

CITY OF
Sandstone *Minnesota*

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Narrative





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document creates a community development initiative narrative to guide future development in Sandstone, Minnesota. It gathers a long list of recommendations and ideas generated over the past decade and uses them as both a foundation for future development and to immediately support a proposed housing redevelopment project in the city's downtown. It provides a general overview of the community and describes the process used to develop the plan, including stakeholders involved and the timeline of events over the past decade that led to its development. It details the process used in the two community priority-setting sessions and outlines the priorities established at the end of the process. It shows how the priorities align with the community vision to expand housing opportunities through the restoration of existing housing, such as North Court Apartments, and the need for more affordable housing, such as the redevelopment of The Rock, a vacant, historically significant building in the city center.

The community vision supported by participants in the process reads:

The City of Sandstone is a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets.

The six priorities established through the process are, as follows, listed in order as ranked in importance by the participants:

1. Expanding housing opportunities
2. Building stronger community connections
3. Reimagining, beautifying, and expanding downtown
4. Empowering the business community
5. Creating a safe, accessible community
6. Positioning the community

Together, these priorities create a roadmap for future development in Sandstone, both in immediate support for redevelopment of The Rock and as it tackles a long list of initiatives that can help guide it toward its vision.

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

The City of Sandstone has developed this community development initiative narrative to guide future projects in accordance with its vision for the community. The impetus for this process came in 2019, when it purchased a historic school property (locally known as The Rock) with the intent to rescue a treasured local asset from further decay and redevelop it to meet community needs. Through a competitive RFP process, it selected Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDC) as the developer for the redevelopment of The Rock. In March 2020, the City of Sandstone engaged The Northspan Group, Inc. to facilitate a community priority setting session to support its community development initiative narrative. The process sought to gather past insights and fresh community input to develop a holistic vision that could both support the redevelopment of The Rock and guide additional community processes.

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The City of Sandstone is a community of 1,429 residents in Pine County, Minnesota. It sits in the east central portion of the state along the Interstate 35 corridor between the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and Duluth and sits above the banks of the Wild and Scenic Kettle River. It owes its name to the sandstone quarries along the banks of the river that were central to its founding, and many buildings in its downtown are still made of the distinctive local sandstone. It has also been a stopping point on a rail line between the Twin Cities and Duluth and historic U.S. Highway 61. Its largest employers include Essentia Health, a Federal Correctional Institution (when individuals housed in group quarters such as the prison are added to Sandstone's population, it rises to 2,657, according to the Minnesota State Demographic Center), and the Sandstone Healthcare Center. Major changes over the past decade include the development of a 181-acre business park with interstate frontage, which helped retain the town's hospital and has spurred additional development interest. This new development also helped to market Sandstone as a destination for outdoor recreation given its location on a picturesque stretch of the Wild and Scenic Kettle River, which is popular among ice climbers and rafters, and its proximity to Banning State Park.

Housing emerged as a major component of this plan due to many challenges in the local housing market, which is characterized by limited activity and a steadily aging housing stock. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, it includes 594 total housing units, 530 of which are occupied, and has an average household size of 2.7. Units are close to evenly divided between owner-occupied and rentals, with 283 owner-occupied units (53.4%) and 247 rental units (46.6%). According to the ACS, vacancy rates for owner-occupied and units hover between six and eight percent, which is typical for the region, and a more comprehensive CHDC survey found a rental vacancy rate as low as 1%. The housing stock is generally older, with one quarter of units built before 1940; while there was another spurt of construction from 1970-1990, only six units have been completed in the past decade. According to a 2020 study from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, 15.8% of housing units are designated affordable units, a total that does not meet the community demand. 27.3% of households in Sandstone are cost burdened, a figure that trends slightly lower than most of East Central Minnesota and larger metropolitan areas in the state but remains substantial.



GEOGRAPHIC AREA

This community development initiative narrative targets the entirety of the City of Sandstone. From the beginning of the process, stakeholders recognized that redevelopment of the downtown area moved in tandem with redevelopment of the community's housing stock, and that this theme of revitalization was not confined to any one area of the community. Participants also recognized the importance of Sandstone's parks and recreational areas as community assets and vital to its future growth and emphasized the importance of interconnection between different parts of the town. Several participants in the visioning session were strong advocates for improved sidewalks, walkability, and access from its parks to its neighborhoods.

