

PLAZA 45

STRONG TOWNS

STRATEGIC PLAN

2022 UPDATE

**STRONG
TOWNS**

ADOPTED APRIL 28, 2022

OUR VISION

We seek to have the Strong Towns Approach be the default way that every city, town, and neighborhood pursues growth, development, and prosperity.

OUR MISSION

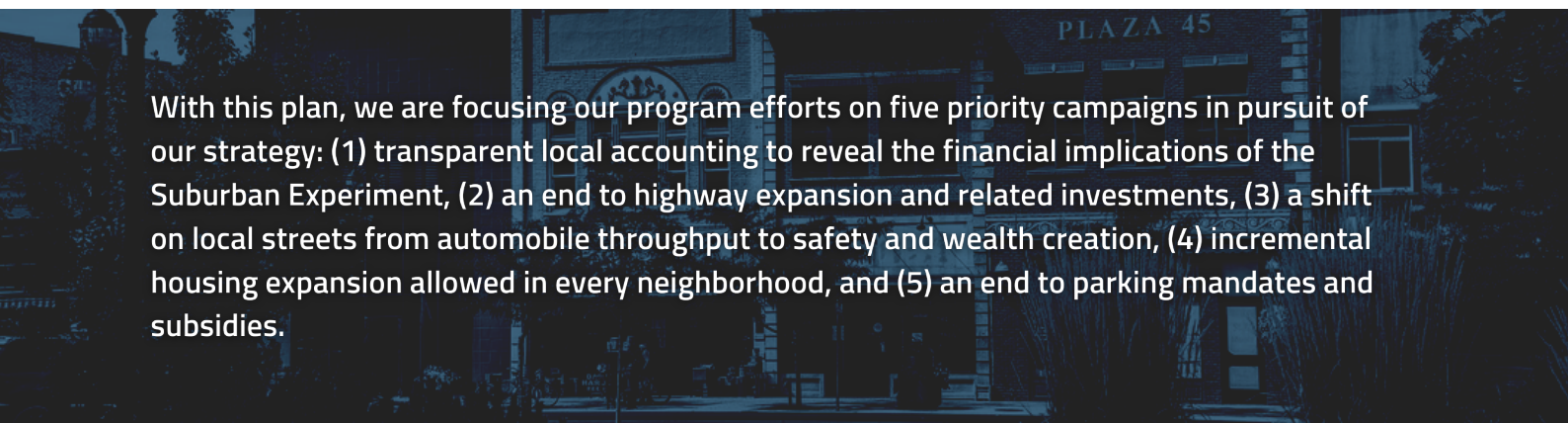
We seek to replace America's post-war pattern of development, the Suburban Experiment, with a pattern of development that is financially strong and resilient. We advocate for cities of all sizes to be safe, livable, and inviting. We work to elevate local government to be the highest level of collaboration for people working together in a place, not merely the lowest level in a hierarchy of governments.

OUR IDENTITY

We are an advocacy organization that primarily uses media to grow and support a movement for change.

OUR STRATEGY

We believe that the change we seek will occur when there is a critical mass of thought and action, making the Strong Towns approach self-evident to decision makers and the people they serve.



With this plan, we are focusing our program efforts on five priority campaigns in pursuit of our strategy: (1) transparent local accounting to reveal the financial implications of the Suburban Experiment, (2) an end to highway expansion and related investments, (3) a shift on local streets from automobile throughput to safety and wealth creation, (4) incremental housing expansion allowed in every neighborhood, and (5) an end to parking mandates and subsidies.

STRONG TOWNS PRINCIPLES

We believe the following to be true:

- Strong cities, towns, and neighborhoods need strong citizens working together to improve the community.
- Local government is not the lowest level of government, but the highest level of collaboration for strong citizens working to build a prosperous place.
- For local government, financial solvency is a prerequisite for long-term prosperity.
- Land is the base resource from which community prosperity is built and sustained. It must not be squandered.
- A transportation system is one of many means of creating prosperity in a community, but never an end unto itself.
- Job creation and economic growth are the results of a healthy local economy, not substitutes for one.

