

# Gering, Nebraska Master Plan





# Acknowledgements

## ***Steering Committee:***

Eli Aguilar  
Daniel Bennett  
Brent Holliday  
Jamie Meisner  
Cinda Munoz  
Stephanie Rask  
Dell Weber

## ***Elected Officials:***

Mayor Tony Kaufman  
Councilor Ben Backus  
Councilor Troy Cowan  
Councilor Michael Gillen  
Councilor Phillip Holliday  
Councilor Julie Morrison  
Councilor Pam O'Neal  
Councilor Dan Smith  
Councilor Susan Wiedeman

## ***Planning Commission:***

Jeff Allen  
Mary Bowman  
Craig Erdman  
Dale Hauck  
Cathy Kaufman  
Paul Marietta  
Terry Rajewich  
Jeremy Rechsteiner  
Jana Shimic

## ***Project Technical Group:***

Annie Folck, City Engineer, City of Gering

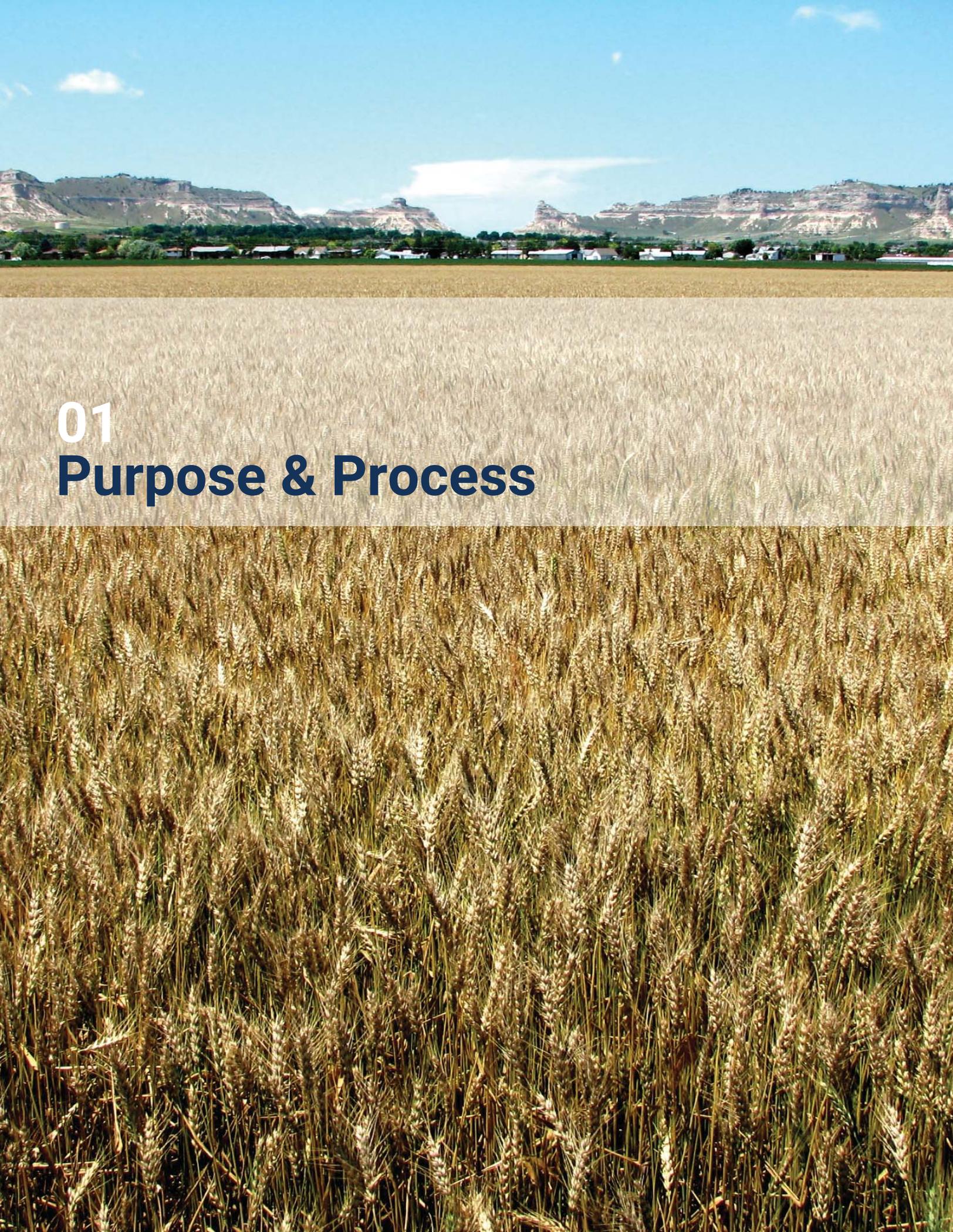
### Consultants:

