



## Warrenton Town Council Fall Retreat After Action Summary & Recommendations

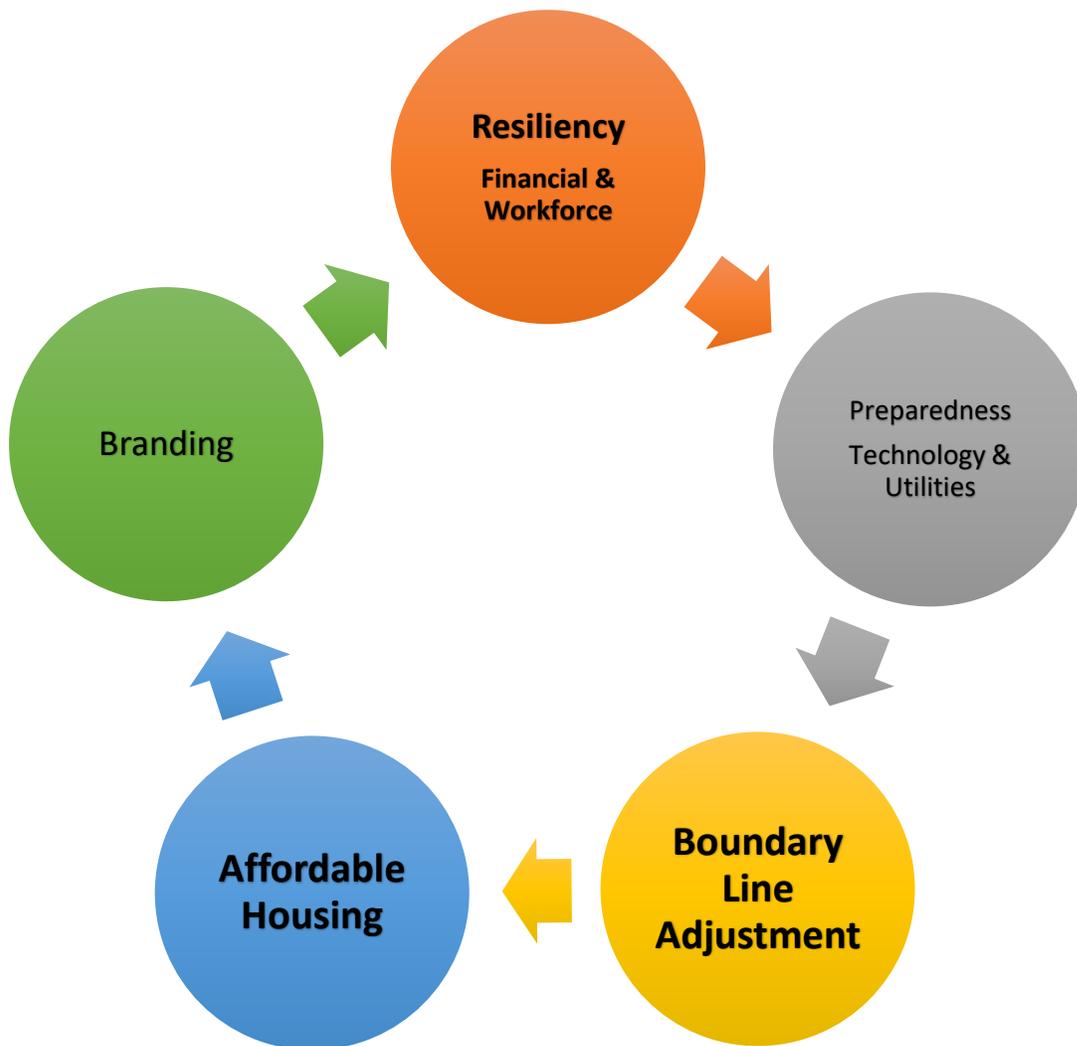
### 1. Executive Summary

The Town Council retreat revisited the priorities identified at its 2019 retreat, and the goals and themes of the Town's adopted Plan Warrenton 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

This is the first retreat since 2019 due to the pandemic, during which the Town, like many others, operated on an emergency basis. Many capital projects were delayed during the pandemic, while basic programs and services were maintained.

