

# **2026-2027 Comprehensive Plan Final Presentations Staff Recommendations**

## **City Administrator Phil Green**

### **Top Recommendation: Confluence**

I was most impressed with Confluence’s emphasis on planning for the future downtown (“The ‘Post-Truck’ Downtown Vision”; “a generational opportunity to redefine Blair’s downtown as a true regional destination”; a plan to facilitate a Downtown Charette) while also identifying and strengthening the unique aspects of Blair. Their written SOQ accurately described Blair’s current condition: “the community has been a regional employment powerhouse, but the residential and commercial side hasn’t always kept pace.” The Confluence team offers a unique mixture of new voices and some who know Blair well (Jacob Garder and Jeff Ray). Finally, they have current & ongoing experience with smaller, rural communities which are experiencing growth and striving to maintain their small-town appeal (Ashland, Springfield, Crete).

## **Deputy City Administrator Aaron Barrow**

### **Top Recommendation: Confluence or Olsson**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my thoughts following the finalist presentations for the Comprehensive Plan. I have taken some time to reflect on both the Statements of Qualifications and what we heard on March 31, and I wanted to share my perspective candidly as you consider your decision.

First, I want to acknowledge that all three firms—Confluence, JEO, and Olsson—are capable of completing this project. The differences between them are less about qualifications and more about approach and what type of plan we want for Blair.

JEO’s proposal and presentation reinforced what we already know about them as a firm. They are strong technically, particularly in infrastructure, transportation, and engineering-related planning. Their SOQ highlighted a well-qualified team, including staff focused on transportation and Safe Streets for All integration, and they clearly have the ability to tie a comprehensive plan to capital improvements and infrastructure planning. That said, their presentation was the weakest of the three. It leaned heavily into process and technical planning and did not come across as particularly compelling from a visioning or community standpoint. My concern would be that the final product, while technically sound, may lack the broader community-driven vision and identity that I think is important for Blair at this stage.

Olsson delivered a very professional and polished presentation. Their team is clearly competent, and they bring a deep, multidisciplinary bench with significant experience in planning, engineering, and infrastructure. Their SOQ demonstrated strong experience with similar communities and a clear, structured approach to completing the plan. I have confidence that

Olsson would produce a comprehensive plan that is thorough, implementable, and well-integrated with our infrastructure and capital planning efforts. Between JEO and Olsson, based on both the written proposals and the presentations, Olsson is the stronger option for this project.

Confluence stood out to me because they approach planning from a different perspective. Their focus on placemaking, community identity, and creating spaces that attract people, particularly young families, and workforce talent—is something Blair needs to be thinking more intentionally about. We have experienced strong industrial growth, but if we want to retain and attract residents, we need to offer more in terms of amenities, quality of life, and overall community experience. Confluence’s SOQ and presentation leaned into that, emphasizing visioning, engagement, and creating a plan that reflects how people want to live in Blair. They are a smaller firm, and they do not have the same in-house technical depth as Olsson or JEO. That is a consideration. However, they do have ties to Blair and the Omaha area, and there is real value in collaborating with a firm that understands the local context and can bring a fresh perspective.

If we are looking for a proven, low-risk option with strong technical depth and resources, Olsson is a very solid choice and one I would be comfortable recommending. At the same time, I am genuinely intrigued by Confluence. They bring something different to the table, particularly around placemaking and community identity—and those elements are going to be increasingly important if Blair is going to grow in a balanced way and attract the kind of residents we want to see here. We have worked with both JEO and Olsson on many projects, and we know what to expect. There is value in that. But there is also value in occasionally bringing in a new firm with a different perspective. Ultimately, I would support either Olsson or Confluence. If the Council is most comfortable with experience and technical depth, Olsson is the right choice. If there is interest in taking a slightly different approach that emphasizes placemaking and long-term livability, Confluence deserves serious consideration.

**City Clerk Brenda Wheeler**  
**Top Recommendation: Confluence**

I am selecting the above firm because I believe their presentation demonstrated a clear understanding of Blair including its regional economic role, housing demand, transportation challenges and growth management needs. In my opinion, they outlined the most impressive or clear phased planning process that emphasized data-driven analysis, extensive public engagement, and infrastructure planning. I was impressed with what they presented for the community engagement and survey methods. I felt their presentation clearly had emphasis on producing an actionable plan to be a practical tool for guiding future policy.