Ayres Associates  
DPlanit



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01

# Purpose & Process

# 1.1

## Introduction

Plan Gering is a comprehensive, long range plan that guides decision makers on issues related to where new jobs and homes should go, how to strengthen our neighborhoods, where to invest new infrastructure and amenities, and how to improve our transportation system. This plan gathered the values and vision regarding Gering’s future into a narrative that tells a story about where the community is going. The purpose of Plan Gering is to provide our community with a path toward our best outcomes for managing growth and change.

A fundamental concept in the preparation of this plan is how to preserve what we have while continuing to evolve to realize our future vision. Plan Gering provides a blueprint for how to manage future growth while maintaining the small-town feel we all have come to cherish. The plan makes recommendations based on a shared vision and expresses our community values through long range policies for land use, transportation, economic development, and natural resources. Ultimately, Plan Gering is a guide that will help us implement our community vision and shape the future of our City in a way that honors our unique needs, values and traditions. The plan is an umbrella covering a broad spectrum of issues and achieves the following:

- Identifies a common vision and articulates community values to help guide decision making related to future growth, development, policy, and capital improvements.
- Provides clarity for the community about priority programs.
- Defines and prioritizes strategies for key elements addressed in the plan.
- Supports the development of realistic and achievable work plans.
- Guides small area planning through a District Framework.
- Meets statutory prerequisite enabling the City to administer zoning codes.

Plan Gering is your plan. It was created by the community, for the community, and reflects where we want to go and lights the path to get us there.

## 1.2

### Need for a Master Plan

As mentioned above, one legal rationale for adopting a Comprehensive Plan is to enable the City to administer zoning codes. These codes provide for a predictable framework that impacts the use of property along with property values. A plan is important because it enables the community's vision to carry on despite changes in personnel and elected officials over time. While specific projects and issues may change quickly, the broad principles and values that frame our perspectives can carry on for decades or more. Because managing a municipality is unpredictable, the Comprehensive Plan works to provide clear direction on issues we can anticipate, while providing a decision-making framework to help officials as they consider unforeseen challenges.

Plan Gering represents a bit of a hybrid approach to Comprehensive Planning. In years past, a comprehensive plan functioned as an encyclopedia of municipal information. Population demographics, utility maps, and other critical information was housed in the plan. With the advent of online resources, digital mapping and other technical advances, the pace of information availability has diminished the role of the comprehensive plan as a data clearinghouse.

Today's comprehensive plan serves to tell a story about the future of a place and strategies that can be employed to get us there. In the case of Plan Gering, we've retooled the traditional approach to storytelling to encompass the guiding principles that will serve as sidebars for decision making over time. Using this method, we've worked to personalize the policies into a vernacular that's unique to Gering.

Plan Gering was adopted on \_\_\_\_\_, 2019. The plan will be administered by City staff as proposed development projects are reviewed, as well as Planning Commissioners, City Council Members, community members and others. Over time the Plan may require updates or amendments due to changing market forces and other factors. Amendments to the plan must be adopted by City Council.

As with any voyage, most start with a destination and route in mind. Yet detours can crop up, requiring recalibration of your route. The same happens with comprehensive plans— changing conditions can impact your vision. It is recommended that this Plan be reviewed every 5-years or less to keep the vision relevant and fresh.

