



CITY OF NOVI
Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee Meeting
February 19, 2025, 3:00 p.m.
Mayor's Conference Room | Novi Civic Center | 45175 Ten Mile Road
(248) 347-0445

CALL TO ORDER: 3:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Mayor Pro Tem Casey, Council Members Gurumurthy, Staudt

STAFF LIAISON: Victor Cardenas, City Manager

ALSO PRESENT: Danielle Mahoney, Assistant City Manager
Katherine Oppermann, Recording Secretary

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Gurumurthy; Seconded: Staudt; 3:0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 3, 2025 Minutes

Motion: Gurumurthy; Seconded: Staudt; 3:0

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

1. Interviews for 2050 Strategic Plan Consultant applicants

Prior to the interviews, the Committee confirmed with Assistant City Manager Mahoney that both applicants had been told to expect presentation time of up to 30 minutes followed by a question-and-answer session of 30 minutes. Based on the information provided so far in the responses to the Request for Proposal (RFP), the Committee thinks that Berry Dunn may be the better fit but are interested to see both presentations and further responses to questions they have.

a. Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC

City Manager Cardenas welcomed the Berry Dunn representatives (Seth Hedstrom, Charline Petit Homme, and Maddi Powers) and introduced them to the Committee members and staff present.

Mr. Hegstrom stated that most of what they would share at this stage was already provided in the proposal in response to the RFP and they don't want to be overly redundant at this point. In short Berry Dunn would bring their tools and best practices along with a strong emphasis on collaboration. They have a core team that would work with the City of Novi but can bring in subject area experts as needed. Ms. Powers and Ms. Petit Homme then went over the typical phases of the Strategic Plan process, including an optional "phase 4" in which Berry Dunn would assist in implementation and action planning once the plan has been completed and accepted. It was noted that the plan is

designed so that it can be carried out without ongoing support from Berry Dunn but that they can offer support and ensure that there are clearly defined steps for carrying out the plan.

They emphasized that outreach and engagement is a huge part of the process and that it is important to make a plan that works for engagement. This includes offering a variety of times and locations for residents to engage in the process. In the past they have had success in having pop-ups at grocery stores or local sports games. Ideally, you are meeting people where they are to have robust engagement. Approaching established community-based organizations is a good practice as well. You want to keep people interested and engaged throughout the full duration of the process so there should be balance between letting residents know what's coming but not overburdening them with information. Ideally, if properly executed, the public's excitement should be maintained so they can fully embrace implementation.

They also talked about some best practices for the establishment of a steering committee including developing a high-level framework and including various city departments/staff as needed. Importantly there needs to be a focus on promoting consensus and making progress on a shared vision. Clarity on everyone's roles and responsibilities, especially when it comes to those in decision-making versus those in an advisory role should be established. We should be careful in the composition of the group.

Councilmember Gurumurthy asked how the existing City plans (such as the Master Plan, Mobility Plan, etc.) gets incorporated into a Strategic Plan. Mr. Hegstrom said that a part of their process in Strategic Plan creation is studying existing plans and operations so necessary elements can be included. Ultimately the Strategic Plan serves as a "North Star" to guide other plans. Councilmember Gurumurthy further asked how we make sure that the plan is still approachable in ten years to which Mr. Hegstrom replied that it is by ensuring that objectives speak to outcomes. Additionally, they should be careful that the plan is not overly tied to ideas that may become outdated. It is important to be flexible in the way we think about the future so that we don't "paint ourselves into a corner." Ms. Powers added that objectives can be better met by establishing a system of touchpoints and reporting.

The Committee also confirmed the expected deliverable and expected input from City of Novi staff. Mayor Pro Tem Casey noted that the example plans provided by Berry Dunn were shorter in duration, typically 5 – 10-year plans, and asked how many 25-year plans they have built. Mr. Hegstrom said that, transparently, a 25-year plan is longer than the average they have built but he doesn't think it should be a problem. He doesn't know the exact number of longer plans, like 25 years, that they have created but he can follow up. Councilmember Staudt expressed his concern that a 25-year plan may be too long/ambitious.