FIGURE 1: CITY OF SANDSTONE MAP

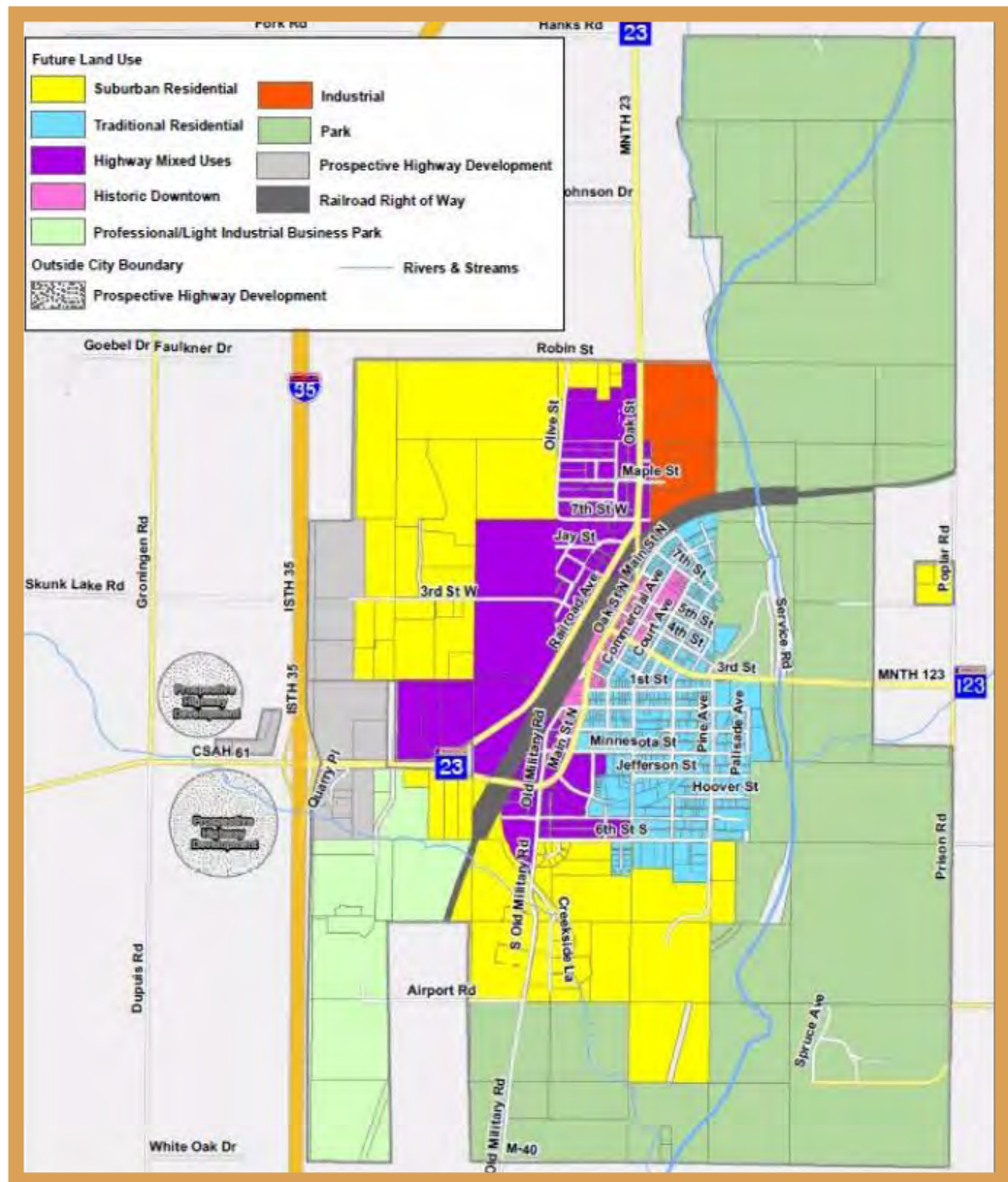


Source: Sandstone 2017 Comprehensive Plan

**GEOGRAPHIC AREA
CONTINUED ...**

Sandstone’s future land use map demonstrates the importance of the interconnections between the various zones of the community. While the historic downtown area received frequent mentions as an area that has seen some upgrades but requires ongoing rehabilitation, it also blends directly into the traditional residential and highway mixed use zones that were also areas of concern. And while much of the residential area abuts the large dedicated parklands on the east side of the city, connections between the two zones have considerable room for improvement due to a lack of pedestrian connections and steep slopes along the banks of the Kettle River. While past studies had focused on improvements to specific areas or zones, such as Robinson Park or the downtown area, these priority-setting sessions sought to unite them behind a single vision.

FIGURE 2: CITY OF SANDSTONE FUTURE LAND USE MAP

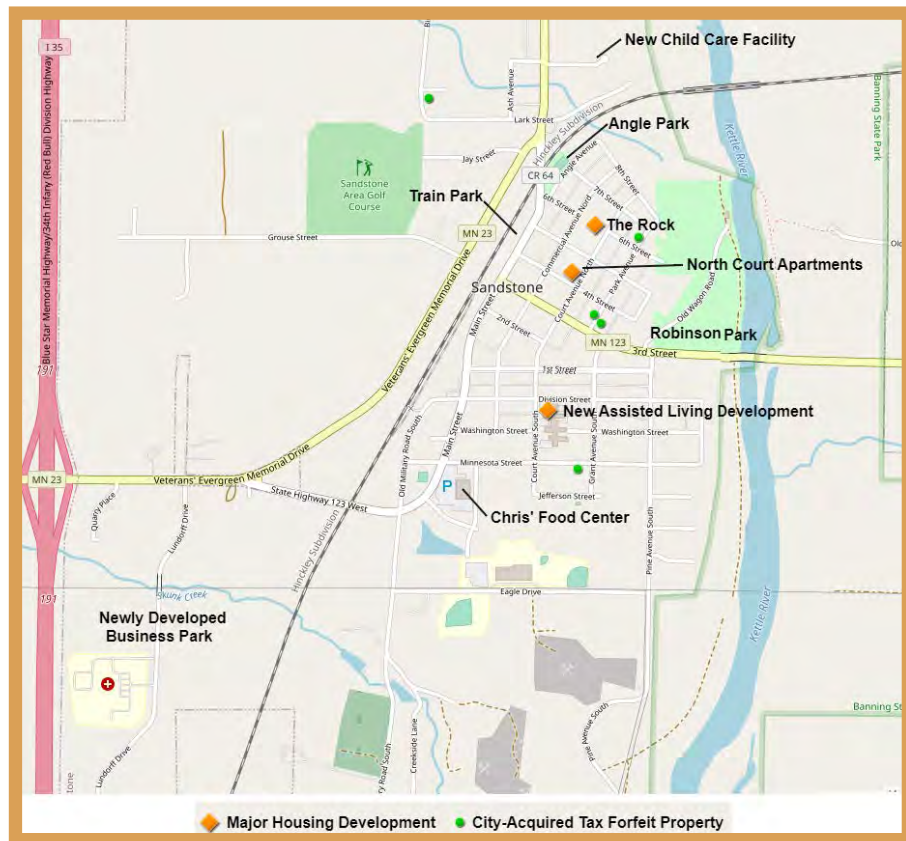


Source: Sandstone 2017 Comprehensive Plan

MAJOR PROJECTS AND AREAS OF FOCUS

The site of The Rock, which sits on a two-block lot between Commercial and Court Avenues and 5th and 7th Streets, is of importance to knitting the community together. While zoned as historic downtown, it is surrounded primarily by traditional residential areas, and without any rehabilitation, sits as a blighted eyesore amid a residential district, thereby lowering property values. The Rock also borders the rest of the downtown, though the corridor nearest it along Commercial Avenue has seen multiple business closures or relocations in recent years. Upgrades to The Rock that bring additional vehicle and foot traffic from Main Street and on to Commercial Avenue would boost activity throughout the corridor and create more viable opportunities for businesses to thrive in the area. It also sits within easy walking distance of the entire downtown area and all its businesses. The Rock is just two blocks from designated parkland, giving future residents easy access to green space and recreational opportunities both in Robinson Park to the east and at Angle Park and Train Park to the west. The Rock's location offers a unique opportunity to create an anchor that resists both residential and commercial decay on the north end of Sandstone's downtown and creates a vibrant hub that pulls together commercial, residential, and recreational activity.

