



EXCEPTIONALLY WELL-IMPLEMENTED BEST PRACTICE:  
ESTABLISHMENT OF STRATEGIC PLANS

# City of Redmond, Washington

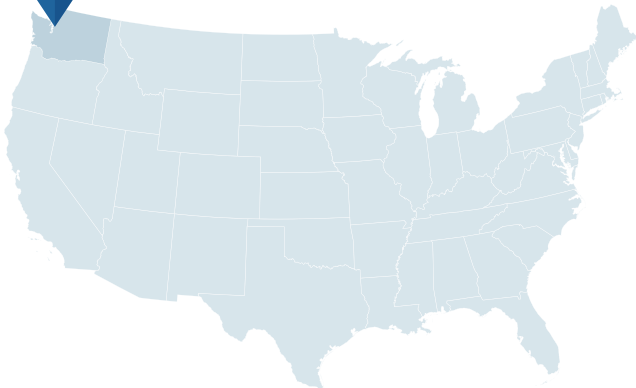
## *Community Strategic Plan*

BY ISABELLA ROMANO



### About Redmond, Washington

Redmond is the 16th most populous city in the State of Washington, located approximately 20 miles east of downtown Seattle at the north end of Lake Sammamish. The city has a population of 71,929, up from 54,144 in 2010. Several companies in the high-tech industry are based in Redmond, including Microsoft and Nintendo of America.



In 2018, the City of Redmond, Washington, decided that it needed a work plan to make sure it was doing the things that were most important to the city council and to the community; in short, it was time to start setting goals in a more purposeful way. “We realized that we needed a work plan to make sure that we were doing the things that were most important to the council and the community,” said Malisa Files, director of finance. “The Community Strategic Plan gave us that guidance.”

### CREATING THE PLAN

The City of Redmond had a long-range financial plan that defined its strategy for financial integrity, but policy decisions at the city council level were still somewhat ad hoc. “When I became council president, one of my goals was to have more predictability about what we would be seeing as a council and how the community could track what our priorities were and what we were working on,” said Redmond’s mayor, Angela Birney.

The city already had a long-range financial plan, and the community strategic plan was written as a complement to this document.

Next, Redmond sought community input directly through an online open house, allowing digital comments on the document. It also asked for comments from community partners, encouraged public comment at city council meetings and study sessions, and sought additional input through the annual community survey, which was already in place, and through the city’s priority budgeting processes.

Birney noted that the city is lucky to have an engaged constituency. “People are really bought-into our community and they want to make it better, so as a city it is really important for us to continue on that long-term vision of making sure we are the best city that we can be,” she said.

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—ANGELA BIRNEY, MAYOR OF REDMOND

The project got underway with a city council retreat to discuss council members’ goals, after which it created a working draft of priorities. A draft of the plan was made public during an online open house, which allowed digital comments on the document. The plan that the city council adopted, roughly a year and a half after its first retreat, is an iterative document that will be revisited and updated periodically.

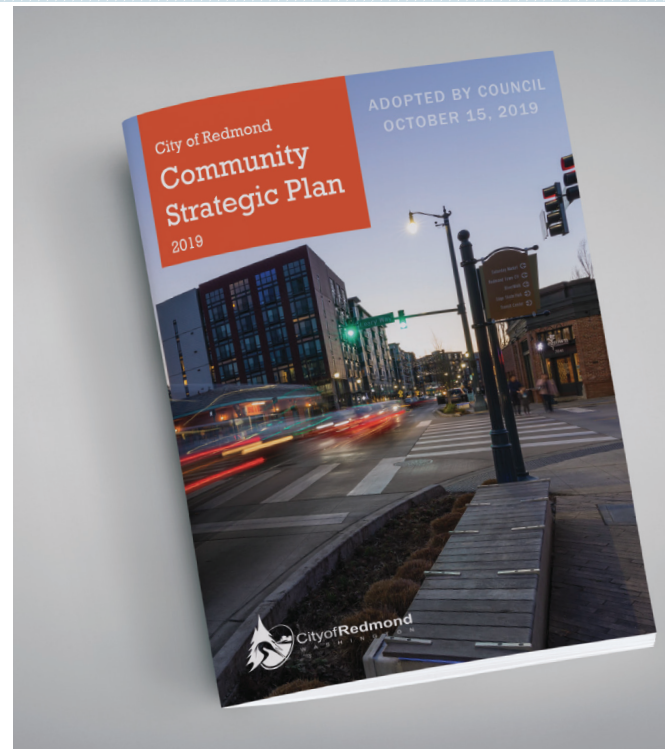
#### GETTING IN SYNC

Redmond’s Community Strategic Plan is a 24-page document that focuses on housing affordability, environmental sustainability, technology and information services infrastructure, cultural inclusion, and infrastructure. The plan is not all-encompassing. For instance, public safety does not appear as its own priority. “Safety is always a high priority for our community, but we know that safety is taken care of,” Files said. “The items in the Community Strategic Plan are things we need to focus on because we need them to be better than what they are right now.”

Central to the plan’s success is its alignment with the city’s comprehensive plan, budgeting process, and departmental plans. “It takes discipline,” Files said. “You want to make sure that your community strategic plan and all the other plans in your city are in sync. The Community Strategic Plan speaks to our comprehensive plan, which speaks to our departmental plan. It takes the entire city pulling the same way.”

#### SEEING THE BENEFITS

Birney listed continuity as one of the plan’s numerous benefits. “It keeps the focus on the good of the city and the nonpartisan issues that are truly important to a city structure,” she said. “It does remove a lot of the politicizing of the issues, keeps you on a longer-term target, and helps you develop a work plan for accomplishing goals.”



The City of Redmond’s Community Strategic Plan followed GFOA’s *Establishment of Strategic Plans* Best Practice.

The plan has also provided a vision for city staff and given them an understanding of what the community is looking for. “I think it’s really helpful in order to focus staff. For instance, take a person who works with utility billing and show them how their work contributes to a welcoming government or affordable housing initiatives, to show how their day-to-day tasks connect with what we are trying to do in the community,” Files said.

“I think it came at a really good time for our city, when people were really clamoring to have more interaction with local government,” Birney added.

“A community strategic plan creates an opportunity for conversation and transparency about what is really important,” Birney said. If your jurisdiction is considering creating a similar plan, “The advice I would give is to start out with a general structure and keep in mind what the long-term goal is,” Birney said.

#### GFOA BEST PRACTICE

Redmond followed GFOA’s *Establishment of Strategic Plans* Best Practice in creating its Community Strategic Plan. In the best practice, GFOA recommends that all governmental entities use some form of strategic planning to provide a long-term perspective for service delivery and budgeting, thereby establishing logical links between authorized spending and broad organizational goals.

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