Mr. Cardenas thanked the Berry Dunn representatives and said that we would be following up with them in the coming days.

Following the exit of the Berry Dunn representatives, Councilmember Staudt stated again that he is currently not in support of a 25-year plan. Mayor Pro Tem Casey and Councilmember Gurumurthy expressed their thoughts that within the 25-year plan would be clear 5 and 10-year goals and objective would be clearer and more actionable. The remaining outline would be higher level, leaving more room for flexibility and change. Councilmember Staudt then said that if that is the case then he would consider supporting a 25-year plan but that he still thinks the process is a replacement for Council goal setting.

b. SBrand Solutions

Cardenas welcomed SBrand owner Sheryl Trent and introduced the Committee members and staff present.

Ms. Trent established her intent in this meeting to have a conversation with the Committee and to utilize her powerpoint slides only as support when needed. She expressed her view of the Strategic Planning process as one that we all use, and that to break it down in three sections it would be "where are we now, where do we want to be, and how will we get there." She also noted that public engagement strategies are one of the most important things that they do and the intent for a Novi 2050 plan to be a living document. She was very pleased to see that we had asked for a timeline of 15 months as a robust outreach takes a lot of boots on the ground, ensuring that we are working with our existing partners and asking the right questions of the right groups. Ms. Trent believes that the difference in SBrand's work is that they are a small firm and "what you see is what you get", they build trust by having the same team present at the various events and meetings for the building of the plan. It is most important to her that the Plan is community informed, not cookie cutter.

Councilmember Gurumurthy asked how the existing City plans would be integrated into the Strategic Plan. Ms. Trent said that, aside from reading and understanding the important information in the existing plans, the Strategic Plan is a larger overreaching plan, a guide map. The other plans would be enmeshed with and informed by the Strategic Plan, they don't go away.

Ms. Mahoney asked how City staff would be assisting in the effort. Ms. Trent said that City staff would be seen as subject matter experts. A core team would be established and engaged in regular meetings to ensure strong incorporation throughout the process. SBrand would handle active engagement/outreach with community.

Mayor Pro Tem Casey asked how many 25-year Plans SBrand has done. Ms. Trent said that they'd done about 7. Mayor Pro Tem also asked about best practices and what to avoid. Ms. Trent expressed that best practices would include involving employee groups and incorporating a lot of visual elements

to engage the public and to ensure that the public is kept informed and engaged throughout the process. Things to avoid would include not involving employees in the plan and not having a practice of implementing the plan/letting it sit on the shelf. Mayor Pro Tem Casey then asked about Ms. Trent's thoughts on how a steering committee would be composed. Ms. Trent replied that odd numbers, such as 9 – 11 members, work best and that the membership is ideally a group that has working knowledge of government. She also stressed that they should be in an advisory role, whereas a group like this committee or City Council would operate at a policy level. Finally, Mayor Pro Tem Casey asked for further specifics about focus groups, as described on the SBrand Proposal. Ms. Trent said that their approach to focus groups is to hold them at different places throughout the City where you might not otherwise hold them. She said that they should start with the largest possible conversation and then refine down and approach focus groups and then a community visioning event.

Mr. Cardenas thanked Ms. Trent and said that the City would be in contact with her by the end of the week.

Following Ms. Trent's exit, Councilmember Staudt said that he thought she was highly engaging but is concerned about how small her team is. Even if the City doesn't choose SBrand for the project they think they could use her facilitating skills on a future project.

Ms. Mahoney then briefly discussed what they had heard back from the references provided for each company. Currently, they have only heard back from two, both for Berry Dunn. Both references said that they would hire Berry Dunn again but noted that there were often changes in the facilitators (notably some facilitators were better than others) and that a great deal of the work was left to City staff with Berry Dunn being more of a guiding hand. Mayor Pro Tem Casey noted that she would not want to see a lot of change in the facilitators and suggested adding that as a caveat in the contract.

The Committee determined that they want to gather more information and be provided with examples from both firms of a 25-year plan prior to making a final decision.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS: None

ADJOURNMENT: 5:01 p.m.

Motion: Gurumurthy; Seconded: Staudt; 3:0