# 1.3

## Plan Framework



### Gering Today 02

**Gering Today** summarizes the unique attributes of Gering and the people that live there.



### Gering Tomorrow 03

**Gering Tomorrow** describes the vision for Gering's future, including community values, principles and policies.



### Shaping Gering 04

**Shaping Gering** provides land use, transportation, parks and energy recommendations for the community.



### Vision to Action 05

**Vision to Action** provides strategies for implementing the plan.



# 1.4

## How you built Plan Gering

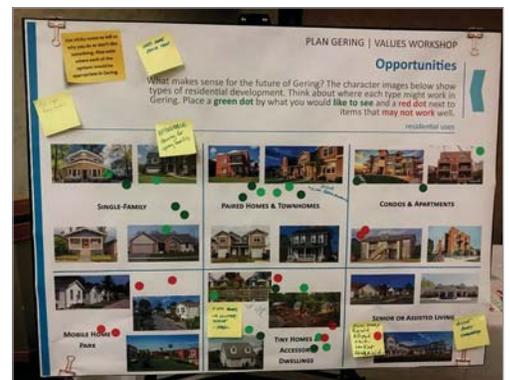
### The Plan Gering Process

Plan Gering was developed through an extensive public engagement process with the goal of translating the values of our community into a growth management and land use strategy. Over the course of a 9-month period with multiple in-person public workshops, focus group meetings, and online information and surveys, more than 400 participants had the opportunity to engage with the plan and provide feedback on their vision for the future.

### Key Events and Activities

#### Community Workshop #1

The first community workshop took place in October 2018, which structured community conversations around developing a cohesive vision. At this workshop residents described the unique qualities of Gering and their aspirations for the city’s future. This meeting served as the backbone of Plan Gering and informed future phases of the project. Four community values resulted from the meeting that express community members’ beliefs about the most important and desirable characteristics of Gering. These values describe how Gering can position itself by reflecting on the heritage of the community and prospectus for the future. We appreciate the historic origins, but also want to continue to look to the future where innovators are pushing boundaries and challenging assumptions.



## Community Workshop #2

The second workshop held in January 29, 2019 distilled the stories and values heard during the Values workshop. Statements for each of the values were developed and vetted by the public. These statements serve as the basis of the plan and helped arrange the recommendations, policies, physical projects, and capital investments. In addition, several mapping exercises were structured to get feedback on physical growth elements valued by the community. Three distinct scenario maps were created to illustrate alternative approaches to accommodating future growth and funding priorities. Good ideas were mixed up with challenging ideas to ensure there wasn't one "right" scenario. Participants were then able to pull the best concepts from each scenario. The three scenarios are described below:

## Scenarios



**Destination Scenario**

The first scenario focused on positioning Gering as a **destination**. In this scenario, the focus is on accommodating the visitor and the provision of activities and events. The community is open for business and desires to draw visitors to the area. The energy of the community is based on the movement of people in, around and through Gering.



**Home Scenario**

The second scenario positioned Gering as a **home**. In this scenario, Gering is focused on daily living and community lifestyle. Quality of life and enhanced daily experiences are emphasized. As we conduct even the most mundane of our daily activities, we see our values reflected in the quality of housing and neighborhoods, new commercial and industrial development, and public facilities and services.



**Livelihood Scenario**

The final scenario looked at Gering through a **livelihood** lens. In this scenario, Gering is focused on the economy and the environment. While supportive of businesses that create jobs, the physical environment is enhanced. Natural resources, outdoor spaces and cultural places are highlighted and highly visible components of our community serving as an inspiration for the creation of new jobs and business activity.

After the public identified desired elements from the three maps, a final scenario map was created to illustrate how Gering should grow in the next 20 years. Participants generally preferred elements and policies consistent with Scenario 1.

