

REPORT OF THE EDUCATION AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING TEAM

OUR VISION

We envision a Richfield that strives to be a community where people of all ages and backgrounds have opportunities for continuous learning which enhances the quality of their lives.

REMARKS ON OUR TEAM'S PERSPECTIVE

Richfield, as a vital, progressive urban community, will promote the development of both high-quality schools within its borders and excellent options in learning for all of life. Richfield will pursue this mission through initiatives of its City Government in cooperation with educational and learning outlets in its area of influence. The mission of promoting excellent education and life-long learning is an integral part of the City's interest in developing the best possible community for all of its citizens.

Richfield has a direct and ongoing interest in education and learning. An educated and ever-learning population is foundational to a healthy and prosperous community. Such people make for a responsible and responsive citizenry, and they are the engine of civic well-being. In as much as the City of Richfield exists to promote and serve the best interests of its citizens, quality education and learning resources are of crucial significance to the City.

Continuous education and learning are necessities of modern life. While important to all people in all times in all places, life-long learning is especially critical in urban communities like Richfield. Well-educated people who are engaged in ongoing learning make for a flexible and dependable work force and provide for stability and civility in the public life of a community. Life-long learning is essential to the quality of life of our citizens.

We live in a period of transition with respect to education and applied skills. Structured elementary to high school education and life-long learning opportunities in Richfield will need to focus on changes in society and in the family, on the globalization of the economy, and on the increasing diversity of people in Richfield. Such skills like cursive writing will be less critical for a literate person, while the ability to keyboard and to interpret visual media will become more critical. We need to provide life-long learning opportunities with an eye focused on the kinds of knowledge and skills literate persons may need in the future. Some of these skills and learning techniques may not have been invented yet.

It is in the best interest of any community to insure that opportunities for first-rate education and learning exist within its borders. It is simply a matter of quality community development. Absent such opportunities, the strength of the community will dwindle as people search out more attractive places to live.

Learning is the product of innate abilities, acquired capacities, the mastery of a body of knowledge, and internal motivation. Some learning is pursued for instrumental purposes; that is, to gain skills and expertise that put a person in a more favorable competitive position. Learning

is also pursued for reasons that relate more to the enrichment of life and that spring from personal preferences and interests.

The acquired capabilities for learning are mostly the result of early schooling in what are called elementary-to-high school educational systems, regardless of whether these systems are public, private, or found in home school contexts. Such capacities are strengthened and expanded in post-secondary schools. It is in the interest of Richfield to facilitate the existence of quality elementary to high school education within the City.

Life-long learning opportunities are more various and compete in the market for the attention and patronage of learners. When, how, and why such resources are used is a matter of the needs and wants of individuals. Much of what we know as life-long learning takes place in non-traditional or informal settings. It is in the interest of Richfield to promote the development of life-long learning opportunities which offer citizens the chance to grow as people and to enrich their lives.

In this document, we outline four major goals for the City of Richfield with respect to education and life-long learning. These goals are discussed as separate issues with discreet strategies for each goal. Yet, we want to emphasize that, in practice, these goals are inter-related. We also want to emphasize that there is, and should be, an active inter-connectivity among the organizations and institutions which provide learning opportunities. We make no specific recommendations about furthering this inter-connectivity with respect to particular goals. Rather, we believe that the existing providers should work together at greater cooperation with a view to insuring that their program offerings are as complementary as possible. We also encourage relevant departments and staff of the City Government to foster this inter-connectivity within the community.

In accord with the philosophical perspective outlined in these remarks, the Education and Life-Long Learning Team of the Richfield 2020 project believes that the City Council should pursue as a matter of formal policy the goals set out in the rest of this document. It is expected that the Council, by adopting these goals, also affirms this philosophical viewpoint. The Council's action in adopting these goals shall serve as directive for the actions of City Staff.

GOAL NUMBER ONE

Promote and sustain high-quality elementary-to high school education in the City of Richfield.

RATIONALE

In every vital community there is a critical, intertwined relationship between the health of the community and the presence of high-quality elementary-high school institutions. Elementary to high school education, which includes preschool experiences, may be carried on in a community through public schools, private schools, and home schools. The nature of the relationship between such education providers and the city in which they exist is peculiarly enmeshed. One of the attractions of any city is its schools. Where the schools enjoy a reputation for excellence, the community enjoys a reputation as a good place to live. On the other hand, in order for the schools to remain attractive and vital, the community must be the kind of place that attracts stable families. It is in the best interest of both schools and city governments to work together to provide quality, attractive elementary-high school education.

For the foreseeable future, the delivery of elementary to high school education will remain the function of professional educators and others not directly under the employ or influence of city government. Yet, city government can assist schools in various ways. The specific strategies of this first goal are intended to provide vectors for that assistance.

