



MINUTES

City Commission Workshop: Strategic Planning

5:00 PM – Thursday, March 14, 2024 – City Hall

CALL TO ORDER: 5:02 P.M.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF QUORUM AND PROPER NOTICE

PRESENT: Commissioner Gary Ashcraft, Commissioner Nan Cobb, Commissioner Willie Hawkins, Vice Mayor Emily Lee and Mayor Michael Holland

1. WORKSHOP ITEM WITH DISCUSSION, PUBLIC INPUT AND DIRECTION

1.1 Strategic Plan Development

Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, introduced Jason Gray, Project Director and Lead Strategist, from Willdan Group, a municipal consulting firm. He provided a brief review of Mr. Gray's background.

Mr. Gray presented the proposed Organizational Strategic Plan encompassing Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Themes. He began with background information and a strategic framework, and then presented strategic themes and the SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) for each.

Mr. Gray noted that the strategic planning process began in late 2023 with a focus on organizational strategic planning which is a separate, complimentary effort to the Downtown Master Plan. He explained the benefits of strategic planning and the need to have measurable outcomes. He commented on all those involved in the process including the community. He introduced his staff that will be involved in the plan development.

Tom Carrino, City Manager, noted the involvement of Project Advisors Lynn Dehlinger and Sharon McCormick at League of Cities.

Mr. Gray provided an overview of the building blocks of strategic planning including vision, values, strategic themes, objectives and activities. He explained the vision states where they want to be and noted the City already has a vision statement. He further explained what each section of the plan accomplishes. He stated the Commission's focus would be on the vision, mission, values and strategic themes. Staff's focus would be on specific objectives and activities. He added that the Commission will provide direction on what needs to be accomplished with staff bringing back how that can be done, when it can be done and how that can be determined. He added that the only reason to do a strategic plan is to change the trajectory.

Mr. Gray compared the City's current vision and the draft downtown master plan vision. He explained what makes a good vision statement and provided various examples. He discussed core ideologies and purposes. He commented on the City's current vision and mission statements.

Mr. Gray asked the Commission about their thoughts on the vision and mission statements with the Commissioners agreeing that they have not had a significant impact on their decisions. It was noted that the vision and mission statements are from 2012.

Mr. Gray asked the Commission for comments on various parts of the vision statement with them responding about the City's lack of vibrancy. It was questioned whether or not the people attending events are actually helping the economy by purchasing from the businesses.

Discussion was held regarding how to improve the City's vibrancy and what that means to different people.

Comments were made regarding the efforts of the City's Events and Tourism division and the effects of past Commissions. It was noted that the City failed to address the loss of the citrus industry and the lack of support for agriculture.

Comments were made regarding the City being the same for the past 20 years. It was stated that the City needs to change its culture. The Commission discussed whether it wants to be vibrant or welcoming and family-friendly.

Mr. Gray commented on the differences in vibrancy from economic, tourism and community perspectives. He focused on vibrancy from each Commissioner's perspective. He noted the need to make sure the objectives meet those perspectives.

The Commission discussed the definition of vibrancy with the following suggestions: 1) Being able to work, play and live in Eustis; 2) Need for a different descriptor than vibrant; 3) Vibrant is a big city word; 4) The need to describe why people move to Eustis; 5) The word vibrant may be too broad; and 6) Being full of energy and enthusiasm.

Discussion was held regarding how to better define the City rather than as vibrant and the need to focus growth in the downtown corridor and on infill. It was noted that residents used to be able to do everything they wanted to within a few blocks of the downtown corridor.

Discussion was held regarding the relocation of the hospital which was an employment center. It was noted that the only way to grow the downtown is to move to the north. It was suggested that as residential properties become vacant the properties could be converted to commercial.

Discussion was held regarding rethinking who the City is without the hospital's presence and define what that is.

Mr. Gray commented on the continuing affect of the absence of the hospital and what are the drivers from the hospital and how to replace those. He asked the Commission's thoughts on the "well-integrated local economy" portion of the vision statement.

The Commission questioned what that means with Mr. Gray stating that usually means they are not dependent on one particular industry or business. Therefore, they could lose an industry or business and still survive.

RECESS: 5:56 p.m. RECONVENE: 6:10 p.m.

Sam Brinson, new Parks and Recreation Director, noted he would begin the position on April 1st. He provided a brief overview of his resume and stated he had previously interviewed for the position in 2016.

Mr. Carrino introduced Lori Carr, Finance Director prospect. He noted that her appointment would come before the Commission for approval on April 4th.