FIGURE 3: THE ROCK AND OTHER MAJOR PROJECTS OR AREAS OF FOCUS



Source: The Northspan Group 2020

STAKEHOLDER LIST

The City of Sandstone brought together a wide array of stakeholders to develop its priorities for the city's future. This includes all 18 participants in the visioning sessions and 31 who were surveyed as part of the visioning session. These participants include members of the following bodies:

Sandstone city staff: Actively managing the implementation of priorities identified in this plan, including housing

Sandstone City Council: Responsible for helping to set and guide a vision for Sandstone and involved in project approval process at various stages

Sandstone Planning Commission: Responsible for planning and zoning activity central to new housing development

Sandstone Economic Development Authority: Responsible for overseeing economic development in the city and has managed housing developments in the past

Sandstone Rental Appeal Board: Has oversight over rental properties in Sandstone

Sandstone Parks and Recreation Commission: Guides the direction of Sandstone's parks system, which creates recreational opportunities and attracts activity to Sandstone

The survey was also made available to the general public and the visioning sessions attracted 10 participants with no affiliation with the aforementioned bodies, demonstrating notable public interest in the process.

Numerous other stakeholders participated in meetings that helped plan for the process, including:

Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDC):

The developer for The Rock selected by the city

Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP): Has assisted Sandstone throughout the development process of The Rock through technical assistance and securing a grant that has helped cover some expenses related to the project

The Northspan Group, which has served as an economic development consultant to the City of Sandstone in various capacities for nearly 20 years and facilitated the priority-setting process

Community groups were crucial in spurring this process along through their efforts to generate support; several are also potential tenants for a renovated Rock. These groups include:

Sandstone Chamber of Commerce: Responsible for local business advocacy and supportive of The Rock project

Old School Arts Center: A community arts group focused on redevelopment of The Rock

Sandstone History and Art Center: A local history-oriented group currently located in another downtown Sandstone building that could use space in a redeveloped Rock

Sandstone Public Library: A current user of city hall that could use new space in a redeveloped Rock.

Many of the 11 studies and reports that provided background for the priority setting had their own public engagement sessions or emerged organically from ideas supported by the community. While it would be difficult to quantify this level of community support, the processes that led to this priority-setting exercise have generated wide-ranging interest from different groups of stakeholders.

COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING SESSIONS

In order to work through an array of recommendations from previous studies and reports, the City of Sandstone convened two community visioning sessions facilitated by Northspan in June 2020. The process was originally slated to take place in person, but Covid-19 forced changes to the process. The sessions were primarily conducted online, though accommodations were made for several participants who lacked internet access or familiarity, and a small group met in person at City Hall in a socially distanced setting.

Northspan began the process by conducting a pre-community engagement survey in early June. The survey went out to a list of all members of the city council, city boards and commissions, and city staff via email and was posted on the city website and promoted via social media and the local newspaper. Complete survey questions are available in Appendix A and a document summarizing all responses is available in Appendix B.

The survey sought to direct survey respondents toward a common goal, the Northspan facilitators adapted a vision statement from the city's 2017 comprehensive plan. The updated, simplified vision statement read: *The City of Sandstone is a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets.*

All but one survey respondent agreed this statement accurately captured the city's vision. Given this broadly accepted vision, respondents were asked to submit 3-5 substantive actions that could aid Sandstone in achieving the vision. These responses were the basis for the subsequent community priority-setting sessions.

Survey respondents who indicated an interest in the priority-setting sessions were invited to two 90-minute sessions on June 11 and 18. The first session aimed to form relationships and cluster actions, while the second sought to discern consensus and name priority areas. Through this process, participants identified the clearest and most distinct substantive actions identified in the survey phase and used them to lead the creation of six priority areas for future action.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Through the priority-setting process, community members developed six priority areas for Sandstone. A complete overview of all ideas generated under each priority is available in Appendix C. They are listed here in order of priority given during a ranking process at the end of the exercise, the results of which are available in Appendix D.

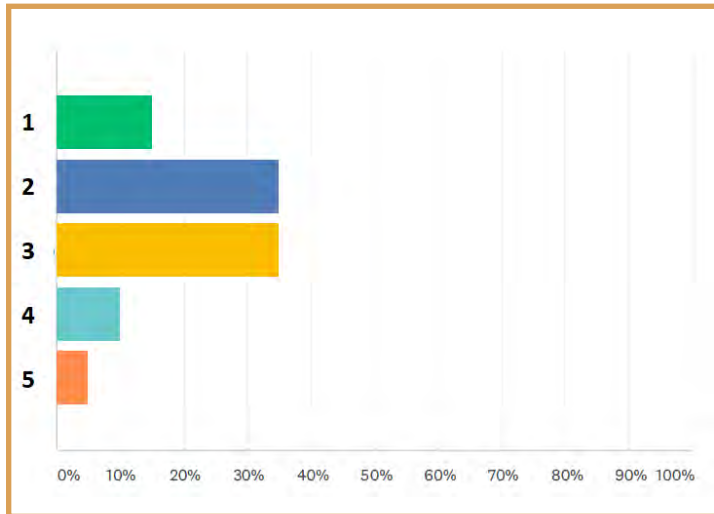
1. EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Housing also arose as the foremost community priority in the process. Participants recognized a wide range of necessary tools that could benefit the local housing market, including:

- a. Rehabilitation of existing housing stock.
- b. Removal of blighted housing stock beyond the point of practical restoration.
- c. Exploring city development of new housing.
- d. Exploring ways to provide additional affordable housing and workforce housing.
- e. Cleaning up blighted properties.

Survey Support for Housing Priority

After asking stakeholders to identify priority areas for the city with no additional direction to avoid any potential bias, the survey conducted prior to the priority-setting session asked two additional questions regarding the housing market to provide perspective for this narrative.



First, respondents were asked to rate whether housing in Sandstone is available at prices that reflect the needs of the community on a 1-5 scale, with 1 meaning it was not at all available and 5 meaning it was very available. The average rating from respondents was 2.55 and 85% of the 22 respondents gave a score of 3 or less, showing general dissatisfaction with Sandstone housing options.

The second question asked respondents to share thoughts on the Sandstone housing market that they had not shared in the portions of the survey that fed into the priority-setting session. Three themes emerged repeatedly in these comments:

1. The first was a general observation that much of the community's housing stock was old and in poor condition and required upgrades.

2. Several respondents also emphasized the need for middle-income housing targeted at working families and seniors, and several others argued that greater homeownership would benefit the community.

3. Additional single responses mentioned other themes that came out in the substantial actions question, including rehabbing or removing blighted properties, cleaning up blight in yards, more affordable housing, the difficulty of finding housing, and focusing on housing for high-risk populations.

2. BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

This broad priority recognized the importance of a strong civic life to sustain momentum on city projects. Without community unity, participants speculated that all other priorities would likely come up short. Participants saw this priority taking several forms, including:

- a. Recreational space for children, including a new playground in a central location and ball courts or fields.
- b. Specific upgrades to Robinson Park, the city's major park along the Kettle River.
- c. Creating spaces for community connections such as community gardens and an improved band shell in Train Park.
- d. Development of a new library and integrating this vision with local history and arts centers.
- e. Working collaboratively to protect natural assets.
- f. More coordination among community social groups and outdoors-focused social groups to increase cooperation and coordination in community improvement efforts.

3. REIMAGINING, BEAUTIFYING, AND EXPANDING DOWNTOWN

Much as with the housing stock, participants in the priority-setting process also recognized the importance of continuing to improve the downtown area through both cosmetic upgrades and more substantial projects. Major areas included:

- a. Revitalization of run-down and empty buildings.
- b. Removal of properties beyond the point of practical restoration.
- c. Finding ways to improve storefronts and emphasize the unique sandstone architecture.
- d. Improved curb appeal and updates to sidewalks and banners.

4. EMPOWERING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Priority-setting session participants recognized the importance of continuing to support the local business community. Ideas for doing so included:

- a. Ongoing support and business retention efforts.
- b. Considering incentives to support business growth or relocation.
- c. More restaurants with less limited hours, including a potential co-op option.
- d. Connecting business opportunities with parks and recreational tourism.
- e. Target businesses that support community needs.

5. CREATING A SAFE, ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY

This priority recognized that Sandstone can be challenging to navigate for both newcomers and residents, both due to a lack of signage or deficiencies in existing infrastructure. Focus areas included:

- a. Sidewalk extensions and upgrades (including lighting), emphasizing connections to amenities such as the grocery store and Robinson Park.
- b. Wayfinding signage throughout the community.
- c. Investment in public transportation and street maintenance.
- d. Improved broadband access.
- e. A community service liaison.

6. POSITIONING THE COMMUNITY

The final priority focused on efforts to position Sandstone to better market and brand the community.

- a. Develop a unified community message to attract people and business.
- b. Investment in tourism marketing, including an updated website, campaign, and office space.
- c. City branding on wayfinding signage.
- d. Attract new residents and develop a welcoming environment for them.

TIMELINE

The City of Sandstone has been building toward its new strategic priorities for nearly a decade, both through the development of 11 studies and reports whose recommendations formed the basis for the action areas in this process and through a series of city actions that laid the groundwork for them to be possibilities.

- 2013** — Sandstone Community Vision Progress Report as community begins to envision a new future for its library facility.
- 2014** — Sandstone Retail and Service Market Profile completed as city eyes potential retail opportunities in a proposed business park.
- 2015** — City adopted a Rental Ordinance to improve the condition of the rental properties in town.
- 2016** — Federal EDA funding secured to expand infrastructure to the business park, thereby retaining and expanding medical services to the community.
 - Roadmap to the Future study helps re-frame community narratives around the interconnections between social, environmental, and economic success.
 - Wayfinding Signage Plan brings new emphasis to community connections and creating a community ready to welcome visitors.
 - Robinson Park Master Plan updated with ideas on how to build on the park's natural beauty and strengthen its profile as a regional destination.
- 2017** — City completes a new comprehensive plan. The vision developed in this process, with some edits, was used as a guide for the 2020 priority-setting initiative.
 - EDA holds a visioning session to establish short-term community priorities.
 - City awarded a Small Cities Development Block grant to rehabilitate 17 owner-occupied homes and 3 commercial businesses.
- 2018** — Recognizing that quality housing at affordable prices has become a barrier to attraction and retention of residents, Sandstone completes a comprehensive study of its housing market.
 - City re-acquires most of the property of The Rock, a large former school building and a valued historic structure in the center of the city, which had previously been sold to a developer but underwent no development.
 - City of Sandstone connects with a community land trust that has brought its model to other rural communities in Minnesota and learns that they do not believe a community land trust is a viable model for new housing construction in Sandstone.
 - City engages engineer firm SEH to evaluate the feasibility of including rail service to new users within the Sandstone Business Park.
 - City acquires 5 residential properties from the County tax-forfeited list and demolishes the structures. 2 lots have been given to Habitat for Humanity. 1 lot has been sold for development of a single-family home. 2 lots are being offered for sale for redevelopment.

TIMELINE

2019

- City contracts with The Northspan Group to visit 15 small businesses and provide recommendations on ways to improve the local business climate.
- Northspan Group researches Sandstone's economic base and explores the potential of adding a rail spur to the business park.
- A University of Minnesota study explores rehabilitation and reuse of structures comparable to The Rock in other small Minnesota communities.
- AmeriCorps members perform some initial clean-up work on The Rock.
- City partners with non-profit to create a child care center in city-owned building.
- The Sandstone Business Park received "Shovel-Ready" status from DEED.

2020

- City of Sandstone formally acquires final outstanding parcel and now controls The Rock property in its entirety.
- City selects Community Housing Development Corporation as its developer for The Rock.
- Dovetail Partners completes a feasibility study on the creation of an ATV park, technical riding area, and youth training area in Sandstone.
- City begins laying groundwork for gathering the information produced in the 11 studies and reports and prioritizing among them to guide future work.
- City partners with the Small Business Development Center to bring an economic development consultant to Sandstone twice a month to work with existing and potential business owners.
- City recognizes that planned priority-setting work will directly support the community development initiative narrative required by Minnesota Housing's 2021 Qualified Allocation Plan, through which the community plans to pursue funding for the redevelopment of The Rock.
- City convenes two priority-setting sessions in June 2020.
- The City has been awarded a Legacy Grant for a Phase 1 Project to make improvements to Robinson Park by creating a paved trail along the Wild and Scenic Kettle River, adding aggregate trails throughout the park, improving two portages, improving parking areas, and addressing stormwater runoff.
- City representatives work with community members to enhance transportation opportunities.
- The City engages the services of engineering firm LHB for pre-design work on a new Library and civic spaces to accommodate art and history venues.

TIMELINE

2021

- If awarded funding from Minnesota Housing, redevelopment of The Rock and North Court begins.
- The City will undergo a Cultural Landscape review process regarding the historic quarry features located in Robinson Park.
- The City plans to apply for a Small Cities Development Block grant, focusing on commercial, owner-occupied residential, and rental properties in the City.
- MN DOT will be adding new sidewalk and making various sidewalk improvements through town in conjunction with their TH 123 Road Improvement Project.
- The City hopes to acquire a lot adjacent to The Rock for the purpose of creating a new City Park that will include the skatepark, a playground, and a basketball court.

