

CITY OF COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL
Annual Strategic Planning Summit

Saturday, 31 January 2015 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Maplewood Golf Club 4050 Maple Valley Highway, Renton

SUMMARY

OF THE COUNCIL'S MAJOR AGREEMENTS AT THE MEETING

REVISED 02.11.15

Attending: Mayor Margaret Harto, Mayor Pro Tem Jeff Wagner, Council members Joe Cimaomo, Mark Lanza, Marlla Mhoon, Jim Scott, and Sean Smith; City Manager Regan Bolli; Management Team members Noreen Beaufrere, Richard Hart, Rob Hendrickson, Kevin Klason, Sharon Scott, Karla Slate, Scott Thomas, and Don Vondran; and facilitator Jim Reid

Guests: Mary Pritchard

MAJOR AGREEMENTS FROM THE SUMMIT

The City Council's major agreements from its 2015 Summit are:

A. VISION, MISSION AND GOALS:

1. The vision, mission and goal statements were reaffirmed—Council made no changes to them.
2. Until now, the vision, mission and goal statements have been introduced with this banner headline: "City of Covington *Vision, Mission and Goals.*" **The Council reached consensus that from now on that banner should read "City of Covington *Growing Toward Greatness.*"**

B. COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR 2015-'16:

The Council agreed on four priorities for 2015-'16:

1. **Gain the voters' approval of the Transportation Benefit District (TBD) in April 2015.**
2. **Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness**

Council members identified two ideas for advancing this priority:

- a. Hire at least one more police officer.
- b. Host a regional fair or festival focused on community safety to help citizens become more aware of public safety issues and take greater responsibility for their neighborhood's safety. Council members expressed a preference for a regional event; they would like Covington to partner with the cities of Maple Valley and Black Diamond to sponsor and organize it. Each city could take a turn hosting the annual safety fair. The Council also expressed an interest in involving vendors and making the event fun. That may mean holding it at the farmers' market or in conjunction with another community event.

It was mentioned that this idea is similar to the annual Emergency Preparedness Fair that Maple Valley sponsors every year in which Covington participates. This could be an opportunity to expand that program and further promote community awareness in Covington.

Council requested that the staff explore the options for the regional public safety fair. They also said they would like this topic to be on the agenda of the Tri-City meeting of elected officials that will be held in Covington this spring. The Council expects that the inaugural event will be in either 2016 or '17.

3. Economic Development

The Council members identified eight potential strategies or actions that the City should consider to advance this priority:

- a. *Invest in the development of Town Center.* The City should be ready to purchase the surplus Kent School District property when it becomes available and the City could purchase a portion of property from Panattoni. Staff reported that representatives of Panattoni are prepared to make a presentation to Council in the near future. The Council asked that this presentation be held in the next two months in a study session at a local high school or middle school so that students could learn, ask questions, and provide perspectives to Council members. This meeting is intended to be a "listening session" for the Council.
- b. *Work closely with the business community.* More specifically, the Council is interested in strengthening the relationship with the Chamber of Commerce, an effort that Mayor Pro Tem Wagner and City Manager Regan Bolli have initiated.
- c. *Improve signage.* Three ideas were suggested: 1) post signs on Highway 18 that say "Covington" at exit ramps; 2) put in a "gateway" sign to welcome people to the city; and 3) adopt a symbol, such as colorful circle, that could be placed around town or turned into a decal for businesses to fasten to their windows.
- d. *Brand Covington as the "Gateway to the Cascades."*
- e. *Brand youth sports programs* to heighten the city's identity.
- f. *Build stronger connections to higher education.* Work with Green River Community College and Eastern Washington University to locate a branch campus in Town Center.
- g. *Address vacant commercial buildings.* Discuss in the future what the City can do to attract more businesses to Covington to fill vacant commercial buildings or identify other uses that would fill them.
- h. *Use art to enhance the City's identity.* Council members suggested that art could be applied to light standards, benches, garbage cans, and other such things to make them fanciful as well as raise the City's identity or profile.

4. Parks and Recreation

Council agreed that the City should establish a citizens' advisory committee similar to the Budget Priorities Advisory Committee (BPAC) that made recommendations to the Council in 2013 about future financial issues and strategies. The purposes of the parks citizens' group will be to analyze existing mechanisms to fund parks and recreation facilities and programs, and recommend strategies and mechanisms to provide long-term, stable funding sources for parks and recreation. Park impact fees and the creation of a Metropolitan Parks District (MPD) were mentioned as two potential tools to stabilize funding for parks and recreation in the future.

As the discussion about priorities was drawing to a conclusion, **Council members asked staff to prepare a timeline for potentially submitting to Covington voters four ballot measures—for police, transportation, parks, and Town Center.** This analysis should include potential countywide and School District-sponsored ballot measures so that the City Council can factor them into its consideration of if and when the City ballot measures would be brought to the voters.

C. POTENTIAL FUTURE FUNDING SOURCES:

After reviewing and discussing eighteen potential sources to fund their priorities, **Council members reached agreement that two potential funding sources meet the criteria they had established and, therefore, merit further analysis and consideration.** The two potential funding sources are: 1) Councilmanic increases to the Surface Water Management (SWM), solid waste, and cable television Utility Tax; and 2) the Transportation Benefit District (TBD). As they were giving staff instructions about researching the first option, **Council members also requested more information about another option, the Business and Occupation (B&O) Tax.**

Council members are preparing to submit a TBD proposal to Covington voters in April 2015, so they devoted more of their time to an in-depth discussion about the pros and cons of increasing the utility tax. Two other options, forming a Metropolitan Parks District (MPD) and imposing park impact fees, are likely to be examined by the citizens' advisory committee that the City will appoint to make recommendations on creating a long-term, sustainable funding source for parks and recreation facilities and programs. Council has not taken these options off the table but will delegate to the citizens' committee responsibility to analyze them.