This year's retreat provides a starting point for the Council to continue its deliberations toward reaching consensus on how to move from the 2040 plan to the 6-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP), to the annual budget. The fiscal year 2024 annual budget, that will be adopted by the Town Council in June 2023, should reflect the Council's short-term strategic priorities (1-5 years), consistent with the long-term goals of the Plan Warrenton 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Based on the Council's discussions of the priorities identified in 2019, and the emerging priorities discussed at this year's retreat, each of the following issues (see diagram below) will require further discussion and consideration over the next few months, for Council to reach consensus and provide necessary direction to the Town Manager and professional staff.



1. **Resiliency & Preparedness** – Identifying key actions and initiatives that will protect and promote a successful future for Warrenton specifically in the areas of (1) financial and workforce resources and (2) technology and utility investments.
2. **Boundary Line Adjustment** – including overall relationship with the County and the process to finish this project. Resume regularly scheduled Town/County Liaison Committee meetings with a particular focus on boundary line adjustments.
3. **Affordable Housing** – including how the County and Non-Governmental Organizations can assist in this challenge.
4. **Branding** – Determining the next steps in this ongoing goal.

## **Recommendations:**

To build on the work of the September 24 retreat and to be well positioned for the Town's next fiscal planning cycle it would be advisable to review these initial discussions in relation to existing policy guiding documents.

The Plan Warrenton 2040 Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document for future decisions regarding development, preservation, public facilities, and other key components of community life. Although the plan seeks to provide a clear vision to help steer the Town, it provides a long term, 20-year, development horizon and is therefore very general in nature.

Accordingly, the Council may want to consider a shorter-term strategic plan that would provide the necessary 1–5-year prioritized policy guidance to the Town Manager and professional staff that can then be incorporated into the Town's Six-Year Capital Improvement program (CIP) and Annual Fiscal Plans.

A shorter term, 1–5-year, planning document would help the Council and the community realize its long-term vision by establishing goals and objectives in a logical, systematic, incremental manner.

Such a plan could look like the diagram below.



Once Council achieves further consensus on priorities, the professional staff can begin to:

1. Identify staff resources needed to execute the initiatives that will address these priorities
2. Identify the resources needed to pursue these priorities and develop program and project plans to achieve the desired goals. These resources include funding; technology, and human resources including managerial time.
3. It is also advisable to adopt project mapping software so initiatives can be reviewed for planning purposes and analyzed for milestone progress.

## 1. Overview of the Fall Retreat

### Retreat Preparation

During the weeks preceding the Warrenton Town Council planning session, 1-hour individual interviews were conducted to prepare for the retreat. The following people participated in a one-on-one format via video with Jane Dittmar from the Virginia Institute of Government:

#### **Council Members (9)**

H. E. Carter Neville – Mayor  
James N. Hartman – Vice Mayor (Ward 4)  
Renard Carlos – At Large Member  
Sean Polster – At Large Member  
Heather D. Sutphin – Ward 1  
William Semple II – Ward 2  
Brett A. Hamby – Ward 3  
Jay Heroux – Ward 5 (newly appointed)  
Kevin Carter – Ward 5 (recently resigned)

#### **Professional Staff (10)**

Chris Martino – Interim Town Manager  
Tommy Cureton – Deputy Town Manager  
Stephen Clough – Town Clerk  
Kasey Braun- Human Capital Director  
Frank Cassidy – Public Works & Utilities Director  
Rob Walton- Community Development Director  
Denise Harris – Planning Manager  
Michael Kochis – Chief of Police  
Stephanie Miller – Finance Director  
Jonathan Stewart – IT Director  
Kelly Koernig – Parks & Recreation (Acting) Director

## **The Retreat**

On September 24, 2022, The Warrenton Town Council convened a day long retreat at the Warrenton Police station. Those present included:

### **Council Members (8)**

H. E. Carter Neville – Mayor  
James N. Hartman – Vice Mayor (Ward 4)  
Renard Carlos – At Large Member  
Sean Polster – At Large Member  
Heather D. Sutphin – Ward 1  
William Semple II – Ward 2  
Brett A. Hamby – Ward 3  
Jay Heroux – Ward 5

### **Professional Staff (4)**

Chris Martino – Interim Town Manager  
Tommy Cureton – Deputy Town Manager  
Stephen Clough – Town Clerk  
Stephen Bruck – IT Specialist

### **Facilitator**

Jane Dittmar – Virginia Institute of Government

## **RETREAT AGENDA**

- 1) Roles & Responsibilities of Elected Bodies and Professional Staff
- 2) Norms and Expectations among Council Members
- 3) Communication Strategies for Council Members
- 4) Challenges and Opportunities facing the Town
- 5) Existing Priorities found in the last Strategic and Comprehensive Plans
- 6) Emerging Priorities based on Challenges and Opportunities facing the Town
- 7) Next steps

## **1. Roles and Responsibilities**

The science and philosophy behind highly performing elected bodies and their staff was discussed. Material from national and international organizations was reviewed.

