Visioning, Strategic Planning And Goal Setting

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“The Future Isn’t A Gift. It Is To Be Achieved”

- This quote from Robert Kennedy still rings true – especially given the challenges facing government today. Many of these challenges are a product of not anticipating the long-term consequences of short-term politically popular decisions.

- Consider: runaway deficits, the burst of the financial bubble, unsustainable public pension plans and municipal bankruptcies.

- “The future ain’t what it used to be” - Yogi Berra.

- The simple truth: resources are tighter than ever and it may get worse.
The Challenge

- Every newly elected official confronts the question “Was I elected to do what the people want or to govern well?”

- All councils operate in two simultaneous realities: the here and now (what people want) and the future (stewardship of the community’s future).

- While appealing - how do you really know what the “people” want?

- The reality is that deciding what the people want boils down to making difficult choices between numerous and conflicting wants.

- It also requires choosing between short-term wants and long-term priorities.
The Importance Of Perspective

- Highly effective councils see themselves existing to:
  - Think about and plan for the future.
  - Establish vision and well-defined strategic priorities.
  - Define results to be achieved.
  - Empower employees to produce those results.
  - Maintain relationships with residents and business leaders that instill confidence in council’s leadership.
  - Demonstrate stewardship for the city’s future and provide leadership that ensures the actions taken today produce the desired future.
Strategic Leadership: What Is It; Why Do It?

- People are future seeking. However, they must be able to visualize what they want the future to be and then decide how to make it a reality.

- Strategic leadership is a process that brings people together to think about the future, create a vision, and identify ways to make that future happen through determination, teamwork, and discipline.

- This is a primary function of leadership (i.e. making desirable things happen that would not happen otherwise and preventing undesirable things from happening that would otherwise occur).
“Back To The Future”

- A strategic leader always comes at you from the future and then takes you “back to the future” from the present.

- The journey starts with **vision**, evolves to **strategic issues** that must be addressed to achieve that vision, and then culminates with the development of long-range **goals** and **objectives** that provide decision-making and budgetary direction.
“Living Month To Month”

- Simply going from one budget to the next, and from one monthly meeting to the next can be limiting – putting your community’s future in the hands of chance and rendering your decision making reactive instead of proactive.

- A council’s primary responsibility is not just to decide routine matters at meetings. It is to accept responsibility for shaping the community’s future by determining what citizens’ desire for their city’s future and achieving it.

- For councils to be effective leaders, they must have a strategic perspective that enables them to make decisions at regular council meetings that are consistent and rational.
What Is Strategic Planning?

- Strategic planning in municipal government is the process by which council, as leaders, determines what it intends for the organization and community to be in the future and how it will get there.

- It involves developing a vision for the organization's future and determining the necessary goals, priorities, and action strategies to achieve that vision.

- Strategic planning serves as a roadmap and is used to prioritize initiatives, resources, goals, and department operations and projects. It involves big-picture thinking focused on directing efforts and limited resources toward clearly defined priorities.
The Strategic Plan

- Each member of council may, to a varying degree, have a different agenda.

- The Strategic Plan serves as a compass – without it, differences of opinion on council disrupt progress. With a properly prepared plan, the focus is on accomplishing council’s agreed upon priorities.

- The plan focuses council on the **Ends** to be achieved and the staff, volunteers and partners on the **Means** necessary to achieve those results.

- Other implementation efforts and plans (i.e. comprehensive land use plans, financial plans, and development plans) are policy and decision making tools that assist the council in achieving its vision for the city or community.
### Terminology

**Vision:** What are we trying to accomplish?

**Mission:** What will this organization do to accomplish it?

**Values:** In what manner shall we go about accomplishing it?

**Issues:** What are the barriers we must face to accomplish it?

**Strategies:** What will we do about it?

**Goals:** Statements of what we hope to accomplish.

**Objectives:** Component parts of goals that are even more specific and include performance measures and timeframes.

**Benchmarks:** Performance targets.
A Strategic Planning Process

1. Agree on the strategic planning process.
2. Determine your SWOTs.
3. Define the city's values, community vision and mission.
4. Develop a shared vision for the organization.
5. Establish goals for the organization.
6. Develop an action plan of specific objectives that address your goals.
7. Finalize the written plan.
8. Add procedures for monitoring and reporting progress.
First Things First – Agree On The Process

- Ideally this is done at a work session with key staff present.
- Education on what strategic planning is and how it is done.
- The value to the organization and community, in terms of providing a common vision and focus.
- The cost of strategic planning should be considered (financial and personnel)
- Define the horizon for the plan.
- Establish the process, the steps and who will be responsible for each step.
And Make Sure You Know Your SWOTs

- SWOT = Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

- This exercise helps provide an understanding of how your city or town relates to the external environment, what it’s internal capabilities are and serves as a baseline data for the strategic plan.
  - **External component** = identify and assess opportunities and threats.
  - **Internal component** = assess the strengths and weaknesses of your organization.
Now You’re Ready To Begin
Values, Community Vision And Mission

Consider beginning your strategic planning by agreeing on the following:

- **The Organization’s core values** – those beliefs or principles that guide the organization; these values are shared by council and staff, strongly held, and not easily changed.