PRIORITY-SETTING PROCESS: BUILDING ON PRIOR RESEARCH

Sandstone's narrative did not seek to reinvent the wheel. Since 2013, the City of Sandstone has commissioned 11 studies that provided recommendations for the future of the city. Those studies include:

1. Sandstone Community Vision Progress Report (LHB, 2013) – Community vision to identify new site and spaces for a library upgrade.
2. Sandstone Retail and Service Market Profile (University of Minnesota Extension, 2014) – Provides market area profiles to communities so they can develop retail and service sectors.
3. Roadmap to the Future (University of Minnesota, 2016) – Creates a framework to develop a resilient community in terms of social, environmental, and economic perspectives.
4. Wayfinding Signage Plan (2016) – Establishes a set of guidelines for design and implementation of public wayfinding signs.
5. Robinson Park Master Plan (WSB, 2016) – Updates an existing 1992 Robinson Park Master Plan.
6. EDA Visioning Session (Northspan, 2017) – Visioning and priority session with the Sandstone EDA.
7. City Comprehensive Plan (WSB, 2017) – Establishes a vision for Sandstone's growth and development over the next 20 years.
8. City Housing Study (Community Partners Research, 2018) – A comprehensive study of housing and market conditions in the City of Sandstone and the surrounding area.
9. Business Retention and Expansion Report (Northspan, 2019) – Overview of visits with local businesses to provide a snapshot of current conditions and resulting recommendations.
10. Cluster and Rail Study (Northspan, 2019) – Assesses Sandstone's economic base and market for a rail spur.
11. ATV Training/Obstacle Course Study (Dovetail Partners, 2020) – Assesses the feasibility of the creation of an ATV park, technical riding area, and youth training area.

Northspan compiled the recommendations from all eleven reports and worked with city staff to identify those that have been completed or are in process. A document detailing all these recommendations and their statuses is available in Appendix E.

BUILDING ON PRIOR RESEARCH, CONTINUED...

Together, the plans offered 94 recommendations for Sandstone, many several of which have been completed or are in process. There was often considerable overlap between some of the plans, as many recognized similar assets in the community and sought to move the community toward a generally aligned vision of a more prosperous future. At no point, however, did the reports cohere into a single, unified vision, and the sheer number of recommendations threatened to drown one another. In early 2020, city staff recognized that it was time to revisit the recommendations and work with the community to set priorities among them.

NEIGHBORHOOD BENEFITS

The City of Sandstone is not currently in a Qualified Census Tract. It is, however, a federally designated opportunity zone, a status for which it qualified based on its relative distress. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, its median household income is \$45,074, or over \$23,000 lower than the state of Minnesota, and its poverty rate is 13.2%, or substantially higher than the state's 9.8% rate. These rates are more extreme in the City of Sandstone itself, which is only a small portion the larger tract; Sandstone's median household income is \$37,222 and its poverty rate sits at 18.5%.

- The census tract has witnessed numerous major investments in recent years. Some of the most substantial include:
- Development of new grocery store facility, Chris' Food Center, in Sandstone, 2011
- Federal EDA grant to extend infrastructure to Sandstone business park, 2016
- Completion of new Essentia Health hospital in Sandstone, 2017
- Completion of new pharmacy and clinic on site of the hospital in business park, 2017
- Completion of new assisted living facility adjacent to hospital in business park, 2017
- New branch space for Members Cooperative Credit Union in business park, 2017
- Upgrades to Train Park, a park two blocks from The Rock, including a mural and added amenities, 2019
- A new, privately owned 44-unit 3-story age-in-place assisted living facility is currently under construction.
- A new Dollar General store is just completing construction and will be opening soon.

These projects also appear in Figure 3. They all feed in to the shared vision for a resilient community that builds on its assets.



CONCLUSIONS

The City of Sandstone's priority-setting process unified community members behind a common vision and laid out a plan that integrated a series of past recommendations and community ideas in a set of priorities for future work. It highlighted six major areas that combine to support the community vision of a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets.

In the near term, the process demonstrated a strong need for additional community housing developments. The City of Sandstone believes the emergence of housing as the foremost priority demonstrates the importance of redevelopment projects such as The Rock. The redevelopment of The Rock alone will not solve all of Sandstone's housing problems, and it falls within a broader effort to explore upgrades to single-family units, the rehab of current multi-family units, and creation of additional units through other means. The project as proposed, however, creates new units to address a dated housing stock, provides affordable opportunities for local workforce and people with limited incomes, addresses a blighted property, and preserves the Section 8 HAP Contract at North Court Apartments. It also helps build connections across the community and integrates other portions of its vision into a coherent whole.

In the longer term, the priority-setting process has created a framework of goals that will help guide Sandstone toward its vision. By thinking holistically about projects such as The Rock, stakeholders will be able to ensure these future developments will help move the city toward many or all its goals. This new framework sets the stage for future work plans and will allow Sandstone to realize growth in a manner that enjoys broad community support.

APPENDIX A
SANDSTONE PRIORITY-SETTING
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Dear Community Member,

You are invited to participate in the City of Sandstone’s priority setting sessions. These virtual sessions will allow us to build off numerous plans and studies conducted by the City in recent years. Through the sessions on June 11 and 18, we will identify areas of focus for the next 3-5 years that align with our collective vision for the community. With your input, the City will be able to direct its time and resources toward this shared vision. Please respond to this survey ASAP before 12noon on Tuesday, June 9th.

Thank you for your participation!

Be well,

NEW 2ND INTRO PARAGRAPH:

Please take a moment to find the reference document “Sandstone Actions Compilation for Priority Setting Sessions” for this survey on the city website for the general public at <https://sandstone.govoffice.com/planninganddevelopment>.

QUESTION 1:

What is your association with the City of Sandstone?

- a. City staff member
- b. City Council / Board or Commission member
- c. Community member / Other

QUESTION 2:

In the 2017 City of Sandstone Comprehensive Plan process, a vision statement was created. Please review the current and recommended vision and respond to the statement below.

CURRENT VISION

The City of Sandstone is a place to live and grow where basic services are provided and where natural and cultural assets are utilized in a manner that is economically, environmentally, and socially resilient.

UPDATED NEW VISION

In order to simplify and clarify the vision, we recommend the following update to the vision:

The City of Sandstone is a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets.

Do you agree that this updated vision statement best represents the intent of the community?

- Yes
- No

QUESTION 3:

Take time to review the Sandstone Actions Compilation for Priority Setting Session PDF and consider the following question:

“What innovative, substantial actions will aid us in becoming a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets?”

Now:

- Brainstorm a list on your own, shoot for at least 7 ideas.
- Then select your 3-5 best ideas and submit them here. (Must be 10 words or shorter.)