### **Town Council**

There was agreement that the Council is the policy maker and responsible for addressing the Town's long-term future by adopting the capital improvement and comprehensive plans, formulating annually a budget and setting the tax rate, enacting local ordinances and making land use determinations. The Council also understands its role hiring the Town Manager and Town Attorney (or by securing outside legal services).

### **Town Manager & Staff**

There was agreement the Town Manager is responsible for hiring, reviewing and retaining professional staff to execute Council policy and for ensuring high-level service delivery for Town residents. Discussion followed whether it was appropriate for individual Council members to work directly with staff instead of going through the Manager with constituent service requests. Utilizing the Town Manager to triage requests is the protocol described in the 2024 Warrenton Town Council Handbook. The handbook procedure was reaffirmed and Council members decided to review protocols on handling constituent service and other requests when the new Manager is on boarded.

### **Preferences for how Council Would Like Information**

The group also discussed their preference in receiving briefings and recommendations from staff. There was consensus that an executive summary of findings and the recommendation of staff is a format that would be well received. There was not general consensus on how many options should be offered. Some members preferred just one recommendation with supporting justification. Others wanted a recommendation that included all the options considered by staff, and besides the supporting justification for the final recommendation, they wanted a brief explanation as to why the other options were rejected. One member did not like having three options to consider. There should be further discussion about how to present the staff recommendation found in their executive summaries.

## **2. Norms and Expectations**

### **A. Summary**

During individual Council members' interviews, the topic of norms of behavior among members came up frequently. This subject was added to the agenda. Besides stated norms found in the 2022 Warrenton Town Council Handbook, the Council discussed norms that were important to them individually and as a whole. Questions were posed such as:

- 1) How do we develop and find consensus on our norms?
- 2) How do we (shall we) evolve our norms?
- 3) How do we communicate our norms to new members?
- 4) What do we do if a norm is violated unintentionally?
- 5) What should we do if a member needs to violate a norm?

## **B. Individual interviews**

During the individual interviews the following themes emerged:

- 1) **One Voice** – Members should bring policy and requests to the full Council so by majority, the Council can speak as “one voice”.
- 2) **No Surprises** – let your fellow members know in advance if they might be surprised by a motion or announcement
- 3) **General Decorum** – treat other members as you want to be treated
- 4) **The actions of a fellow member v. the member** – criticize actions or policies being promoted by a member, not the member themselves and keep language from becoming personal. Exercise care in social media posts and other group communication.
- 5) **My Ward – Our Town** – recognize and respect the ward members who represent a particular ward and all members should understand that the Council considers the good of the whole town.
- 6) **Horse trading votes** – when horse trading ward to ward, ensure that these votes are good for the whole town.
- 7) **Handling “breaches”** – reach out to understand a breach before reacting to what you assume was the motivation.

## **C. Exercise results**

Members broke into four groups of two each to discuss norms and expectations. The following highlights illustrate the priorities of the members:

- 1) **Boundaries**
  - a. **Ward boundaries** – those in wards request that they be notified if another member has town business to discuss or attend to in their ward. That said, some members didn’t want the town to be too siloed by ward boundaries and wanted everyone to vote on behalf of the entire town.
  - b. **Staff boundaries** – “don’t put staff in the middle on issues”
  - c.

**2) Respect for each other**

There was also good consensus around the showing of mutual respect by avoiding surprising a fellow member by talking outside of official meetings, coming prepared to meetings, accepting each other's differences and handling disagreements or concerns in private and preferably in person.

**3) Handling Breaches**

Discussion included the recommendation that any breach should be addressed carefully with respect on both sides.

**3. Communication Strategies & Tools**

Some time was devoted on tools and strategies for effective communication.

**4. Existing Priorities**

**A. Summary**

The Council spent time reviewing existing priorities found in the Comprehensive Plan "Plan Warrenton 2040" and in the findings of the last strategic plan held in 2019.