Ms. Carr commented on her government experience and how excited she is about coming to the City.

Mr. Carrino thanked the Commission and staff for their support during his family's recent issues.

Mr. Gray asked the Commission about the creativity and innovation section of the vision statement and if it is purposeful for today's Eustis. The Commission agreed that this does correspond to present day Eustis.

Discussion was held regarding "It's a community that respects and honors its history" and whether or not it is still valid. Discussion was held regarding the City getting back to its roots while welcoming the newcomers. Discussion was also held regarding the impact of prior commissions and administration and the conflicts. It was noted that residents are concerned about the possible closing of the historical museum.

Discussion was then held about recognition of the City's rich natural environment and retaining the waterfront in its natural state. The Commission commented that Eustis is one of the few "old Florida" style cities left.

Mr. Gray commented on the "live, work, play" concept and suggested including something similar.

The Commission suggested "home of the million-dollar sunsets".

Discussion was held regarding "friendly, welcoming sense of place" and what that means.

Mr. Gray opened discussion on the mission statement with most of the Commission agreeing it was poorly phrased. Mr. Gray indicated he would work on that entire statement.

Mr. Gray summarized that he would bring back a vision statement changing some of the phraseology but that would be similar in context. He indicated they would completely rework the mission statement.

Mr. Gray then opened discussion on the value statements which he stated exist to provide a centering point on how to deliver the vision and mission. He emphasized that the values begin with the Commission and cited how that is exemplified. He indicated the values identified in the vision and mission statements. He noted the City's organizational values and asked if the Commission feels any of those are not appropriate.

The Commission agreed that the values are spot on with how the City should function with Mr. Gray asking if there any of the values that the City as a whole is not being adhered to. It was suggested that the City organization needs to focus more on producing results.

Mr. Gray stated that they would bring back some alternatives on the vision and mission statements while trying to incorporate the portions agreed upon.

Mr. Carrino asked for clarification on how Mr. Gray prefers the City to communicate with him with Mr. Gray stating his preference to receive direct communication from the City Commission.

Mr. Gray discussed strategic themes and the high-level SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). He explained that strengths are areas where the community currently thrives. He stated that the goal of the strategic plan is to build upon the existing strengths. He explained that weaknesses are current weaknesses that are things that are preventing the City from accomplishing the vision. He stated the strategic plan will work toward mitigating those weaknesses.

Mr. Gray then explained that opportunities are things the City could further leverage to become a strength. The goal of the plan will be to leverage those opportunities to become

strengths to serve the vision. He then stated that threats are areas that are not yet a weakness but could place the City in jeopardy of accomplishing the vision or mission.

Mr. Gray then discussed the City's strategic themes which provide a plan, but not the details, for how to accomplish the vision. He cited the five mentioned in the budget: 1) Competent and effective government; 2) Safe community; 3) Planned and secure future; 4) Developed and functional infrastructure; and 5) High quality lifestyle. He asked the Commission to think about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for each of those themes.

Regarding a "competent and effective government", the Commission responded that the Commission works well together and has staff that does a lot with a little. They also cited the City's department heads as a strength.

Regarding weaknesses, the Commission cited slowness in achieving results, insufficient staff and the upcoming election. Mr. Gray termed the election as a threat rather than a weakness since the outcome is unsure. It was noted that the City has half the staff they had in 2008 and yet the City has grown significantly.

Discussion was held regarding how that occurred due to the downturn in the economy and resistance to growth.

Mr. Gray questioned how they can make sure the organization is prepared to meet the requirements.

The Commission commented on the need to look at outside influences and organizations and their affect on the City. The Commission indicated that the City has a good working relationship with both the state and other local cities. Comments were made on recent improvements to the City's relationship with the County.

The Commission indicated the City needs to streamline some of its processes and procedures with comments on the need to also improve technology.

Mr. Gray noted that weaknesses often become opportunities. He then opened discussion on opportunities pertaining to competent and effective government.

The Commission cited the opportunities the City has had partnering with neighboring cities for various services. They also noted the opportunity to provide more education for the City's work force.

Mr. Gray then opened discussion on weaknesses with the Commission citing the idea of "it's always been done that way" and lack of sufficient funding. They also cited the lack of expediency which may result in the loss of traction on a project.

Mr. Gray stated there is a direct connection between the amount of focus and discipline and the ability to deliver the results they want to have. He stated the more focused and disciplined the Commission is then the larger the ability the staff will have to deliver the results. He indicated that the less focus and discipline results in staff being pulled in too many directions.