APPENDIX A
SANDSTONE PRIORITY-SETTING
SURVEY QUESTIONS, CONTINUED ...

Focus on ideas that are feasible and within the realm of this group’s ability to accomplish over the next 3-5 years.

- 1.X
- 2.X
- 3.X
- 4.X
- 5.X

The City of Sandstone is currently working on the plan to redevelop the former school building known as The Rock. As part of this process, it will seek funding from Minnesota Housing, which requires a community development narrative that details housing opportunities and challenges in the city. Please answer the following question given this context:

QUESTION 4: In your opinion, is housing in Sandstone available at prices that reflect the needs of the community? (1-5 rating)

1 = Housing not at all available at prices that reflect the needs of the community; 5 = Housing very available at prices that reflect the needs of the community

Do you have additional thoughts about Sandstone’s housing market that you did not share previously that you believe are important to this narrative?

Are you able to join us for the priority-setting sessions on Zoom via **video** on Thursday, June 11 from 6:00-7:30 PM and Thursday, June 18 from 6:00-7:30 PM?

- Yes, I can
- No, I cannot
- I can only attend one

Are you interested in participating but unable to do so by video? *The sessions will be interactive and include visuals, so we strongly recommend attendance via Zoom.*

- I can participate by video
- I am unable to participate by video

If you are unable to participate by video, please share your email with us so we can contact you. *Your responses to previous questions will not be tied to your email.*



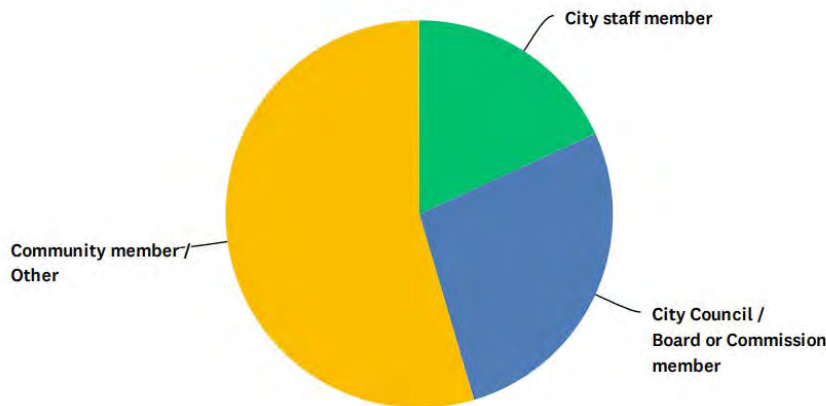
PRIORITY SETTING SURVEY SUMMARY

Participants

The City of Sandstone sought feedback from city elected officials and board members, city staff, and the general public on community priorities based on the recommendations outlined in 11 reports, plans, and studies commissioned over the past seven years. A total of 22 community members responded to the survey, and a majority of respondents were community members with no other affiliation.

Q1 What is your association with the City of Sandstone?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

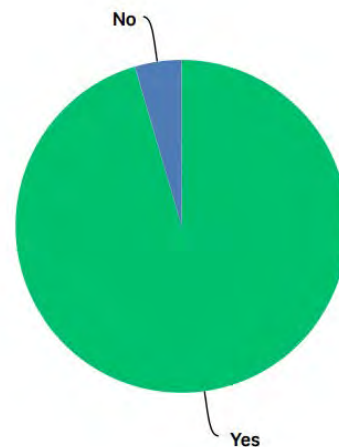


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
City staff member	18.18%	4
City Council / Board or Commission member	27.27%	6
Community member / Other	54.55%	12
TOTAL		22

Community Vision

The first question asked respondents to weigh a proposed update to the community vision detailed in the 2017 comprehensive plan, which read: *The City of Sandstone is a place to live and grow where basic services are provided and where natural and cultural assets are utilized in a manner that is economically, environmentally, and socially resilient.*

A clearer, simplified version reads: ***The City of Sandstone is a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets.*** 95% of respondents agreed this simplified vision accurately captured the community’s intent.





PRIORITY SETTING SURVEY SUMMARY

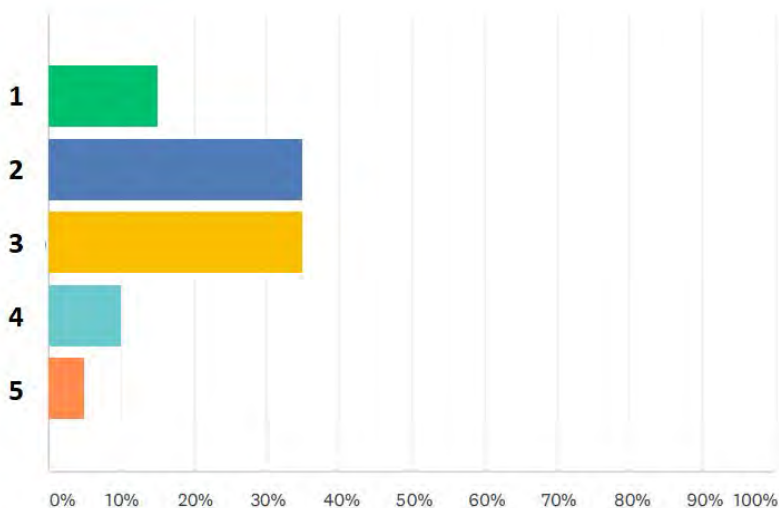
Innovative, Substantial Actions

The next question in the survey built on this vision and asked what innovative, substantial actions would aid Sandstone in becoming a resilient community that builds on its natural and cultural assets? Community members submitted a wide range of responses, the most frequent of which are summarized in the table below. Numerous additional responses received one or two mentions and will be available in final documents that summarize this strategic planning process.

Comment	No. of Mentions
New community playground and/or recreation areas for children	6
Rehab or remove substandard housing	5
Rehab or remove downtown businesses/storefronts	5
Upgrades to Robinson Park	5
Community wayfinding signage	4
Improve downtown area sidewalks and streetscapes	4
Publicize community’s assets (to attract new residents/visitors)	4
Upgrade community’s online presence (especially for marketing)	3
Increase options for affordable housing	3
Business retention and expansion efforts	3

Rating Housing Availability at Prices that Meet Needs

Two additional questions asked for additional insights from Sandstone residents on the housing market. First, residents were asked to rate whether housing in Sandstone is available at prices that reflect the needs of the community on a 1-5 scale, with 1 meaning it was not at all available and 5 meaning it was very available. The average rating from respondents was 2.55 and 85% of respondents gave a score of 3 or less, showing general dissatisfaction with Sandstone housing options.



