


Short term priorities for Lancaster County

Interviewees were asked for short-term priorities for the county, defined for this planning effort as three years or less. Some of those interviewed noted multiple priorities. The list below begins with the most frequently mentioned priority.

Short-term priorities

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- 1. Corrections: the jail and alternatives, including juvenile detention**
 - 2. Infrastructure, including roads, bridges, the South Beltway, and county facilities, buildings**
 - 3. Technology; computer software**
 - 4. Staff retention & succession planning**
 - 5. Budget and resources**

Sample quotes:

The jail is filling up dramatically faster than expected, largely due to legislative actions. It's the largest budget in the county. We need to house only those individuals that need to be housed. We need to focus on the relationship with the legislature to provide valuable insights and perspectives of how things affect us at the county level.

Road and bridge funding is a big priority. Corrections is a big priority. We have a brand new jail and it's filling up rapidly. Changes in the Legislature will fill it up more rapidly. The Justice Council has a goal to reduce the jail population or come up with alternatives.

...We have got to do something about infrastructure: roads, bridges, outlying engineering buildings, technology. We have people with different versions of Microsoft; the criminal justice system is DOS. People have said 'we can get by for another year.' We have to take care of how we communicate. Technology is the way we communicate. Short-term, we need a strategic plan. We need to update our policies. We need to update the county website.

Get a handle on the jail population. The maximum when built seemed a long way off; we're close now. We're looking at retirement of department directors and elected officials—make sure strong public servants step up. There is an increasing amount of computer needs. We have aging mainframes we are going to have to be replaced. Software is different now and we still operate a lot of old systems. The time clock system is antiquated.

Re-evaluating alternatives to incarceration for youth and adults, whether it's addressing underlying causes or the cost of more people in our jails. ... Evaluating and modernizing the way we do business: some people still use WordPerfect and we have several different iterations of software. Get a comprehensive look at hardware and software and know when we are going to replace. County facilities and buildings don't have HVAC or bathrooms. We need to review roofs, expansions. We need a renovation and/or relocation study.

We need to get a handle on our infrastructure—working with the county engineer, get a handle on infrastructure needs and develop some type of plan. Same for public buildings. We need to focus our attention on those two things. Through no fault of anyone, there's a misallocation of resources. We need to do short-term planning for the long term. Come to resolution with juvenile detention alternatives—in the next three years we need to have an understanding about what we're doing with juveniles in detention.

We've got some computer software issues we've got to deal with. We've got a payroll system on its last leg. We've also got a program the sheriff, police and jail work with that needs to be updated. We need to get some stuff upgraded. Sometimes, in the governmental word, we hold ourselves back and utilize software that people outside government would wonder why we're using it. Other infrastructure needs—roads and bridges are both short and long-term priorities. Some we need to do now and some we'll need to do later. Another short term/long term priority is the jail population. At the beginning, we thought it would last 25 years and now, eight years in, it's an issue.

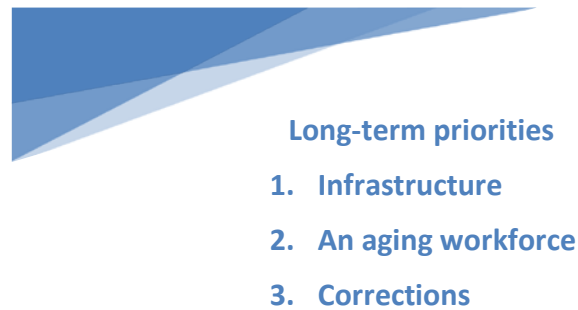
How do we manage to get enough resources to serve the needs of the county without increasing the tax burden? Since the city is growing and the county isn't—in population—there is an internal dynamic in the way we budget that results in increasing budgets. Not everything you do is essential. The desirable things take on the quality of being essential.

A priority is maintaining essential services in a way that doesn't short change the population and the people we serve.

I'd like to see the county develop guiding values and a mission and filter down to all departments so we can communicate that to the community. I'd love to see a more team-oriented culture.

Long term priorities for Lancaster County

When the topic turned to long-term priorities for the county, ten or more years out, a big-picture approach was common, but three long-term priorities were mentioned by multiple interviewees, the first listed below noted by the majority.



Sample quotes:

Our infrastructure needs are huge—we've got a lot of roads and bridges out there. The growth of Lancaster County over 10 years and it will still be growing and with that growth will come all kinds of things: public safety, sheriff, courts.... Hopefully we'll be getting those beltways in by then. Property taxes are a huge issue; I tend to think that's a short and long-term issue because it won't be solved easily.

Infrastructure—bridges and roads. As the city gets larger it goes further out in the county, which changes the dynamic for the county, with acreages, with agriculture. Do you stop it? What do you do?

More comprehensive plans: How are we going to address growth? How do we make a plan to address roads costs versus money available? How do we keep buildings up to date? Do more things with towns and villages; we interact with them very little. Plus, a transition plan for baby boomer employees.

The east beltway. Lincoln is expanding. It's growing. We are going to have to cooperate with the city on how we manage that growth. We have to deal with RUTS program, roads, jail population. Human services will grow as the community grows.

Infrastructure—bridges and roads. Economic development—from the county's perspective, it's not our main, but we help administer tourism funds. Aging population—what that means for the county.

We do have an aging workforce. We're just starting to see that now. In spite of a retirement program people think is a Cadillac, people have to stay because they can't afford to retire and they are staying longer with the health and disability costs that accompany an aging workforce.

We have an aging workforce in local government. How are we effectively marketing local public service to millennials? The city continues to grow. How are we going to provide an increasing amount of services to the increasing number of residents—emergency management, etc. that we help fund? Diversifying our revenue streams so we don't rely solely on property tax.

We have to make sure we are continuing to invest in efforts to keep residents safe and improve people's lives.

I don't know where the county wants to be in ten years. We're not able to look long term because so much of what we do is dictated by the state. I'd rather be in a place where the county knows what it needs to do.

Additional comments

Before they were asked the final question of the interview, each person was given the opportunity to raise an issue or topic not already discussed. Several commented:

We have a tendency on the county board to focus a bit too much on bricks and mortar. ... I think we could de-emphasize the bricks and mortar and focus on the right people, right place, right skills.

The county is good at looking where their money is spent.

The records program is making progress, getting into the 21st Century. We keep a close eye on the Legislature. Intergovernmental cooperation has always been big in the city and county and you have to continue to consolidate and leverage resources.

I believe one of my responsibilities is stewardship of assets, property, finance, workforce. When you steward a workforce, you provide opportunities for training, travel for training, equipment to do the job. It all comes back to property, money, workforce. You have to have an involvement in the community—human services, economic development, safety and security. And finally, transparency. We need to provide transparency for everything we do in the community. The website needs to be more user-friendly. We need to use every means to communicate with people: Facebook, Twitter, the newspaper. We need to be more coordinated in efforts to communicate.

Just because of the way the county is structured, I have little confidence in our management—the five of us have different perspectives and represent different parts of the county with different needs.

We do a lot of two on two meetings because if there are three of us it's a public meeting. We govern differently because we all have a different set of facts. (We need a) higher level of trust and openness among commissioners and staff. ... We could use a higher level of communication among all of us.