- **Community Vision** – Council’s vision for the community; this is council’s image of what the community could be.

- **Mission** – the stated purpose for your municipality’s existence; think of it as your organization’s public statement of the contribution it promises to make to help accomplish the community vision.
A Shared Vision For The Organization

The concept here is that the organizational vision is dependent upon or subordinate to council’s vision for the community.

- Develop a vision of where council wants the organization to be in $X$ number of years, and then define strategies that will get it there.

- The vision might describe the organization in terms of broad categories (i.e. mix of services, reputation and key accomplishments), and/or it may provide descriptions of specific characteristics that define it.

- For a small town, a joint council-staff process may be effective. For a larger organization, a two-stage process (staff first and then council).
Goal Setting

- Set goals that, assuming the city is successful in addressing its mission, describe the organization in a specified number of years.

- The jump from vision to goals is usually a short one.

- Sometimes the statements describing the vision are essentially goals (status statements describing the organization).

- Transforming the vision into a series of key goals for the organization is extremely valuable.
A Plan Of Action

- You’ve got a long-term vision of what you want your community and organization to look like – now what?

- The next step is development of an implementation plan.

- This work plan consists of objectives that address the goals.

- To be successful, your strategic plan must reflect current conditions.

- That is why council will want to limit the work plan (i.e. the objectives) to the first year covered by the plan and then update annually.
Operative Words: Clear And Accountability

- Objectives must have clear time frames.
- They must be clearly assigned to an individual or unit.
- And they must be measurable.

- Objectives can relate to:
  - City services
  - Programs and Initiatives
  - Projects
  - Events
  - Relationships
The Involvement Of Staff Is Key

- Developing the annual work plans requires both council and staff input.
- Staff has valuable insight that council may not have.
- Staff can help council evaluate if the work plan is achievable.
- Are council’s expectations of what the city (council, staff, volunteers and partners) can achieve reasonable?
- Is it realistic? Can it be done?
Put It In Writing

- Finalize a written strategic plan that summarizes the results and decisions of council.

- There is no set format per se, but consider the hierarchy of:
  - Vision
  - Goals
  - Strategies
  - Objectives
  - Benchmarks (Performance Targets)

- Council should then formally adopt the plan.
Don’t Forget To Monitor And Maintain It

- Be sure progress towards goals and objectives is monitored regularly.
- For some cities this may be monthly. Others, particularly small towns with limited staff, this may be quarterly.
- Develop a work plan annually at the beginning of each year.
- It should consist of strategies/objectives that have been reevaluated and revised based on progress made, obstacles encountered, and the changing environment (internal and external).
- Align the process with the budget cycle so that council’s priorities are addressed/funded in the annual budget.
Some Thoughts On Facilitation

- The retreat (and any other planning sessions) must be facilitated.
- The individual facilitating the meetings should be (or be made) knowledgeable about the organization and community.
- They should be someone:
  - Skilled in small group processes
  - Non-directive
  - Committed to full discussion of the issues
  - Committed to full participation of all council members
  - Task-oriented
  - Able to keep the process moving forward
Some More Thoughts On Facilitation

- A member of staff or council may be capable of facilitating the meetings.

- However, using an outsider, or consultant, often produces better results.

- They may be better able to navigate potential land mines and complicated relationships that may exist on council because they bring no baggage to the process.

- When facilitated by a member of staff or council, that individual is not able to fully participate because they are too focused on facilitating the process.

- A 3rd party usually can be more direct than a member of staff or council.
In Closing…

- **Process matters**: If the plan isn’t done properly, you won’t use it.
- **Agreement**: If there isn’t consensus, there isn’t a plan.
- **Simplicity**: The harder it is to understand, the less it will be used.
- **Length**: The longer it is, the less it will be used.
- **Clarity**: Clearly define all objectives, assignments and time frames for completion.
- **Measurement**: Create measures to determine and/or quantify success.
In Closing…

- **Monitor**: Keep tabs on and regularly report progress to council.

- **Revisit**: Review the previous plan’s results before beginning a new one.

- **Refer**: Look to the plan for guidance during the budget process and during the policymaking process.

- **Commitment**: Success is more about commitment and determination than it is about an expensive and complicated plan.

- **Scalable**: Every city, no matter its size, can benefit from strategic planning provided there is a commitment to the process and plan.
Resources

City of Rock Hill, S.C.
www.cityofrockhill.com

Municipal Association of South Carolina
www.masc.sc
Keywords: strategic planning

Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC)
www.mrsc.org