Plan Warrenton 2040 serves as the official document tying together community features with the overall vision for its future. It is broken into 7 areas of community policy and development:

- 1) Historic resources
- 2) Community facilities
- 3) Housing
- 4) Open space, parks & environment
- 5) Transportation and circulation
- 6) Economic and fiscal resilience
- 7) Land use and character district plan

B The strategic plan created in 2019 identified the following priorities:

- 1) **Boundary Adjustment- Facilities** – From the Community Facilities section of the Comprehensive Plan
- 2) **Branding- Who, What, Where** – From both the Historic Resources section and the Economic and Fiscal Resilience sections of the Comprehensive Plan
- 3) **Recreation- Quality of Life Activities** - From the Open Space Parks and Environment section of the Comprehensive Plan
- 4) **Historic District - Boundaries** – from both the Historic Resources and Land Use and Character District Plan
- 5) **Gateways** – from both Transportation and Circulation section and the Land Use and Character District section of the Comprehensive Plan and
- 6) **Inventory of Affordable Housing** – from the Housing section of the Comprehensive Plan

### C Group Exercise – reaffirming existing priorities

Members broke into four groups of two each to discuss norms and responsibilities. The following highlights illustrate the goals of the members. The top priorities identified by all four groups were:

1. Successful completion of the **boundary line adjustment** project  
Top priority in two groups, number two priority in the other two groups  
This priority continues to be consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan, found in the Community Facilities section, and the 2019 Council Retreat findings.
2. Forward movement on addressing **the affordable housing shortage**  
Top priority in one group, Second priority in one group, third priority in two groups  
This priority continues to be consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan found in the Housing section and the 2019 Council Retreat findings.
3. Continue the **branding** initiative for the town  
Second priority in one group, third priority in one group, fourth priority in one group and fifth priority in one group. This priority continues to be consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan, found in the Historic Resources section and the Economic and Fiscal Resilience section, and the 2019 Council Retreat findings.
4. Honorable mentions were recorded for:
  - a) Recreation (mentioned twice)
  - b) Historic resources (mentioned twice)
  - c) Transportation, including walkability (mentioned twice)
  - d) Economic Development (mentioned once)

### D Group Exercise – Identifying Emerging Priorities

Members broke into four groups of two each to discuss emerging priorities. The following highlights illustrate the priorities of the members

There were a number of emerging priorities the Council considered. The two major emerging priorities centered on **resiliency and workforce**.

- 1) **Resiliency** came in as number one emerging priority. It was listed number one for three groups and one of the three groups listed it twice. Descriptors for resiliency included:
  - a) “financial”
  - b) “preparedness”, and
  - c) “preparedness for change”.

**2) Workforce**, arguably a subcategory of resiliency, was elevated to its own priority. It was listed as the number two issue for two groups and the number three issue for two groups. Descriptors included

- a) "Hiring Town Manager"
- b) "Employee retention"
- c) "Employee recruitment and retention", and
- d) "Protecting our workforce"

**3)** Honorable mentions were recorded for:

- a) Representing town demographics; honoring diversity (mentioned twice)
- b) Maintaining high level of trust with residents (mentioned once)
- c) Maintaining the qualities of Warrenton that make it distinctive (mentioned once)
- d) Preparing for the future embracing change (mentioned once)
- e) Preparing for climate change (mentioned once)

## **5. Next Steps**

There are several events in the near future that are significant to Council working through these priorities. They are:

1. Fall (October/November 2022): Communication with the search firm regarding the qualities the Council wants in their next Manager.
2. Winter (December 2022-February 2023): Utilizing remaining work session(s) in 2022 to review the cost, action steps and timing of identified priorities for 2023. Also test the formats for explaining recommendations in executive summaries to determine which style suits the Council.
3. Winter (December 2022-January 2023): The November 2022 election will identify the several new members who will join the Council effective January 2023. Besides other materials, new member orientation can include a discussion of norms and expectations with other remaining members of the Council.
4. Winter (December 2022-January 2023): The on boarding of new Council members
5. Winter (February 2023): Conduct a fiscal planning retreat where for Council to assess the Town's financial strength and stability, review recent financial trends, identify any warning signs and provide guidance and direction regarding the desired quality and level of programs and services, capital investments and how to allocate the Town's limited resource to move ahead on its priority initiatives.
6. Winter (February 2023): The on boarding of the new Town Manager.

7. Spring (March-April 2023): Staff preparation of the proposed FY 2024 Annual Budget, the FY 2024 – FY 2029 6-year CIP and FY 2024 – FY 2028 year Budget. To do this there will need to be clear direction from Council on what priorities will be “slow walked” and which priorities should command the most discretionary resources in the next budget cycle.

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