THE STRONG TOWNS APPROACH

The Strong Towns approach is a way of rationally responding to the challenges created by America's suburban experiment. A strong city, town, or neighborhood:

- Relies on incremental investments ("little bets") instead of large, transformative projects.
 - Favors resiliency of result over efficiency of execution.
 - Is designed to adapt to feedback, to evolve over time to meet the changing needs of the community.
 - Is inspired by bottom-up action ("chaotic but smart") and not top-down systems ("orderly but dumb").
 - Seeks to conduct as much of life as possible at a human scale.
 - Is obsessive about accounting for its revenues, expenses, assets, and long-term liabilities ("do the math").
-

OUR PROGRAMS

In pursuit of our mission, we will undertake the following programs:

CREATE CONTENT TO INFORM AND INSPIRE A MOVEMENT

1. **Strong Towns Media.** Create and distribute content through the Strong Towns media platform at www.strongtowns.org.
2. **Strong Towns Academy.** Provide pre-recorded training and instruction at academy.strongtowns.org.
3. **Local Motive.** Provide live, online training sessions.
4. **Action Lab.** Curate action-oriented content, core insights, and answers to questions at actionlab.strongtowns.org.

EXPAND THE MOVEMENT'S SIZE AND INFLUENCE

5. **Strong Towns Events.** Share the Strong Towns message at in-person and virtual events.
6. **Public Relations.** Use traditional and non-traditional public relations strategies to broadly distribute our message.
7. **Paid Marketing.** Use paid content marketing to reach new audiences and cultivate deeper audience engagement.
8. **Membership.** Maintain a membership program as a critical mechanism for advocates to self-identify and support the movement.
9. **Partnerships.** Collaborate with organizations whose work complements our movement and supports our campaigns and policy objectives.

MOBILIZE THE MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

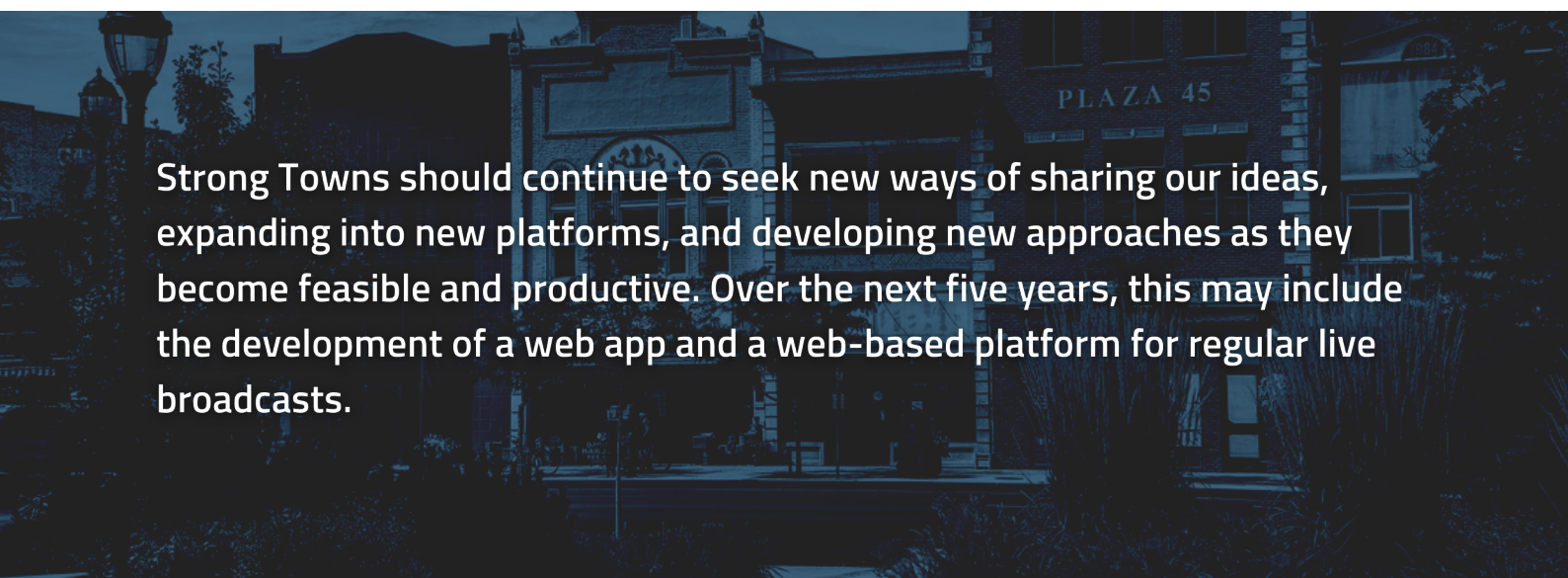
10. **Local Conversations.** Facilitate community-focused meetings of Strong Towns advocates.
11. **Community Action Lab.** Provide content, events, marketing, and coaching to a specific community or region.
12. **President's Issue Summit.** Regularly convene an invitation-only meeting of Strong Towns members to discuss policies and strategies relevant to the movement.
13. **Strong Towns Conference.** Hold an annual gathering of Strong Towns advocates to celebrate and learn from those successfully implementing aspects of the Strong Towns approach.

