# 2026-2029 Strategic Plan

# Letter from Leadership

As we launch the Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan, we do so at a moment of both challenge and opportunity. Our region faces undeniable headwinds: critical workforce shortages, the out-migration of talent, and rising competition for state and federal resources. Employers consistently tell us that access to housing, ownership transitions, and capital remain barriers to growth.

Yet, the Greater St. Cloud region also carries forward powerful momentum. We are home to strong cross-sector partnerships, a growing startup scene, and an engaged investor base. Together, these strengths give us a foundation to move boldly into the future.

This plan represents more than strategies on paper. It is a roadmap for focused, collaborative action. Developed with input from board members, investors, civic leaders, employers, and staff, it reflects the best of who we are as a region: pragmatic, innovative, and united by a shared vision.

Over the next three years, our work will center on three pillars:

**Unified Regional Leadership — strengthening our ability to speak and act together.**

**Business Retention, Expansion & Attraction — supporting companies across the full business lifecycle.**

**Amplifying the Region's Return — ensuring that investors, partners, and community members see and feel the value of engagement.**

These core pillars are complemented by five strategic additions that deepen our focus on leadership continuity, industry specialization, federal funding readiness, land use and housing alignment, and talent retention and return.

We are narrowing our focus to maximize impact. We are aligning public and private leadership to drive shared outcomes. And we are investing in systems that will deliver sustained, scalable solutions for years to come.

Most importantly, we are committed to accountability. Each strategy carries measurable targets and a commitment to clear storytelling so our region—and all who invest in it—can see progress in real time.

This is the right plan for Greater St. Cloud at the right time. But as always, success depends on partnership. We invite you to lean in, lend your voice, and walk with us to shape a future where our region thrives as a hub for talent, entrepreneurship, and community

With Gratitude,

NeTia Bauman & Joan Schatz

**NeTia Bauman, CEO & President**

**Joan Schatz, Board Chair,**

# Greater St. Cloud Leadership

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*Dr. Larry Dietz*
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*Ayan Omar*
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*Clare Richards*
*Impacks, Inc.*

*John Torgerson*
*Bernick's*

*Ryan Cross*
*BCI Construction*

*Steve Windfelt*
*PCI*

*Greta Stark-Kraker*
*Central Minnesota*
*Community Foundation*

*Mary Swingle*
*Boys & Girls Clubs of*
*Central Minnesota*

## *Staff Team*

*Left to right: Leslie Dingmann (Business Development Director), Gail Cruikshank (Talent & Community Impact Director), Tammy Campion (Communications Specialist), Jennie Weber (Administrative & Program Specialist), and NeTia Bauman (CEO & President)*

# 2026-2029 Strategic Pillars Overview

The GSDC Strategic Plan 2026–2029 centers on three core pillars and five cross-cutting strategic additions. This roadmap was developed through:

- *Extensive stakeholder engagement, including board members, investors, civic leaders, employers, and GSDC staff*
- *Regional economic and business retention data, time-use analysis, and workforce forecasts*
- *State and federal alignment with DEED, EDA, SSBCI, CHIPS Act, and IIJA priorities*
- *Environmental scans and benchmarking against peer metros*

## UNIFIED REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

Strengthen the region's ability to speak, plan, and act together across sectors and jurisdictions

## BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION & ATTRACTION

Expand and modernize support for businesses across the lifecycle—from startups to legacy firms—through targeted outreach, capital access, and succession pathways.

## AMPLIFYING THE REGION'S RETURN

Demonstrate compelling value to investors and partners through consistent reporting, relationship-building, and strategic engagement.

# PILLAR ONE:
# Unified Regional Leadership

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

**Summary:** To strengthen the Greater St. Cloud region's ability to act together—with a clear voice, coordinated planning, and shared influence—across cities, counties, and sectors. GSDC will serve as a trusted convener, building the civic infrastructure needed for collaborative strategy, consistent messaging, and increased competitiveness.

