



# 2026-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Vision

Advance Thief River will be the driving force for economic development in Pennington County, enabling business owners and residents to benefit from an unparalleled living and working environment.

## Purpose

Advance Thief River drives economic development in Pennington County through business retention, expansion, attraction, and creation.

## Values

- **Business** – we believe the area’s business men and women are the foundation of the community’s economic vitality
- **Opportunity** – we believe in creating opportunities for new businesses to start operations in the community, as well as opportunities for existing businesses to grow.
- **Growth** – we believe a growing business community is a healthy business community.
- **Talent** – we believe successful businesses are staffed by talented and highly-skilled employees.
- **Collaboration** – we believe in partnering with government entities, nonprofits, and businesses to reach shared goals

## Priorities

- Business retention, expansion, attraction, and creation
- Workforce and talent development
- Housing development
- Childcare capacity
- Resident recruitment and community promotion

# Strategic Priorities (2026–2028)

## 1. Business Retention, Expansion, Attraction, and Creation (BREAC)

**Goal:** Build a thriving local economy by supporting existing businesses, helping them expand, attracting new investment, and enabling startups.

### Objectives & Actions

- **Retention & Expansion**
    - Conduct annual business surveys to identify needs and challenges.
    - Launch a concentrated marketing campaign highlighting existing businesses.
    - Provide consulting, training, and referrals tailored to business growth.
    - Develop incentives and support structures to help local firms expand.
  - **Attraction**
    - Create a prospect list of target industries and businesses.
    - Market Thief River Falls as a regional hub, emphasizing transportation access, workforce potential, and quality of life.
    - Advertise availability and advantages of Gilbert Industrial Park lots.
    - Partner with regional and state agencies to attract external investment.
  - **Creation**
    - Expand business startup services including networking, mentorship, consulting, training, and access to financing.
    - Encourage entrepreneurial development among youth and new residents.
    - Support innovation through business incubators, co-working space, and accelerator programs.
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## 2. Workforce & Talent Development

**Goal:** Ensure a strong pipeline of skilled workers while making Thief River Falls an attractive place to live and work.

### Objectives & Actions

- Create frameworks that businesses can use in hiring, training, and apprenticing youth.
  - Engage youth through work opportunities, career fairs, and exposure to career pathways.
  - Build partnerships with schools, training centers, and higher education institutions.
  - Develop community navigator roles to welcome and integrate new workers.
  - Explore workforce solutions in collaboration with childcare providers to support working families.
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### **3. Housing Development**

**Goal:** Address housing needs to support population growth and business expansion.

#### **Objectives & Actions**

- Advocate for and promote development of single-family housing with green space.
  - Support housing initiatives that appeal to young families, professionals, and seniors.
  - Leverage public-private partnerships to spur investment in residential projects.
  - Market Thief River Falls as a community of choice for families relocating to the region.
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### **4. Childcare Capacity**

**Goal:** Expand affordable, accessible childcare options to support working parents and employers.

#### **Objectives & Actions**

- Collaborate with providers and organizations to increase licensed childcare capacity.
  - Advocate for childcare-friendly policies and incentives.
  - Explore employer-supported childcare models to benefit workforce retention.
  - Connect childcare businesses to existing business support services.
  - Assist childcare businesses in obtaining financing to start or retain operations.
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### **5. Resident Recruitment & Community Promotion**

**Goal:** Attract and retain residents across generational segments by promoting quality of life, opportunity, and community spirit.

#### **Objectives & Actions**

- Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to “Sell Thief River Falls” as a regional hub with access to a larger market and talent pool.
- Implement “Welcoming Community” initiatives that foster belonging and inclusion.
- Promote transportation access, including air service, bus service, and exploring Uber/ride share opportunities.
- Host campaigns targeting alumni, remote workers, and families seeking relocation.
- Increase population by highlighting affordability, recreational amenities, and career pathways.

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## Implementation Framework

- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with city, county, schools, workforce agencies, housing developers, and local organizations.
- **Measurement:** Track metrics such as number of new residents, housing units developed, businesses retained/expanded, childcare slots added, and workforce participation rates.
- **Communication:** Regular updates to stakeholders and the community through newsletters, social media, and annual reports.
- **Sustainability:** Ensure that initiatives are scalable and adaptable for long-term success beyond 2028.
- **Teams:** establish and use subcommittees for each of the priority focus areas, incorporating board members and ATR members.

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## Conclusion

Advance Thief River’s 2026–2028 Strategic Plan positions the organization as a proactive leader in economic development. By focusing on business retention, expansion, attraction, and creation—while also addressing housing, childcare, and workforce needs—the plan ensures that Thief River Falls remains not only competitive but also a vibrant, welcoming community for businesses and residents alike.