around our homes, so let's consider the cost for an average shower. The average shower produces 2.1 gallons per minute. Considering that an average shower length is 8.2 minutes, you would use 17.2 gallons of water for that shower.



The cost of the water for that shower using the figures above would be **\$0.64 cents**. Of course, that water also goes down the drain adding to the wastewater that is sent to Montevideo for treatment.

Down the Drain

That same shower contributing to the City wastewater system also has a cost. Your current sewer base rate per month is \$32.00 and your sewer usage rate is \$14.83 per thousand gallons of water usage. When divided by 1000 gallons, the cost to send a gallon of water down the drain is 0.047, or nearly five (5) cents per gallon.



To run the shower water down the drain costs you **\$0.81 cents** per gallon.

The total cost of your 8.2 minute shower including the water used and the wastewater treated is \$1.45.

SUMMARY

The examples used above show you that although your monthly bill may seem high, when you break it down into parts the cost of the service and the product is not as high as one might think when comparing it to other products and services you use on a day-to-day basis.

Mayor Kyle Jones along with the City Clerk, Sue Brickweg have been negotiating the current price the City pays to Montevideo to treat your wastewater. The original agreement considered projections to determine the monthly fee that Watson must pay to Montevideo. A financial analysis along with wastewater data collected shows that Watson is not contributing as much wastewater to the Montevideo system as was originally projected.



We are confident that we will realize a reduction in the monthly fee paid to Montevideo to treat Watson's wastewater and that reduction will be passed on to Watson residents as a sewer rate decrease when we have been successful with re-negotiations.

Watson City Council