The final scenario map was then converted into a District Framework which breaks up the city into 11 districts based on character, context, development patterns, natural features, and types of destinations. Existing and desired character is described for each district which will help residents understand differences in land use and built form and will also help City staff adapt strategies to encourage development that is appropriate in location and type. The District Framework is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Key findings that resulted from the scenario preferences are as follows:

- **GENERAL GROWTH DIRECTION** - The City will focus on infill of vacant properties and directing growth within current city limits.
- **DOWNTOWN** - Downtown will serve as the primary hub for visitor-oriented commerce. There is also a desire to preserve the small-town Main Street character.
- **COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERN** - Commercial development will be primarily concentrated downtown near civic uses.
- **NEIGHBORHOODS & RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT** - There should be a variety of housing styles and types integrated within neighborhoods. Medium density housing can be blended with single-family housing while higher-density housing should be located along major roadways.
- **INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT** - New industrial development should be located within existing and new Industrial Parks with buffering requirements to mitigate impacts.
- **PARKS & RECREATION** - Resources should be used to improve connections between recreational destinations and the enhancement of existing facilities.
- **MOBILITY & TRANSPORTATION** - The transportation network should be context based with improvements based on supporting employment activities. Primary corridors will have a multi-modal approach with some streetscape enhancements.

- **INFRASTRUCTURE** - Regional approach to utilities with the goal of reducing visual clutter. Green infrastructure will be encouraged to improve efficiencies and storm water quality will be addressed through best management practices.
- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** - The City will focus efforts on developing home grown and small businesses and will support the development of commercial retail and services that support the residential and employment-based elements of the community.

### **Community Workshop #3**

The third workshop held on August 26, 2019 presented the Draft plan to community members. The workshop began with a brief presentation of Plan Gering. Following the presentation participants were given the opportunity to review summary boards and share their feedback.

## **Outreach Methods**

Several methods were used to inform residents about the planning process to increase participation. Promotion for the public workshops included TV interviews, Facebook posts, meeting announcements posted in downtown businesses, and project updates posted to the project website.

### **Online Survey**

Beyond in-person meetings, the consultant team deployed an online survey to provide another way for Gering residents to share their views and perceptions on issues related to growth and development. The survey was posted online from September 5, 2018 to October 22, 2018 and resulted in 420 responses. The survey provided important input and a deepened understanding of key themes that emerged from the responses, including but not limited to economic health, environmental stewardship, affordability, transportation, and community amenities.

### **Plan Gering Project Team**

Plan Gering was led by the City's Planning Department, with assistance from other City staff and a Steering Committee. These two groups were fundamental to the plan's development and are described below.

#### ***Project Technical Group***

This committee was made up of the key City staff representatives who provided assistance in getting interested people and groups to participate in the engagement activities and events, and also reviewed and commented on draft deliverables for the project.

#### ***Steering Committee***

This 8-member group was established to meet periodically throughout the planning process. The committee functioned as a "sounding board" for thoughts and ideas related to the creation of Plan Gering. Members of the committee discussed ideas and issues and helped guide the consultant team in synthesizing public input. This group also provided advice and recommendations at key points throughout the process.

02

# Gering Today



## 2.1 Snapshot

Gering is closely connected to nearby Scottsbluff and Terrytown, which has played a major role in shaping its economy. What affects one community, by and large, affects the others. Therefore it is important that key issues are tackled in a collaborative manner with solutions that are mutually beneficial for all three communities.

### Trends

Gering's population saw significant growth at 9.7% from 2000 and 2010 compared to Scottsbluff's 2.1% growth rate. Yet during this same time period, Scottsbluff's taxable sales increased by 4.6% while Gering saw a decrease of 5.4% in net taxable sales. This trend is likely attributed to Gering resident's spending their dollars in Scottsbluff which offers a more diverse mix of retail and services. As Gering continues to grow, there will continue to be demand for commercial services and the potential to capture more sales tax from eating and drinking establishments, which is one of the largest growing sales tax generators nationwide. Moving forward, Gering needs to build upon its entertainment base and leverage new types of businesses that will support and enhance the overall experience for residents and visitors alike. Attracting businesses that provide services and one-of-a-kind retail will help strengthen Gering's position in the regional market.

Household incomes for Gering residents are higher on average when compared to those of Scottsbluff residents. According to the 2016 American Community Survey, Gering's Median Household Income was \$52,484 compared to \$37,665 for Scottsbluff. This difference is likely the result of a higher percentage of Gering residents holding technical and professional positions. Gering's largest job sector is in educational services, health care and social assistance at 28.20% with large job increases occurring in the professional, manufacturing, and construction sectors. Gering should capitalize on this asset and find new growth in sectors that require higher levels of education and work to have a larger concentration of higher-wage jobs. While Gering should also look to grow its service-oriented sector to keep pace with the demands of new residents, the growth of professional and higher-paying jobs should be Gering's primary focus.