STRONG TOWNS MEDIA

The 2015 Strategic Plan directed the organization to build a movement for change based heavily on a media strategy. Seven years of implementing that strategy created Strong Towns Media, which remains at the core of this plan's program approach.

Strong Towns Media includes:

- The articles, columns, and stories at www.strongtowns.org/stmedia, a site that began as the Strong Towns Blog but now includes up to 15 new posts per week from a wide variety of contributors.
- Currently three podcast streams, including The Strong Towns Podcast, The Bottom-Up Revolution, and Upzoned.
- Regular videos, including live and pre-recorded events.
- A steady stream of microcontent shared on a variety of social media sites.
- Books, e-books, workbooks, and other publications.



Strong Towns should continue to seek new ways of sharing our ideas, expanding into new platforms, and developing new approaches as they become feasible and productive. Over the next five years, this may include the development of a web app and a web-based platform for regular live broadcasts.

PRIORITY CAMPAIGNS

With this strategic plan, we are seeking to focus our programs on the following campaigns:

TRANSPARENT LOCAL ACCOUNTING

We seek to reveal the financial implications of the Suburban Experiment by increasing the transparency of local government accounting practices.

END HIGHWAY EXPANSION

We seek to curtail the primary mechanism of local wealth destruction and municipal insolvency: the continued expansion of America's highways and related auto-based transportation systems.

SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE STREETS

We seek to shift the priority of local streets from automobile throughput to human safety and wealth creation.

INCREMENTAL HOUSING

We seek to have the next increment of development intensity allowed, by right, in every neighborhood in America.

END PARKING MANDATES AND SUBSIDIES

We seek an end to the mandates and subsidies that cause productive land to be used for motor vehicle storage.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE SUCCEEDING?

For the organization overall, we will use the following measurements to indicate whether or not we are making sufficient progress with our current approach:

GOAL #1: GROW OUR AUDIENCE.

Indicators:

- The 12-month trailing audience (measured in Squarespace).
- Total number of podcast downloads.
- Total number of quality email addresses in our database.
- Total number of social media followers.

GOAL #3: GROW OUR OVERALL IMPACT.

Indicators:

- Number of active Local Conversations.
- Number of people taking courses at the Strong Towns Academy.
- Number of designated partner organizations participating in our content stream.
- Number of times featured or referenced in Tier 1 media outlets.

GOAL #2: GROW OUR NUMBER OF COMMITTED SUPPORTERS.

Indicators:

- Number of Members.
- Number of Friends of Strong Towns (donors of \$500 and above).
- Number of Major Donors (donors of \$5,000 and above).
- Number and overall amount of foundation grants.



STATEMENT OF INTENT

Urban planning and related professional fields have long been dominated by men of European descent, often with left-leaning views. While the Strong Towns movement emerged from within this body of professional knowledge, we must move beyond it. We have been making and will continue to make a concerted effort to engage individuals, organizations, and groups representing the full spectrum of the American experience, not simply so others can benefit from our ideas, but so our understanding can be informed and shaped by their lives, insights, and experiences.

We seek a process of growth that results in meaningful transformation, not superficial change. We recognize that this ongoing effort takes work and commitment from the entire Strong Towns Team, as well as leadership and accountability from the Board of Directors. The President of Strong Towns is to report to the Board annually on efforts and progress to incorporate more voices into the Strong Towns conversation.

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Directors will be expanded from three to five members, with one- to three-years terms, ensuring continuity of leadership over time.

In addition, the Advisory Board established to assist in putting together this Strategic Plan will be codified into a permanent body. Advisory Board members will be appointed to one- to two-year terms by the Board of Directors. The Advisory Board will be asked to provide ongoing feedback on specific organizational objectives, campaigns, and challenges as identified by staff leadership and the Board of Directors.

In addition, it is prudent for Strong Towns to start planning for the eventual departure of its founder and current president, Charles Marohn. While Marohn's departure is not imminent, the organization has grown to sufficient size and scale that responsible governance requires the Board of Directors to create a succession strategy to ensure that the organization will thrive, even in the absence of Marohn's leadership.

It is the goal of this Strategic Plan to be fully prepared for a successful succession to a new president/executive director by December 31, 2027, even if such a transition does not occur at that time.
