



**City Council Work Session
Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at 5:00 PM
Buckham West Senior Center**

AGENDA

1. Call to Order

2. Items for Discussion

- A. Update on the Long Range Transmission Project - Xcel Energy
- B. Strategic Planning - SWOT Analysis Review- Allyson Brunette, AB Consulting

3. Future Discussion

4. Adjournment

(The Council may meet as a group for dinner)

Please contact the City Administrator's Office if you need special accommodations while attending this meeting.

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Council Work Session Memorandum

TO: Mayor and City Council
THROUGH: Jessica Kinser, City Administrator
FROM:
MEETING DATE: May 20, 2025
SUBJECT: Update on the Long Range Transmission Project - Xcel Energy

Discussion:

Anna Thill and Jake Andre from Xcel Energy will provide an update on the Long Range Transmission Project.

Attachments:



Council Work Session Memorandum

TO: Mayor and City Council
THROUGH: Jessica Kinser, City Administrator
FROM:
MEETING DATE: May 20, 2025
SUBJECT: Strategic Planning - SWOT Analysis Review-
Allyson Brunette, AB Consulting

Discussion:

Allyson Brunette of AB Consulting will lead the Mayor and Council and the leadership team through a review and discussion of the SWOT analysis.

Attachments:

1. Final Faribault SWOT Analysis

Faribault SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS: Your brand differentiators – the things that set you apart.

- **A Committed Community with a Strong Identity:** Faribault's greatest asset is its people. There's a consistent sense of shared pride in the city's identity and a strong culture of relationship-building across residents and staff. Many describe the city as welcoming, connected, and familiar. Community engagement has improved in recent years, including with the Somali community, and residents are increasingly stepping into leadership roles. While challenges exist, there is a sense that Faribault's people are "all in" and ready to move the city forward together.
- **Dedicated and Knowledgeable Staff:** City staff members are deeply committed to serving the community. They believe in the work they do and take pride in its quality. Department heads and front-line employees alike see the City as a good place to work, with a strong foundation of knowledge and a desire to improve services. Staff are aware of community challenges and eager to be part of the solution, given the right direction, tools, and support. Many also see an opportunity to modernize internal systems and build a stronger organizational culture.
- **Infrastructure and Physical Assets:** Faribault benefits from a wide range of community assets that contribute to its quality of life and economic vitality. These include an active industrial park with room for expansion, a regional airport, an extensive park and trail system, and the second-largest historic commercial district in Minnesota. The city is known for its beautiful downtown, outdoor recreation amenities, walkability, and proximity to larger metropolitan areas. These features support business growth, tourism, and a strong sense of place.
- **Buckham Memorial Library as a Civic Anchor:** The library is a cornerstone of community life in Faribault. Residents frequently cite it as one of the City's greatest assets, particularly due to its inclusive programming, commitment to equity, and responsiveness to community needs. From cultural programming to youth engagement, the library's staff exemplify a customer-first approach and are continually adapting services to meet a changing population.
- **Cultural Institutions and History:** Local organizations such as the Paradise Center for the Arts, Rice County Historical Society, and River Bend Nature Center provide cultural and educational opportunities that enrich community life. These institutions support youth engagement, celebrate Faribault's diverse history, and build civic pride. Combined with historic architecture and natural features like the rivers and bluffs, they create a compelling story of place.

WEAKNESSES: The most pressing issues you need to address.

- **Limited Housing Options and Affordability Challenges:** Faribault faces a significant housing shortage across multiple income levels. There is a lack of affordable, quality rental units and limited pathways to homeownership for working-class families. This is especially urgent for renters, many of whom are cost-burdened, and for immigrant and

BIPOC families facing systemic barriers. Vacancy rates are extremely low, and many neighborhoods are experiencing disinvestment. There is also a need to clarify and strengthen the role of the Faribault HRA in addressing these challenges.

- **Siloed Government Functions:** There is a notable lack of alignment between the City and other public institutions, particularly Faribault Public Schools. Despite shared goals around youth development, workforce readiness, and community engagement, collaboration is limited. Internally, coordination among City departments can be inconsistent, with staff noting a need for more cross-departmental planning and communication. Siloed operations limit innovation, slow progress, and make it harder to deliver seamless service to residents.
- **Perception and Identity Challenges:** A significant number of residents, including those with school-age children, hold a negative perception of Faribault in comparison to other communities. This affects talent attraction and retention, business recruitment, and school enrollment. The City is often seen as lacking in amenities or opportunities, even when those assets exist. These perceptions are compounded by data showing low scores in quality-of-life metrics like safety, education, and economic opportunity—often fueled by systemic inequities and public misunderstanding of the realities many residents face.
- **Staff Capacity and Organizational Support:** While Faribault's staff are dedicated, they report challenges with workload, professional development, and organizational structure. Departments are often understaffed relative to growing service demands. Burnout, limited communication across teams, and reactive management practices are common. There is also a lack of ongoing training for both frontline service delivery and supervisory roles. Employees want support to grow their skills, better serve residents, and manage the complexity of local government work.

OPPORTUNITIES: Your toolkit of ways to address weaknesses or threats and support strengths.

