

City of Sandusky  
**Strategic Plan**  
Executive Summary  
February 8, 2005

It is time for a new culture in our organization. In the past we have been able to perform our services without having to worry too much about another entity coming along and doing them better than us. After all, we were government and we were the only ones providing that service in our market. We did not have to worry too much about the choices that people made because we were the only choice that they had. We are no longer in the past and there are many choices for people nowadays. They can easily choose another community if they do not like ours, and just a quick look at historical data reveals that that is exactly what people have been doing for the past twenty years. They have been choosing other communities. Their choices have led to a decline in our population and a loss in our wealth. Our new culture must be one of competition. We are competing for people's choices. Every day we must fight to be a place of choice so that businesses, visitors, and residents that have choices choose us.

Being a great competitor is all about understanding and action. Understanding comes with knowing our competitive position and action comes with developing plans that take advantage of our strengths and minimize our weaknesses. The key to achieving understanding is creating a culture where it is not only acceptable to acknowledge the existence of problems, but actually developing a system that praises those that point it out. There is no better example of the pitfalls of lack of understanding than the events that led to the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. When the space shuttle Challenger exploded on its ascension into space during the 1980's the NASA space program and our country suffered a terrible loss of lives and property. The most devastating fact revealed in the investigation of the potential causes of the explosion was that a fear of acknowledging a known problem led to the malfunction and subsequent tragedy. At NASA the scientists work in teams, much like we do at the city. When trying to work through development issues or launch issues scientists would assemble to make sure that they covered all potential problems. During one such meeting most of the team agreed that all problems had been covered. One scientist, however, realized that there was a problem with a part called an O-ring and that the problem could lead to excessive friction that may cause an explosion. Rather than point out the problem to the group and risk delaying an already delayed launch, the scientist let it go. This is an extreme example but it illustrates in a dramatic fashion the potential consequences of lack of understanding.

A lot of us are afraid of understanding. We are embarrassed to gain understanding because it will probably reveal some of our shortcomings. Part of our shift in culture to a competitive organization must include a willingness to reveal our shortcomings. There is nothing wrong with having inadequacies. What is wrong is to have them and not know of them or to know of them and not do anything to fix them. We must be proud to identify areas where we do not perform well and even more proud to develop plans to improve.

With understanding must come action. People of long ago did not have a mechanism to clean their teeth. A few of them probably noticed as their choppers slowly decayed from the first speck of plaque to the heart-wrenching pain of a full-blown cavity. They understood that their teeth were decaying but had no tools to take action. Today, we need not stand idly by and

watch our teeth decay. We have toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, mouthwash, and dentists as tools to take action against decay. However, many organizations today are like people of long ago that might have been plopped down in the twenty-first century. They understand their teeth are decaying, but they do not know that tools to take action to fix the problem are available to them. Some organizations are like a person of today that chooses not to address decay even though they know all the tools that are available. In both cases there is understanding without action. Time and resources will not permit us to take action on every problem, but that should not stop us from gaining a thorough understanding and then prioritizing our action plans.

Historical data reveals that we have had twenty years of decline in wealth as a percentage of the county's wealth and that all the while our demand for services has been going up because of the population that we serve. If this trend continues the city could be bankrupt and will for sure become less and less effective at providing services. All development indicators reveal that this trend will continue without intervention. It is too easy to develop on land outside of the city and developers will migrate to those areas. Our land inventory data reveals that we have some reason to be hopeful. There are lots of vacant or underutilized properties in the city and we have an opportunity to make those areas ready for redevelopment. It will take investment on our part, but if we do not do it we will not capture the growth.

With understanding and action we can compete to be a place of choice. It is with that in mind that we have researched our competitive position and used our research to create twenty action plans that are designed to take advantage of our strengths, create opportunities, minimize our weaknesses, and squash our threats. The twenty plans are all designed to achieve one or more of our six major wealth capturing goals: *promotion, development of housing, development of business, customer-focused organization, celebrating our cultural diversity, and the creation of strategic relationships*. We have come to understand that we are an organization of service providers and that the level of service that we can provide is entirely dependent on the wealth in our community. The resources that we use to provide our services come from the monetary value of the people we serve – through income taxes – and the real value of their property – through property, bed, and admissions taxes. When values are high we will have plenty of resources to provide service and when they are low we will struggle to provide services. Therefore, we must be effective and efficient operators at the same time that we stimulate growth and attract wealth. The implementation of these plans will lead to the City of Sandusky becoming a low-cost, high-quality producer of services. We will be competitive in everything that we do and we will create an exit strategy for things that we do not do well. It will also lead to significantly increased revenues in our major tax generators – income, property, admissions, and bed tax.

The full version of the strategic plan contains a description of the background and the rationale used to develop the plan. It also contains a detailed description of each action plan. The City Commissioners prioritized the twenty action plans. All low- or no-cost plans should be implemented as the City Manager and staff have available time and resources. Items that require investment will be completed as funding becomes available and in order of importance as detailed on the prioritization sheet.