Home values in Gering have continued to rise and housing costs are increasing throughout the region. As a result, households faced with lower-paying jobs and increasing housing costs are experiencing greater economic stresses. Providing affordable housing choices for all income and age groups will become increasingly important as Gering continues to grow.

As mentioned previously, finding solutions to these issues should be approached through a regional perspective. As Gering continues to grow, the City should look to partner with its neighbors to improve regional quality of life and economic competitiveness.

## 2.2 Challenges

In creating a new Comprehensive Plan, Gering identified that the prior document, adopted in 1995, was severely outdated and needed a fresh start to create a modern decision-making framework. Additionally, the existing zoning code has not been systematically reviewed and does not provide the tools that staff needs to respond to changing conditions. This system has severely hampered the ability of elected officials and staff in advancing a predictable regulatory environment.

Starting fresh with a new plan provides the opportunity for residents to weigh in on the greatest challenges and opportunities facing Gering. Once this vision has been established, adjusting the regulatory codes so they support the implementation of this vision is essential to success.

Beyond the rust on the plan and code, a few other challenges were identified by stakeholders when the process launched:

- Gering's identity as a community sometimes gets overshadowed because we don't have a clear vision of our future.
- Predictability of regulatory enforcement is unclear due to a disconnect between the plan and codes.
- Like many rural communities, Gering is losing younger populations to larger cities.
- Gering is perceived as a bedroom community, with many people choosing to live in Gering, but working in another community.
- Presenting a positive visual impression of Gering while supporting industrial businesses on the 10th Street Corridor.

Despite these and other challenges, Gering is being proactive in identifying solutions. By undertaking a comprehensive planning effort and subsequent code update, the City is able to not only chart a course for success, but also take several important next steps to help realize the vision.

## 2.3 Priorities

Through the Plan Gering process, many suggestions and ideas were identified by the community that will improve the city over the coming years. One goal of this plan is to make sure those ideas are documented so that we don't forget these great ideas in the shuffle of our daily lives. Several priority themes came up in discussions time and time again during the process. These items are represented in this plan and are woven into the vision, policies and strategies. Here's how three community priorities are addressed in the plan.

**OPEN FOR BUSINESS:** Gering is a place that is ready and willing to welcome entrepreneurs to sink roots and expand their business. This plan and subsequent zoning code update will help to align the vision and codes to remove barriers while providing more flexibility. Additional policies and strategies describe other ways Gering can build a positive reputation as being a great place to set up shop. What's in the plan?

- **Our Vision** - being "Champions of Commerce" highlights our commitment to welcoming business. (P21-22)
- **Our Policies** - provide additional detail on things we can do make the vision a reality. (P34-38)
- **Our Land Use Framework** - is structured with a flexible approach so that development proposals consider compatibility, intensity and scale when reviewing appropriate zoning. (P49)

**QUALITY OF LIFE:** Gering is place where people have chosen to invest their lives, largely because of the parks system. Additional planning and continuing to prioritize parks will help Gering maintain a competitive edge. How does the Plan help?

- **Our Vision** - Represented by the theme "Nature Close at Hand," quality of life is a signature focus helping Gering capitalize on the amenities present in the local geography. (P24-33)
- **Our Open Space Framework** - identifies that a diversity of park types and proximity to residents is key to ensuring that amenities continue to be a driving factor attracting residents to Gering. (P94)

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** the experience of arriving in Gering is monumental. We only get one chance to make a first impression. Enhancing the entryways and offering great neighborhoods can help communicate our pride of living in Gering. What does the plan say?