Discussion was held regarding some of the issues that slow results.

Mr. Gray asked the Commission about the strengths relating to safe community with the Commission responding having a strong police chief and good communication with all aspects of the community regarding ongoing incidents. They also noted some new programs such as SeeClickFix and highlighted the City's forward thinking.

The Commission added the City Manager and staff as a City strength.

The Commission then discussed weaknesses pertaining to safe community and cited the lack of funding to have a stronger police and fire presence. They then discussed opportunities relating to having a safe community. They highlighted leveraging available resources and maintaining their connections with the State and Lake County.

Discussion was held regarding threats to having a safe community with Commissioners citing Orlando, types of businesses that are allowed within the City and retention of police officers.

Mr. Gray questioned whether "planned and secure future" should be a strategic theme. The Commission discussed if that should be a function of planning. Mr. Gray suggested there is an energy around the idea of a planned future with the Commission discussing how they have successfully planned other areas. They also commented on the City's ownership of various properties and how they have leveraged those. Discussion was held regarding "secure" pertaining to economic development. They discussed various current programs including the UCF incubator and the City's ties to Lake Sumter and Lake Tech. Further discussion was held regarding expanding UCF's presence in the City. They stated that education was both a strength and an opportunity.

Discussion was held regarding lack of work force housing and the resulting loss in educated residents.

RECESS: 7:14 p.m. RECONVENE: 7:21 p.m.

Mr. Gray asked about threats to a planned, secure future with Mr. Carrino commenting on unfunded mandates and pre-emptions as threats to the City's planning and development and Home Rule. He cited the Live Local Act and its affect on the City's development as well as limitations imposed by the County.

Mr. Gray then cited the next strategic theme as "developed and functional infrastructure". He asked what are the current strengths to the infrastructure with the Commission responding the department director Rick Gierok. They emphasized his ability to use the City's resources to their best advantage. They also cited the modernization of the City's water and wastewater plants to the extent they were able to assist other cities.

The Commission also cited the use of ARPA funds to expand the City's wastewater plant and staff's forward thinking whenever an expansion is done. They also cited the City having its own grantwriter.

Discussion was then held on weaknesses for the infrastructure with the Commission citing the aging infrastructure and lack of planning in the past. They also cited the lack of a paper trail for older infrastructure and the difficulty in addressing enclaves due to jurisdictional issues. Other weaknesses named were insufficient funding and timing.

The Commission then discussed the following opportunities: 1) Working with Lake County to take in roads if they bring them up to par; 2) Annexation of enclaves; 3) Working with the State and County on large scale infrastructure projects to obtain funding; and 4) Having a lobbying consultant in Tallahassee.

Mr. Gray asked about threats to the infrastructure with the Commission citing insufficient funding and Mr. Carrino discussing regulatory pre-emptions and proposed limits on what the City can charge to customers located outside of the City.

As an opportunity, the Commission discussed the possibility of utilizing something like CDD's to fund infrastructure for developments. Discussion was held regarding putting more of the burden on the private sector - the developer and end user - for the cost of the infrastructure.

The Commission discussed managing growth both initial growth and long-term.

Mr. Gray asked the Commission for their thoughts about what constitutes a high quality lifestyle.

The Commission mentioned the following qualities for a quality lifestyle: 1) Clean, neat and tidy environment; 2) Good public safety; 3) Low crime, job opportunities, recreational activities and community involvement; 4) Having the right businesses so residents don't have to leave the City for their purchases; and 5) Ability to raise your family in a town that is safe throughout where you can shop and walk.

Mr. Gray commented on the five strategic themes and asked if those seem to be a good starting spot. He asked if there were further concerns that weren't mentioned with the Commission indicating they felt the most important issues were discussed.

Mr. Carrino committed to providing the Commissioners with Mr. Gray's contact information.

Mayor Holland announced that the community would have the opportunity to provide input at future sessions.

The Commission emphasized the need to have more community engagement and buy-in on the plan.

2. ADJOURNMENT: 7:48 P.M.

**These minutes reflect the actions taken and portions of the discussion during the meeting. To review the entire discussion concerning any agenda item, go to www.eustis.org and click on the video for the meeting in question. A DVD of the entire meeting or CD of the entire audio recording of the meeting can be obtained from the office of the City Clerk for a fee.*

CHRISTINE HALLORAN
City Clerk

MICHAEL L. HOLLAND
Mayor/Commissioner