### 1.1 REGIONAL MESSAGING TOOLS

**Develop a shared set of key messages, visuals, and data points to align how partners communicate the region's identity and priorities.**

- Create "5-Point Regional Message Card" and co-branded visuals
- Customize messaging for talent, infrastructure, and business climate
- Distribute widely to elected officials, business leaders, schools, and chambers
- **Target Impact:** 75% of partners actively using toolkit within 12 months

### 1.2 REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE & POLICY

**Host annual roundtables with city, county, school, and economic development leaders to coordinate capital planning, permitting, and legislative strategy.**

- Share project pipelines and funding applications
- Identify permitting/zoning priorities and joint policy opportunities
- **Target Impact:** ≥ 90% stakeholder participation; 3+ collaborative funding applications influenced each year

### 1.3 CIVIC ONBOARDING PROTOCOL

**Develop and deliver a regional onboarding experience for new elected officials, staff, and institutional leaders.**

- Provide Regional Onboarding Packet and welcome letter from Board Chair
- Offer 1:1 strategic briefings with GSDC leadership
- **Target Impact:** 80% completion of 1:1 briefings; 50% of new leaders engaged in GSDC activities within 6 months

### 1.4 PUBLIC INVESTMENT PLAYBOOK

**Publish a shared reference guide listing top regional infrastructure priorities with project status, costs, and lead agencies.**

- Include 5–8 priority projects (e.g., broadband, housing, roads, downtowns)
- Update annually to reflect readiness and funding status
- **Target Impact:** $5M secured by 2029; ≥ 50% of projects supported cross-jurisdictionally

# PILLAR TWO:
# Supporting Businesses at Every Stage

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

**Summary:** Build a seamless and scalable ecosystem for business growth—one that supports founders, owners, and employers at every phase, from startup to succession. GSDC will focus on connecting capital, coaching, and coordination across the region to ensure that businesses can grow, transition, and thrive.

### 2.1 STARTUP JOURNEY MAP & MENTORSHIP EXCHANGE

**Clarify the "idea-to-exit" business growth path and launch a structured mentorship network to guide founders and early-stage employers.**

- Publish Regional Startup Journey Map (print + interactive)
- Launch Founder Mentorship Exchange
- Develop Investor Access Guide + annual pitch competition (Q2 2026)
- **Target Impact:** 1 ecosystem map; 1 guide; 1 pitch competition annually; 10–15% annual increase in startups and businesses supported

### 2.2 SECTOR-BASED BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION CYCLES

**Modernize BRE strategy by organizing outreach by industry cluster and firm size—targeting specific expansion barriers.**

- Conduct 100+ annual BRE visits, 60% in primary sectors
- Provide structured follow-up to firms (+10–15% over baseline)
- Produce 4 quarterly BRE Briefing Sheets per year
- **Target Impact:** More firms reporting expansion support; systemic barriers surfaced via semi-annual stakeholder focus groups

### 2.3 CAPITAL ACCESS MAPPING & COACHING

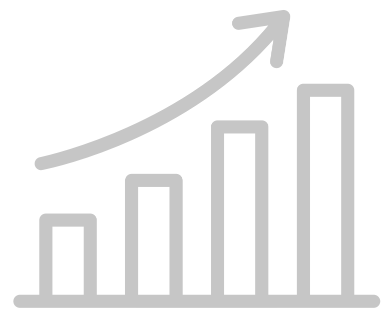
**Create a centralized capital navigation system for businesses—covering grants, loans, equity, and SSBCI pathways.**

- Publish Regional Capital Landscape Guide
- Offer ≥ 5 "Equity Prep" workshops annually
- Provide 1:1 capital coaching for businesses (+10% over Thrive 2025 baseline)
- **Target Impact:** Directional increase in capital raised; improved clarity in semi-annual finance partner focus groups

### 2.4 BUSINESS SUCCESSION & CONTINUITY STRATEGY

**Help owners in transition with tools, financial matchmaking, and successor support—especially in rural and legacy sectors**

- Publish Business Succession Toolkit (Q2 2026)
- Launch buyer–seller matchmaking platform (Q4 2026)
- Formalize lender partnerships for succession financing
- **Target Impact:** 60 toolkit downloads by 2029; ≥ 5 demonstration transitions; +10% average annual growth in continuity support



**BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION & ATTRACTION**

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# PILLAR THREE:
# Amplifying the Region's Return

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

**Summary:** Demonstrate clear and compelling value to GSDC's investors, civic partners, and stakeholders—driving stronger retention, deeper participation, and expanded co-investment in regional growth.