Additional Housing Market Comments

The final question asked respondents to share thoughts on the Sandstone housing market that they had not shared previously in the process. Three themes emerged repeatedly in these comments.

- (1) The first was a general observation that much of the community’s housing stock was old and in poor condition and required upgrades.
- (2) Several respondents also emphasized the need for middle-income housing targeted at working families and seniors, and several others argued that greater homeownership would benefit the community.
- (3) Additional single responses mentioned other themes that came out in the substantial actions question, including rehabbing or removing blighted properties, cleaning up blight in yards, more affordable housing, the difficulty of finding housing, and focusing on housing for high-risk populations.

APPENDIX C
SANDSTONE PRIORITY SETTING SESSIONS
6.11 AND 6.18 OUTCOMES

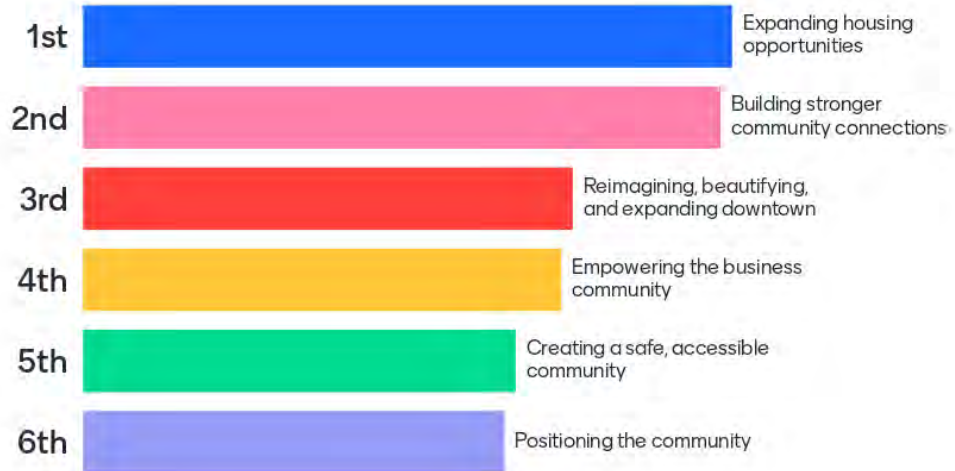
CITY OF
Sandstone *Minnesota* **PRIORITIES**

REIMAGINING, BEAUTIFYING, AND EXPANDING	POSITIONING THE COMMUNITY	BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS	EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES	CREATING A SAFE, ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY	EMPOWERING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates to downtown sidewalks and flag banners • Revitalize run down and empty buildings in downtown area • Main street facelift: teardowns, rehab, architectural theme, point out history • Restructure old downtown businesses--teardown or rebuild • Improve curb appeal / first impression • Continue to find ways to rehab blighted properties • Fix/remove blighted businesses. • Ask businesses to try to make storefronts more appealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office space for tourism • Develop city website AND keep it updated • publicize Sandstone's assets as much as possible • Promote tourism by highlighting local attractions • create brand and wayfinding signage • City website--emphasize natural resources • city website--emphasize businesses for use of natural resources • Signage for attractions • Welcome Center at entry point to City--Old gateway building? • Unified community message / marketing to attract people/business • Sandstone as "top of mind" tourist destination--invest in marketing firm • Attract young / educated people to and back to Sandstone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kid friendly locations- playground, courts, baseball fields • create new city park - playground, skatepark, basketball court • Collaboration with outdoor "social groups" • Child friendly / handicap accessible playgrounds • Centralized/nice playground for youth. • Work on the Robinson Park plan for updating by having electrical power on site • develop new Library / History / Art Center • Integrate KREEC site into Robinson Park with compatible uses • Robinson Park, hiking and natural • new library • Pull community (social) groups together for events • Ways to protect our natural assets as more people discover them. • Centrally located playground or activity site for children • Community gardens to facilitate intergenerational interactions • Keep public informed of Robinson Park progress, publicize the park • Improvement / upgrading of existing parks • Ball fields/courts for youth. • Where's the sandstone in Sandstone- clean and highlight the beauty • Train Park updates-new band shell possibly larger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore moderate rent income restricted housing • Continue to support the need for affordable housing • Housing rehabilitation for single family owners • create home ownership incentives • Tear down blighted neighboring homes and combine lots for larger homes • Fix/remove blighted housing. • remove junk from front yards • City built housing for sale • More affordable housing • Restoration of existing housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayfinding signage • Extend accessibility (e.g.) sidewalks to community amenities • City investment in public transportation, dial-a-ride, and special event transportation • Wayfinding to direct travelers to parks and businesses • Walking friendly community--pedestrian lighting, sidewalks on side streets • Walkability, Sidewalks that connect the City to the trail along 23 • Community Service Liaison • Better streets and winter maintenance • Create a welcoming environment for newcomers. • Access to broadband 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the business in our community • Continue business retention efforts • Supporting new startups re: recreational tourism • Create/capitalize on any/all incentives for small business to relocate into Sandstone • More restaurants • Attract businesses that support community needs • Cooperative store space • Restaurants that are open more than a few days/ limited hours. • co-operative restaurant/food hub • Find a connection between businesses and park activities

APPENDIX D
SANDSTONE PRIORITY
MENTI RANKING

Mentimeter

Rank the priorities from 1-6 (1 being most important and 6 being least important):



APPENDIX E
SANDSTONE ACTIONS COMPILATION
FOR PRIORITY SETTING SESSIONS

This document is a compilation of action recommendations from eleven different studies commissioned for the City of Sandstone between 2013 - 2020.