- **Our Vision** - highlights "Establishing Roots," focusing attention on creating quality places that make Gering a welcoming place. Our gateways, neighborhoods and downtown set the tone for lasting impressions. (P39-42)
- **Our Transportation Framework** - identifies key locations and corridors that should be enhanced. (P80)
- **Our Strategies** - describes steps that can be taken to help support this priority, including gateway beautification, housing diversification, and steps to add vitality to downtown. (P109-115)

03

# Gering Tomorrow



## 3.1

### Community Vision



The language of the community vision found on the following pages emerged through multiple community conversations and was presented to and approved by the community during the second planning workshop. The community vision represents the ideals expressed by the community for its continued growth over the next twenty years and serves as a foundation of Plan Gering. The vision is intended to protect and enhance the elements that contribute to Gering's unique sense of place while planning for growth that will positively contribute to the city's quality of life and livability.



## Pioneers Welcome

There's a spirit in Gering that draws inspiration from years past and guides our vision for the future. It is timeless and calls each one of us to endure and explore, linking our past with our future.

For generations this spirit has called out over the bristling tallgrass of the prairie and echoed through the ancient land forms that stand watch over all those who have made Gering home. The first native pioneers were guided by this spirit to find herds of buffalo and live a nomadic lifestyle based in adaptation and innovation. A second wave of frontier pioneers, were guided by this spirit as they traveled through and settled in the area seeking opportunity.

Today the ancient landforms known as 5 rocks – Saddle, Dome, Eagle, Sentinel and Crown - still serve as iconic guardian landmarks; the North Platte River provides life-giving sustenance; and the wagon ruts, roadways and rail lines that connect us beyond the horizon.

Those looking for a better life have long been drawn to Monument Country, attracted by the natural geography and breathtaking vistas. They've discovered a place where cultivating roots is rewarded with unrivaled opportunity, and quality of life is more than just a buzzword. In Gering it is the spirit of community which overcomes adversity through adaptation, innovation, and creativity. This spirit provides an invitation to everyone to be part of the community through the words - "Pioneers Welcome!"

For those who live here today and those who will come – Pioneers Welcome! - means Gering is a community where exploration is encouraged and perseverance leads to prosperity. Where newcomers and life-timers appreciate the quality of our community and everyone is invited to create lasting connections. Our vision is intimately tied to four themes which reflect what we value most and desire to nurture in the future.



## Nature Close at Hand

In Gering, we welcome trailblazers and stewards who not only carve out new trails but also lead others along established trails, exploring and enjoying the numerous outdoor experiences and opportunities offered in the badlands of western Nebraska. Here in Gering, we appreciate and value the natural beauty and resources that are close at hand.



## Champions of Commerce

In Gering we welcome entrepreneurs and commerce based on working an honest day, creating something of value, and building an enterprise that lasts for generations. Here in Gering, we support and champion a culture of thriving commerce, where products and services are delivered with pride.



## Establishing Roots

In Gering we welcome visitors to our community and surroundings as we celebrate friendship, conduct business, and enjoy the natural environment together. Here in Gering we provide you with a reason to stay a little longer, come back a little sooner and become a future resident.



## Meaningful Connections

In Gering we welcome opportunities that are created via connections with people and places as we develop our neighborhoods and businesses, engage in neighboring and community gathering activities, and move around, through, and in-and-out of the community. Here in Gering we are a socially, physically and technologically connected community.

Whether you're visiting Gering for the first time, part of the legacy of longtime families, or somewhere in between, we welcome you to discover the monumental upside of Gering. Come, explore Nature Close at Hand, become our next Commercial Champion, watch your family flourish when you Establish Roots, and find the rewards of Meaningful Connections. Whatever it is you're seeking, your trail leads to Gering. In Gering our vision is simply stated – Pioneers Welcome!

## 3.2

### Community Values & Policies

Throughout the planning process, the community articulated a desire to leverage its natural resources, champion a resilient economy, improve connections between people and places, and maintain a unique sense of place. These ideas are expressed in the following community values:

- Nature Close at Hand
- Champions of Commerce
- Establishing Roots
- Meaningful Connections

The following pages describe what we intend to achieve for each value along with supporting policies that the City of Gering can use to help advance the vision embodied by Pioneers Welcome!

The terms “principle” and “policy” are used in this plan to mean:

**Principles** articulate the overarching aspirations of the community. These are broad statements that describe how we would like our community to grow.