STRATEGIES

1. In all community development thinking and planning in the City of Richfield, education and learning will be a regular, integral, and necessary element. All City planning will evaluate possible and probable impacts on elementary-high school education with a view towards maximizing benefit and minimizing harm. Where community development measures are reasonably expected to affect elementary-high school institutions adversely, all due diligence will be taken to mitigate the harmful effects. Community development planners will be especially careful to insure that the kind of housing available in Richfield will attract families.
2. Community development planners will meet at least once yearly with representatives from the public and private educational institutions within the City. Whenever possible, these meetings will take place at the start of the planning process for the various organizations. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss plans and to search out ways to bring about mutual benefit in development efforts.
3. The City Manager will meet at least yearly with the leaders of the public and private schools to discuss how the City and schools can work together to make the Richfield Community stronger.
4. The City Council will meet at least yearly with the governing boards of those institutions within Richfield which provide elementary-high school education. The purpose of these meetings will be to share information; to discuss matters of mutual interest; and, to the extent possible, to facilitate awareness among the various institutions of their respective plans and programs.
5. City Government, at every level and in every department, will foster a climate of value for, support of, and cooperation with elementary to high school education, public and private. Department heads will regard it as a professional priority to foster such a culture within their departments.
6. The City will make use of its public information resources to vigorously and proactively highlight and promote elementary-high school educational institutions in the City. By “proactively” we mean that the City shall actively seek things to showcase and not wait for requests to come to it.

GOAL NUMBER TWO

Promote and facilitate maximum opportunities for Life-Long Learning for the Citizens of Richfield.

RATIONALE

We believe that with respect to life-long learning, it is in the best interest of any community, and Richfield in particular, to provide for its citizens the greatest opportunities for the least cost. At the present time, there are two major providers of life-long learning services in the City: Richfield Community Education Center and the Augsburg Park branch of the Hennepin County Library. These two institutions have proven their ability to develop and deliver programming and to adapt to meet the changing learning needs of the community. We believe that these two entities are capable of continued leadership in this area provided that they receive adequate funding and community support.

We recognize that change is constant. In the future, a need may arise for other learning-related services not provided by existing entities. The City has an interest in facilitating the development of such new enterprises to serve its citizens.

STRATEGIES

1. Assist the existing institutions (e.g., Community Education Center, Hennepin County Library) that provide life-long learning services to the community to remain viable through support and funding. The City Council will direct City Staff to be proactive with respect to this strategy.
2. The City Council will charge the Staff to explore opportunity for and facilitate the development of new entities within the City which will provide life-long learning services.
3. Promote inter-connectivity through the use of state-of-the art communications technology.
4. Use cable, Community Bulletin Board, *Your City*, and other public information resources to vigorously and proactively showcase and promote programs of life-long learning offered in the City of Richfield. By "proactively" we mean that City Staff will actively seek information on programs offering life-long learning opportunities rather than waiting for providers to come to the City for assistance in presenting their programs to the public. The goal will be to find information on such programs and include the information in the various public information sources controlled by the City. The City should work to improve the quality of cable programming.
5. Promote awareness of available opportunities for life-long learning through an annual event such as a "Learning Fair." Encourage an expanded Richfield Visions, Inc. to assume sponsorship of this project.
6. The City will establish a Fine Arts Commission whose purpose will be to develop opportunities for citizen participation in the arts.

GOAL NUMBER THREE

Enhance and expand City-owned-and-operated life-long-learning facilities and programs such as Wood Lake Nature Center and other recreation services programs.

RATIONALE

Issues separated out for attention under this goal may well have been included in goal number two. We have decided to make it a separate and distinct goal because the nature of the influence exercised by the City in this area differs decidedly from that which it may exercise under goal number two. The role of the City under goal number two is that of cheerleader and facilitator.

Under goal three, we focus on those things over which the City exercises direct influence through budget, staff, philosophy, and policy. The existence of City programs and facilities which carry on learning activities shows that the City has taken responsibility to create, fund, and staff life-long learning. We commend this position as wise and marked by foresight. We seek to expand upon this vision.

We note especially Wood Lake Nature Center as an example of the forward-looking philosophy of the City. We are a small community in the metropolitan area, yet we boast one of only five operating nature centers.

After the K-12 schools, Wood Lake Nature Center is the largest provider of learning opportunity in the community. It serves large numbers of Richfield citizens and an even larger number of other visitors through programs in environmental education and interpretation and through passive recreation experiences which may also be occasions for learning. The educational work done by Wood Lake Nature Center is a cradle-to-grave project.

STRATEGIES

1. Ensure continued funding and support to Wood Lake Nature Center in order to sustain the excellence of the experiential learning opportunity it provides.
2. Enhance and expand the ability of facilities like Wood Lake Nature Center to provide unique learning opportunities.
3. Ensure adequate funding and staff for programs owned and operated by the City which may be reasonably and generously understood to provide learning opportunities to the community.
4. Actively advertise programs of the City which provide learning opportunities.
5. Actively seek new markets for new City-run learning activities.

GOAL NUMBER FOUR

Encourage and promote connections for citizen access to learning environments within businesses located in the City

RATIONALE

It is good for our community to have strong, cooperative relationships with businesses in the City. Many of these businesses are in a position to offer mentorship/internship opportunities for students. Some local companies have internal learning centers used to train employees. Some of these facilities, with the cooperation of business, may offer learning resources valuable to the larger community. In turn, local businesses can capitalize on the contributions of students and of people in the community. We believe that it is wise leadership for the City to promote an ever-expanding partnership between business and the community in the advancement of mutual interests.

STRATEGIES

1. Ensure that policies and incentives are in place to attract businesses that provide educational services and/or resources.
2. Aggressively develop partnerships with local businesses in the City to promote learning opportunities open to people in the community.

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- Ms. Wendy Olson, Director of Community Education, who guided us into an understanding of the role of Community Education and who gave us an overview of the large and expanding program provided by Richfield Community Education.
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