Report Details & Purpose	Actions	Status
<p>City Housing Study</p> <p>2018 - Community Partners Research</p> <p>Provide a comprehensive study of housing market conditions in the City of Sandstone and surrounding area.</p>	<p>Homeownership Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential demand for 1 to 2 moderate to higher priced houses annually • Potential demand for 1 to 2 affordable new construction houses annually • Promote attached single family housing construction (i.e. twin homes or town homes) • Promote affordable existing home ownership options (slow/limit conversion of single-family homes into rental properties) • Consider the creation of home ownership incentives using available resources (new construction incentives, lower connection fees, tax abatement) • Monitor the residential lot inventory • Shelve/don't move forward with Community Land Trust <p>Rental Housing Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the development of 26 -32 market rate townhouse style rental units • Develop 10 to 12 units of apartment style market rate moderate rent housing • Develop subsidized rental housing as resources allow • Explore opportunities for moderate rent income-restricted housing development • Monitor future senior housing with higher services needs • Explore opportunities to offer senior housing options with light services <p>Housing Rehabilitation and Preservation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to promote owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs (SCDP) • Promote rental housing rehabilitation programs • Continue to utilize the rental licensing requirement to monitor the inventory • Consider the development of a purchase/rehabilitation/resale program • Continue to demolish and clear substandard structures • Continue to promote downtown/commercial improvements 	
<p>City Housing Study (ctd.)</p> <p>2018 - Community Partners Research</p> <p>Provide a comprehensive study of housing market conditions in the City of Sandstone and surrounding area.</p>		
<p>Sandstone Community Vision Progress Report</p> <p>2013 - LHB</p> <p>Community vision to identify new site and spaces for library upgrade</p>	<p>Conduct pre-design process with conceptual floor plan for new library to compare with top 3 sites</p>	<p>DONE</p>

APPENDIX E
SANDSTONE ACTIONS COMPILATION
FOR PRIORITY SETTING SESSIONS
CONTINUED...

<p>Roadmap to the Future</p> <p>2016 - U of M/CSBR</p> <p>Creating a framework to develop a resilient community in terms of social, environmental, and economic perspectives.</p>	Embrace the natural resource recreation economy		
	<p>Create a clear 'brand' identity for Sandstone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design & install entry markers and signage that stands out and portrays Sandstone's history and character Solicit unique service businesses that give travelers a reason to stop Solicit specialty businesses to develop at I-35 intersection 		
	<p>Create places that foster culture and social connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing/repurposing/reconstructing existing locations to better serve community scale gatherings Long range planning for city hall/library redesign Establishment of a 'town square' type park (Main St park space) Expanded and modernized community center within the city 	Underway	
	Identify and improve connectivity for pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles		
	<p>Revitalize downtown & surrounding areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, recognizable arrival experience Improve public open space downtown Improve or repurpose commercial building stock and infill sites in downtown & surrounding areas Leverage train maintenance facility by creating opportunity for train passengers to access downtown Sandstone 		
	Include Sandstone's extended community (rural residents, seasonal residents, recreational visitors)		
	Embrace an entrepreneurial mindset and vision, followed by action in the community		
<p>Roadmap to the Future (ctd.)</p> <p>2016 - U of M/CSBR</p> <p>Creating a framework to develop a resilient community in terms of social, environmental, and economic perspectives.</p>	Meet the housing needs of current & future residents		
	Eco-Industrial Park and I-35 Interchange Development		
	<p>City Comprehensive Plan</p> <p>2017 - Establishing a vision for Sandstone's growth and development over the next 20 years</p>	<p>2017 Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Zoning Ordinance to reflect Comprehensive Plan direction on land use guidance, density, and design standards Communicate land use plan with goals, strategies and tasks to EDA Robinson Park Grant Application Develop wayfinding signs per plan from 2016 Place AMIBA and Main Street Discussion on EDA agenda Create Housing Task Force to identify resources and strategies that the City can take advantage of to find solutions to achieve housing goals. 	Underway
		<p>2018 Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene local businesses and discuss their role in business growth and retention program. 	
		Park Inventory	

APPENDIX E
SANDSTONE ACTIONS COMPILATION
FOR PRIORITY SETTING SESSIONS
CONTINUED...

<p>Sandstone Retail and Service Market Area Profile</p> <p>2014 - U of M Extension</p> <p>Provide market area profiles to communities so that they can develop retail and service sectors</p>	<p>Analyze and utilize data provided in the report to develop individual business and main street strategies</p>	
<p>Business Retention and Expansion Report</p> <p>2019 - Northspan</p> <p>Visit with local businesses to provide a snapshot of current conditions</p>	<p>Encourage the formation of a tourism board that emphasizes the Sandstone area's natural assets</p> <p>Improve community wayfinding to highlight access points to the Kettle River and downtown business district</p> <p>Aggressively pursue efforts to clean up blighted properties</p> <p>Consider possible incentives for local businesses</p> <p>Plan proactively for changes in the downtown core</p>	
<p>Rail Cluster/Study Report</p> <p>2019 - Northspan</p> <p>Assess Sandstone's economic base and market for a rail spur</p> <p>Rail Cluster/Study Report (ctd.)</p>	<p>Do not prioritize rail, but leave the option open, if possible</p> <p>Cultivate a regional tourism attraction effort</p> <p>Target new investment instead of internal relocation</p> <p>Emphasize Sandstone's innovative potential</p> <p>Continue to expand transportation options</p>	
<p>EDA Visioning Session</p> <p>2017 - Northspan</p> <p>Visioning and priority setting session with Sandstone EDA</p>	<p>Retention of Ford dealership</p> <p>Establishing a daycare</p> <p>New hotel</p> <p>New restaurant</p> <p>Cabela's/other outdoor discount outlet</p> <p>Attracting a medical supply company</p>	<p>DONE</p> <p>Underway</p>
<p>Wayfinding Signage Plan</p> <p>2016</p> <p>Establish a set of guidelines for design and implementation of public wayfinding signs</p>	<p>Design and install uniform signage for the city of Sandstone including: Gateway signs, Monument signs, Directional signs & Kiosks</p>	
<p>ATV Training/Obstacle Course</p> <p>2020 - Dovetail Partners</p> <p>Assessing the feasibility of the creation of an ATV park, technical riding area, and youth training area</p>	<p>Put ATV project on hold and focus on working with MN DNR, Pine County and ATV clubs to connect City to existing trail system</p> <p>Continue exploring alternative projects for the site regarding economic/tourism development</p>	<p>Underway</p>
<p>Robinson Park Master Plan</p> <p>2016 - WSB</p> <p>Updating the existing 1992 Robinson Park Master Plan</p>	<p>Accommodate a variety of recreational activities for both local and regional park users</p> <p>Provide recreational amenities during all seasons of the year</p> <p>Improve the overall park experience and safety of the park</p> <p>Provide a better connection between the local community and the park</p>	

APPENDIX E
SANDSTONE ACTIONS COMPILATION
FOR PRIORITY SETTING SESSIONS
CONTINUED...

Robinson Park Master Plan (cont.)	Provide a balance between preserving and enhancing the natural resources and scenic qualities while accommodating active recreational park development	
	Portray the historical significance of the site that is currently be missed and protect artifacts	
	Encourage ongoing stewards - encourage youth to get them more involved	
	Provide proper accessibility to the park and recreational amenities	
	Delineate vehicular vs. pedestrian routes through the park	
	Promote future business opportunities in Sandstone by highlighting the parks' significance	