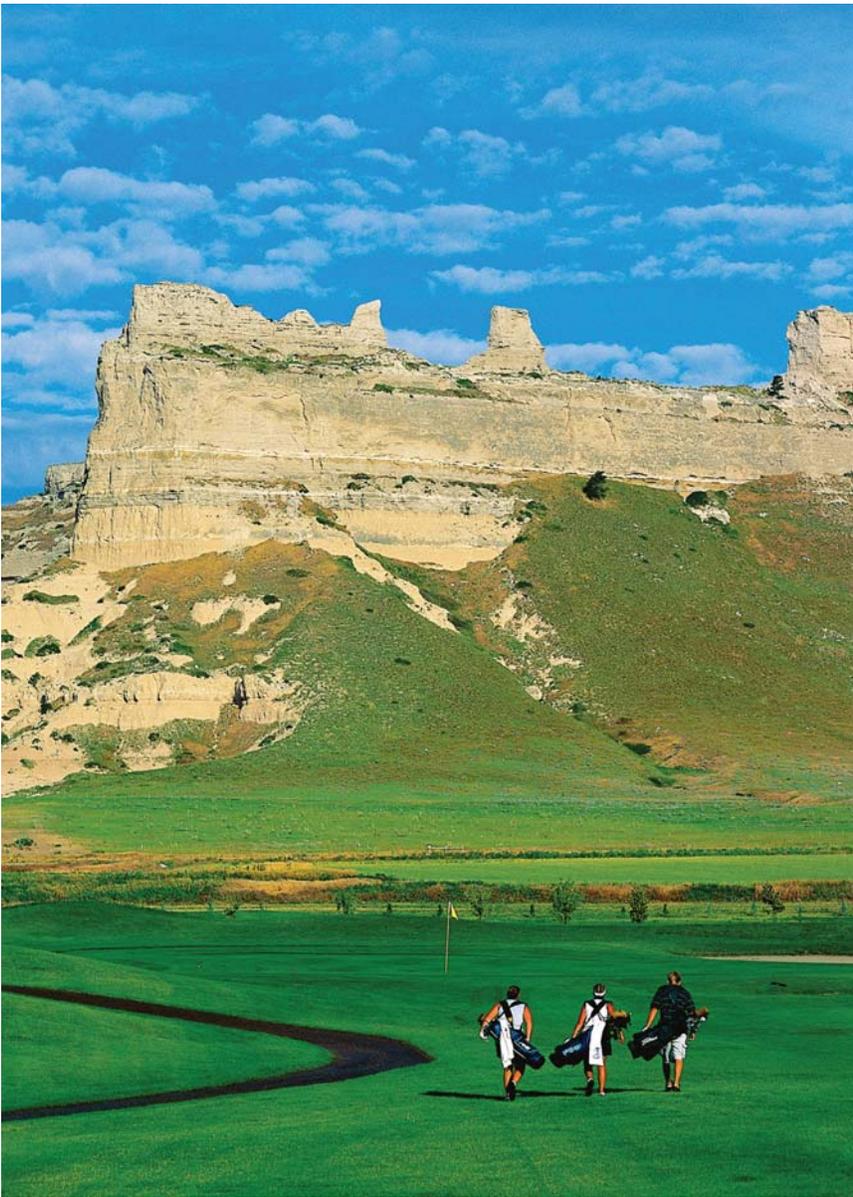
**Policies** are statements providing a course of action to move the community towards attainment of the Principle. Policies guide the work of staff in formulating changes to the zoning code and other regulatory documents.

The principles and policies are meant to be flexible to adapt to changing contexts and can help guide decision making, work programs and long-range planning projects, in addition to preparation of the budget and capital improvements program over the coming years.

When facing decisions, use these principles and policies to help identify considerations that can help provide guidance. The Plan helps staff and decision-makers approach topics from a “big picture” perspective.

# Nature close at hand

Gering's parks and open spaces are major assets that are highly valued by residents and visitors alike. As the city continues to grow, we want to ensure that close access to nature remains a defining attribute of our community. Nature Close at Hand reflects our community's commitment to maintain and protect our natural spaces and provide a connected system that is accessible to the entire community. We will prioritize maintaining and improving our public spaces to ensure they are memorable, interesting, and reinforce our sense of community. Nature Close at Hand will be accomplished by using regulations that will allow growth to occur without compromising the integrity of our natural spaces. The following principles and policies will help to ensure the open spaces we experience today last long into the future.