- **A More Inclusive, Youthful, and Diverse Faribault:** Faribault's demographic shifts present an opportunity to shape a more vibrant, resilient, and future-ready city. As Faribault becomes younger and more racially and culturally diverse, the City can fully embrace this as a strength rather than a challenge to overcome. By celebrating cultural identity, promoting civic inclusion, and expanding opportunity for all, Faribault can position itself as a model of what a small, inclusive city can be. This includes investing in language access, youth leadership, and small business support for underrepresented groups.
- **Improved Communication and Community Engagement:** There is a growing demand for more accessible, timely, and transparent communication from the City. Residents want to understand City services, initiatives, and decisions in plain language and across multiple platforms—including in multiple languages. A coordinated, strategic communications plan, supported by both staff and elected officials, can increase trust, participation, and understanding. Internally, this effort also includes improving

communication between departments and ensuring that staff feel informed, included, and supported.

- **Buckham Center Redevelopment as a Community Hub:** The redevelopment of the community center—offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a civic heart for Faribault. Community members envision a space where families can access education, recreation, wellness, and public services in one accessible location. The project has potential to model equity-centered design, build social connection, and promote holistic community wellbeing. It also is imperative to consider the implications of movement and redevelopment on the anchors of the existing site: the Buckham Memorial Library and Buckham West Senior Center.
- **Reposition Faribault's Narrative and Reputation:** Faribault has an opportunity to tell a more accurate, hopeful, and inclusive story about who it is and where it's going. Highlighting the city's cultural vibrancy, historic downtown, parks, arts, and diverse business economy can improve external perceptions and internal pride. Messaging aligned with Vision 2040, local branding efforts, and tourism strategies can help reposition Faribault as a place of opportunity—for families, entrepreneurs, and young people alike.
- **Ensure Top-Notch Customer Service in Planning, Inspection, Code Enforcement:** Residents and businesses continue to call for clearer, simpler, and more responsive processes across permitting, licensing, zoning, and code enforcement. Staff are also eager for better tools and systems to deliver services. Adopting a “help-first” mindset, improving internal workflows, and offering better public education can reduce friction and increase satisfaction. Technology upgrades and metrics tracking will help improve both experience and outcomes.
- **Investing in Staff Development and Management Training:** Faribault can strengthen service delivery by expanding training across all levels of the organization. Front-line staff need consistent onboarding and customer service skills, while supervisors need training in effective management, coaching, and team leadership. Investing in people—especially during transition periods—can improve retention, increase staff confidence, and reinforce a culture of continuous improvement.
- **Modernizing Fees with Equity in Mind:** Faribault can evaluate and adjust its fee structures to improve financial sustainability, particularly in areas like licensing, permits, and recreation. Done thoughtfully, this can balance cost recovery with access, ensuring programs remain inclusive and well-funded. Transparent communication and data-driven decision-making will be critical, especially when serving cost-burdened populations. This is an important consideration as infrastructure replacement of sewer / water and stormwater may pose an undue burden on vulnerable households.
- **Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Poverty:** Nearly 60% of Faribault residents live below 60% of area median income—a persistent challenge that shapes health, education, housing, and economic opportunity. City leaders and staff must deepen their understanding of what this means in everyday terms. Investing in data storytelling, community listening, and cross-sector partnerships can help elected officials and administrators connect policy decisions with lived experience. Without this, well-intended actions may miss the mark or reinforce existing disparities.

THREATS: Less pressing issues than weaknesses, but will become weaknesses if not resolved.

- **Persistent Poverty and Structural Inequities:** Economic hardship remains widespread, with a majority of Faribault's population living below a livable wage. These challenges are not evenly distributed, and racial disparities persist across housing, income, and health. Unless directly addressed, these conditions will continue to strain public services, limit workforce growth, and erode trust in institutions. To move forward, Faribault must take a deeper look at how policies, systems, and practices impact those living in or near poverty—and design solutions that match the scale and complexity of the need.
- **Reliance on State Aid and Fiscal Volatility:** Faribault's budget remains heavily dependent on Local Government Aid (LGA) and other intergovernmental transfers. Economic downturns or political shifts at the state level could threaten funding, limit service delivery, and force difficult tradeoffs. A long-term financial strategy—grounded in resilience, flexibility, and local control—will be key to maintaining essential services.
- **Loss of Institutional Knowledge and Leadership Continuity:** Ongoing staff turnover, particularly among senior leadership, poses a risk to stability and institutional memory. As retirements and transitions continue, the City must prioritize knowledge transfer, leadership development, and culture-building. Without this, Faribault risks reactive decision-making, staff disengagement, and disruption of essential services.
- **Aging Infrastructure and Growth Pressures:** Although Faribault's infrastructure is currently viewed as a strength, anticipated growth in population and housing will place additional pressure on roads, utilities, and public facilities. Without proactive investment, deferred maintenance could grow more costly, especially for long-life systems like sewer, water, and stormwater. While the City has taken steps to forecast and manage infrastructure replacement, rising costs may fall disproportionately on lower-income residents. Careful planning, communication, and equitable cost-sharing strategies will be essential to ensure growth doesn't deepen existing inequities or overwhelm aging systems.
- **Risk of Community Division:** Without intentional efforts to build intercultural connections and shared goals, Faribault's rapid demographic changes could result in social isolation and conflict for various groups, particularly the Somali and Hispanic communities. For instance, if newer immigrant families feel excluded from civic life or City services, it can weaken cohesion and trust across the City. This can lead to a sense of separation between existing residents and newcomers, compounding the issue of division and undermining the overall unity of the community.