

BENZIE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS



OVERVIEW

The Board of Commissioners has met in several meetings to explore and set strategic priorities and goals to guide the County’s actions and investments over the next two to four years. All decisions impact the long-term plans for Benzie. The notes below document the outcomes of these meetings, as well as the next steps.

HIGH-LEVEL THEMES

Commissioners discussed their motivations and intentions and established a “big picture” framework. Their intentions included:

- Focusing on long-term impacts.
- Approaching challenges with optimism and collaboration.
- Focusing on solutions in the short-term and long-term future.
- Considering future generations when making short-term decisions.
- Considering goals and actions through the lens of community and economic growth.
- Understanding constituents may want to oppose things and keeping this in mind while making decisions.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The following high priority issues emerged during the strategy sessions:

1. Infrastructure and Space Needs
2. Fiscal Health and Responsibility
3. Enhanced County Services
4. Public Spaces and Public Lands
5. Economic Development Activities

Commissioners acknowledged that these are long-term issues and that a variety of short-term and long-term actions will be required to address needs and opportunities.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPACE NEEDS

Strategic Priority: Ensure proper infrastructure maintenance and development and adequate space for the performance of county services, including cyber security infrastructure.

Goal Statement: Evaluate the needs to perform services for the Benzie County community and ensure its appropriateness with County fiscal health.

Actions:

- Staff will consider whether there is a need to provide non-mandated services to the community and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners.
- Staff will explore options for providing services to the community which are non-mandated, through partnership activities and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners.
- The Board of Commissioners will create and empower ad hoc committees and subcommittees to explore the potential of additional services, enhancement of current services, and the development of necessary infrastructure to perform these services.
- The Board of Commissioners will consider selling or contracting existing infrastructure and services to protect the County's liability, enhance fiscal health and stability.
- Bolster technology infrastructure to increase cyber security for all county hardware and software.

Resources Required:

- Removing barriers to allow for robust discussion.
- Continuing to identify needs of the community through public participation.
- Additional staff to explore grant opportunities and other funding.
- Building awareness of responsibilities of County government and potential partnerships in the community.

FISCAL HEALTH AND RESPONSIBILITY

Strategic Priority: We have an obligation to maintain Benzie County's fiscal condition and financial statements in a healthy state.

Goal Statement: Benzie County will maintain a balanced budget while supporting professional development and expanding resources for elected officials and staff.

Actions:

- Continue to implement a sustainable planning and budgeting process in which key stakeholders gather information on performance and cost structure of services.
- Establish a budgeting process that will utilize this data to optimize resource allocation.
- Build a budget process that is data driven.
- Develop a budget timeline with specific guidelines on when and how.
- Develop with key stakeholders an expenditure priority list that is guided by county goals. Define tradeoffs if needed to maintain a balanced budget. Examine with stakeholders which financial decisions have the greatest impact on county services.

- Work with elected officials and appointed staff to strengthen and further define a long-term capital needs plan.
- Create a quarterly financial update by department and at the Board level that will compare the most recent quarter to the same quarter for the previous three years in order to analyze changes and ensure proper resource allocation.

Resources Required:

- Staff time.
- Elected Official time.
- BS&A Accounting Software
- Professional development opportunities related to public accounting.

ENHANCED COUNTY SERVICES

Strategic Priority: We will evaluate current services and consider other services to be provided to the Community, including partnering with private agencies to provide services.

Goal Statement: To provide exceptional service; enhance and protect the quality of life for all Benzie County citizens; facilitate a vibrant economy with an abundance of workforce opportunities; and exercise fiscal responsibility, while using innovative approaches and making well-planned decisions.

Actions:

- Provide professional, cost-effective, and innovative service delivery, by continually evaluating the county’s programs and services, soliciting feedback, reinforcing positive examples of customer service and work ethic.
- Implementing technology enhancements and providing job-enhancing training for employees.
- Encourage and facilitate internal communications and coordination between departments, in order to strengthen the organization and provide opportunities for efficiency and collaboration.
- Achieve effective external communication with the community by engaging in positive outreach; facilitating community awareness and involvement; publicizing the availability of county services; and providing timely notice of changes in services which may affect customers.
- Explore additional countywide services, such as Fire protection and expansion of Emergency Medical Services.
- Manage capital assets and facilities in a manner that assures longevity; maximizes cost-feasible energy efficiency and natural resource protection.
- Explore innovative financial strategies to fund programs and services offered to customers that leverage county tax dollars with non-local funding sources.
- Engage in long-range planning to assure that capital funding needs are met; maintain prudent financial reserves to provide operational continuity in the event of an emergency or natural disaster.
- Ensure that the state-mandated capital needs are provided for constitutional offices.

Resources Required:

- Community support.
- Staff time.
- Elected Official time.

- Consultants.
- Partners' time.
- County Wide Millage.

PUBLIC SPACES AND PUBLIC LAND

Strategic Priority: Provide safe and accessible public spaces where people may recreate, socialize, or enjoy being alone in nature.

Goal Statement: Invest in facilities and amenities in order to create vibrant County spaces that connect all people to nature and to each other.

Actions:

- The County will increase the visibility and community awareness of all county-owned public spaces and parks.
- The County will enhance communication about the potential for personal uses of public spaces and encourage more park use.
- The County will increase accessibility to parks by fostering connections to trails and public transportation options.
- County staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission will conduct public surveys on a more routine basis, in order to gain feedback and broader insights to inform and guide the County's actions and investments in public spaces.
- The County will update its Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- The County will strive to maintain and invest in its facilities.
- The County will strive to protect its waters and parklands.

Resources Required:

- General Fund allocations.
- State and Federal grants.
- Private foundation and individual donations.
- Staff.
- Community partners.
- Programming offered by private sector and nonprofit entities in public spaces.
- Public support for visions and projects.
- Park users.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Strategic Priority: In a global economy where people can work from anywhere, people are choosing to live here because of the natural characteristics of this place. We will focus on creating a healthy community and strong sense of place and will integrate our economic development efforts with our climate goals and action steps.

Goal Statement: The County will foster economic development by adopting a growth mentality and by conserving and maintaining natural resources. It will work with partners to invest in and maintain amenities that support a wide variety of industries, build the workforce, and attract well-paying jobs with the region’s future in mind.

Actions:

- The County will work with the likeminded agencies in the County to address the childcare crisis, supporting residents in their careers.
- The County will develop policies and adopt practices that encourage development in townships in order to increase housing options and support access to good paying jobs.
- The County will use a variety of funding sources, including dedicated sources like tax Increment Financing, to achieve its goals.
- The County will increase staff capacity, including adding a Community Development Coordinator position, as the budget allows us to achieve its goals.
- The County will provide focused support and assistance to Industrial Parks.
- The County will support and partner to expand utilities, including natural gas, water, sewer, and broadband.

Resources Required:

- Staff.
- Elected Officials.
- Funding.
- Political will.
- Professional consultants.
- Cost sharing approach with regional partners.
- Collaboration with community partners to enhance economic development.

NEXT STEPS

The Board of Commissioners will continue to review and refine the goals and actions identified in this document. Commissioners will continue to evaluate resources required and will reflect on these goals and actions during the County’s annual budgeting process.