*Glen Park in the City of River Falls shows how native plants can be integrated into the landscape to give a better sense of place.*

## Principle 1.1: Our community will embrace the river.

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**Policy 1.1.A:** Protect key views and access points to the North Platte River, treating it as a vital resource for recreation and a means of generating economic development based on quality of life.

**Policy 1.1.B:** Development proposals should approach the river as an asset rather than turning its back on it. New projects should integrate the river as an amenity.

**Policy 1.1.C:** Development proposals adjacent the river should preserve and enhance its natural environmental value.

**Policy 1.1.D:** The river is a recreation asset. Access along the river should be provided to support recreation and transportation connections.

## **Principle 1.2: Our community will preserve Monumental Views and other views of significance.**

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**Policy 1.2.A:** The geography sets Gering apart from other places. Views to the monuments should be preserved and/or framed from key public locations like parks, public buildings and other key landmarks.

**Policy 1.2.B:** Preserve and frame views of the Monument whenever possible, while also respecting existing uses and private property rights.

**Policy 1.2.C:** Encroachment upon the monuments by development should be discouraged. The City should work with community partners to protect or purchase lands adjacent to the monuments that have significant environmental and/or historical value.

## **Principle 1.3: Our community will conserve natural resources.**

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**Policy 1.3.A:** Prioritize the conservation of sensitive environmental resources and lands of significance.

**Policy 1.3.B:** Conserve natural areas in private and public spaces and introduce new ones.

**Policy 1.3.C:** Integrate and restore waterways, wetlands, and other natural features into site design.

**Policy 1.3.D:** Preserve significant site features such as trees, whenever possible. When not possible, relocate, replace, or replant site features.

**Policy 1.3. E:** Promote the design of buildings and landscapes to conserve, store and reuse water.

**Policy 1.3.F:** Encourage the use of durable building materials that enjoy a long life span.

## **Principle 1.4: Our community will develop a system of quality open spaces.**

---

**Policy 1.4.A:** Adopt and implement an Open Space Master Plan.

**Policy 1.4.B:** Seek and dedicate funding sources for the acquisition and stewardship of public open space.

**Policy 1.4.C:** Ensure open spaces are accessible and interconnected across developments and neighborhoods.

**Policy 1.4.D:** Design of open spaces should facilitate public access to and movement along the system.

**Policy 1.4.E:** Areas along the river and wetlands should be integrated into natural components of development proposals.

**Policy 1.4.F:** Encourage the creation of new publicly-accessible open spaces with new development using incentives— including, but not limited to, parks, outdoor squares, courtyards and landscaped areas.

**Policy 1.4.G:** Improve standards for new open spaces by providing guidance on scale, design, maintenance, lighting, landscaping and other amenities.

**Policy 1.4.H:** Encourage responsible environmental stewardship for existing and new open spaces.

**Policy 1.4.I:** Maintain and improve physical assets of existing parks.

**Policy 1.4.J:** Develop new requirements for landscaping or strengthen existing regulations.

## **Principle 1.5: Our community parks will serve all populations.**

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Policy 1.5.A: All parks should be designed to be accessible, enjoyable, and welcoming to all people regardless of age, ability or geography.

Policy 1.5.B: New parks and trail systems should be built in underserved areas in order to ensure all Gering residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park or trail.

Policy 1.5.C: Improve access to existing parks.

Policy 1.5.D: Develop facilities and programs in existing parks to meet community needs.

## **Principle 1.6: Our community will preserve and improve our tree canopy and urban forest, and provide appealing public right-of-way amenities.**

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**Policy 1.6.A:** Establish a program on tree care that provides training and education for all residents.

**Policy 1.6.B:** Establish programs such as tree giveaways, neighborhood planting programs, and education workshops.

**Policy 1.6.C:** Seek grant funding for community tree planting to improve City parks, neighborhoods and streets.

**Policy 1.6.D:** Ensure a healthy tree planting environment along streets by requiring adequate growing space.

**Policy 1.6.E:** Inventory street trees and develop a tree replacement program.