### 3.1 RELAUNCH INVESTOR TIER MODEL

**Modernize investor tiers to link commitments with visibility, engagement, and impact.**

- Publish new tier descriptions with benefits and outcomes
- Distribute onboarding kits and branded welcome tools
- **Target Impact:** Investor renewals at same or higher tier +10% over 2026 baseline; average contributions +5–10% annually; retention ≥ 85%

### 3.2 QUARTERLY ROI DASHBOARD & VIDEO BRIEFINGS

**Deliver investor updates in lightweight, visual formats that build accountability and trust.**

- Release 2-page Quarterly Impact Brief (print + PDF)
- Launch interactive ROI dashboard (sortable by pillar, sector, partner role)
- Produce 3-minute video briefings with staff, board, and partners
- **Target Impact:** Open & engagement rates +10% annually; citations of ROI materials in boardrooms and grants +10% annually; satisfaction ≥ 4.5/5

### 3.3 INVESTOR EXPERIENCE FORUMS & RECOGNITION

**Host strategic forums and recognition events to connect investors with outcomes and celebrate impact.**

- Hold 2 thematic investor forums per year (e.g., Housing, Startup, Infrastructure)
- Recognize contributions with Investor of the Month and Investor of the Year awards
- Showcase "Impact in Action" walk-throughs at project sites
- **Target Impact:** Forum participation +10% annually; new/expanded pledges +10% annually; media/social reach of recognitions +10% annually

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**AMPLIFYING THE REGION'S RETURN**

# STRATEGIC ADDITIONS
# Cross-Cutting Enablers for Regional Impact

## DESCRIPTION

While the three Strategic Pillars define GSDC's core areas of focus, the five Strategic Additions function as cross-cutting enablers. They are not standalone priorities. Instead, they multiply the impact of the pillar strategies by improving coordination, strengthening implementation systems, and addressing structural constraints that limit regional progress.

### SA.1 CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE & LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY

Strengthen long-term regional alignment by equipping elected officials and civic leaders with shared tools, trusted relationships, and onboarding systems that persist beyond leadership transitions.

### SA.2 INDUSTRY SPECIALIZATION & CLUSTER STRATEGY

Sharpen the region's economic identity, deepen sector intelligence, and enable more targeted business support by organizing around key industry clusters.

### SA.3 FEDERAL FUNDING STRATEGY & COORDINATION

Strengthen the region's ability to pursue, secure, and align federal and state funds—by building internal systems, shared priorities, and partner coordination mechanisms that improve readiness and response.

### SA.4 LAND USE & HOUSING FOR REGIONAL GROWTH

Ensure that land use and housing decisions across the region align with long-term economic goals, support inclusive community development, and enable talent attraction, retention, and mobility.

### SA.5 TALENT RETENTION & RETURN STRATEGY

Retain young professionals and skilled workers—and to reconnect those who've left—with meaningful career pathways, civic engagement opportunities, and a compelling regional identity that inspires long-term commitment to Greater St. Cloud.

**STRATEGIC ADDITIONS**
Cross-Cutting Enablers for Regional Impact

| | Pillar 1 Unified Leadership | Pillar 2 Business Growth | Pillar 3 Regional Return |
|---|---|---|---|
| Civic Infrastructure & Leadership | ✓ | ○ | ✓ |
| Industry Specialization & Cluster Strategy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Federal Funding & Coordination | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Housing & Land Use for Growth | ✓ | ✓ | ○ |
| Talent Return & Regional Engagement | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Legend
✓ Direct Support ○ Indirect Support

## OUR VISION
Greater St. Cloud - a growing and vibrant region where talented people choose to live, work, and engage.

## OUR MISSION
Driving regional economic growth by providing the resources, connections, and expertise to empower success.

GREATER
ST. CLOUD

## OUR VALUES

**Leadership.** We inspire trust.

**Diversity.** We benefit from differences.

**Collaboration.** We engage partners.

**Integrity.** We do what we say.

**Accountability.** We create results.


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