The criteria that the Council used to assess each of the eighteen potential funding sources were: 1) the net amount that might be generated (high funding impact); 2) sustainable and predictable over the long-term; 3) feasibility; 4) ease or difficulty and cost of implementation (low cost); 4) fairness and equity among income levels and between residents and non-residents; and 5) doesn't substitute local for State funds (must be above and beyond).

Raising the utility tax may be the means by which to fund an additional police officer. Council members also heard that the cities of Kent and Renton have worked with their Chambers of Commerce on proposals to impose or raise the B&O tax. As the discussion came to an end, the **Council reached consensus that the staff should present a proposal that would require mandatory garbage and yard waste collection in Covington and increase the cable television utility tax.** In addition, staff will research this question: "What taxes do cities without a B&O tax assess businesses?"

Council members also heard that the voters' approval of the TBD in April could be another, albeit indirect, means of funding a police officer. With more stable funding for transportation projects, the City would no longer need to loan money from the General Fund to the Street Fund. Ending that practice would free up General Funds to help pay for a police officer.

D. BIENNIAL BUDGETING:

The Council agreed to further assess and discuss how the biennial budget process would benefit the City and be put into operations. Staff will bring a proposal to the Council later this year.

E. RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE VITAL TO SUCCESS:

The Council identified relationships the City depends on to succeed. Foremost among them in 2015 are the relationships with the cities of Maple Valley and Black Diamond, the Kent School District, Eastern Washington University, the Chamber of Commerce, King County, and state and federal elected officials.

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Maple Valley and Black Diamond

Issues to address with these two cities in 2015 are:

- The public safety and emergency preparedness regional fair or festival.
- The Interlocal Agreements for building administration, including plan review and building inspections, and for public works services.
- Transportation.
- The Tri-City Trail.
- Homelessness and poverty in Southeast King County.

Kent School District

Issues to address with the School District in 2015 are:

- The value of the presence of a higher educational institution in the community. Could the School District develop and promote a curriculum that paves the way for a higher education institution in the community?
- Transparency of standards that schools are achieving. High quality schools will attract businesses and well-educated people to Covington, as well as more students, thus expanding the local economy. The City could help promote the schools' quality and achievements.
- Access to school facilities, including fields, gyms, and classrooms.
- How the TBD will benefit students by providing safer transportation, including better roads and more sidewalks.
- A coordinated approach and messaging in working with our State legislators.

Council members expressed an interest in hosting a meeting with the School Board once the district's new Superintendent of Education is hired.

Eastern Washington University (EWU)

The Council will continue building its relationship with EWU to attract a branch campus or some kind of presence to Covington. The City could also help facilitate a closer relationship between the Kent School District and EWU to achieve a K-12 through college "continuum of education" in the community.

Chamber of Commerce

The Council would like the City to have a more visible presence at Chamber-sponsored events, including monthly meetings and "after hours" social events. By getting on the agenda of Chamber meetings and other forums, the City could help the business community better understand the wide variety of issues the City is tackling and services it provides.

Council members expressed a desire to convene a meeting with the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce and Covington Economic Development Council (CEDC) to model the kind of relationship that the Council seeks between representatives of the public and private sectors.

The Council also suggested that Karla work with the CEDC to convince the Chamber of Commerce to update and reproduce the map of Covington it had once published, and to place the map on the Internet.

King County

Issues to address with the County in 2015 are: 1) animal control; and 2) the Courts. Regarding the latter, the Council is interested in receiving quarterly updates on the costs to the City of Court operations. A key to continuing to build a fruitful relationship with the County is the City's relationship with King County

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Councilman Reagan Dunn. An efficient way to keep working with him is to invite him to the Spring 2015 Tri-Cities elected officials' meeting.

State and Federal Elected Officials

The Council is interested in continuing to nurture the relationship with the State legislators who represent the City in Olympia, particularly on transportation matters, but also on financial structural issues such as revenues from the sales of liquor and marijuana that flow to local governments. The Council is also interested in strengthening the City's relationships with United States Senators Murray and Cantwell and Congressman Reichert.

Other Important Relationships

Other important relationships that must be nurtured include those with developers and commercial brokers, the Covington Water District, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Regional Fire Authority, Forterra, the King Conservation District, and neighborhood councils and homeowners' associations (HOAs).

Council members specifically mentioned meeting this year with:

- The new manager of the Covington Water District.
- The Chief and captains of the Regional Fire Authority to learn how the City fits into their vision of their organization's mission, roles and responsibilities.
- Commercial brokers and developers at the annual roundtable sponsored by the King County Master Builders Association.

By working with neighborhood councils and HOAs, the City intends to make the community safer and help direct citizens to opportunities to obtain King Conservation District funds that could strengthen their organizations. By monitoring the work of the King County Joint Recommendations Committee, the City could obtain CDBG funds to improve infrastructure and housing for low-income residents. Finally, the City expects that its citizens will take responsibility for fostering Sister City relationships.

F. KEY MESSAGES FROM THE CITY TO THE COMMUNITY:

Following the discussion about priorities for 2015 and '16, the Council discussed the key messages that should be communicated to the public about the City's priorities and what it will take to implement them.

Regarding the TBD ballot measure, the Council agreed that messages to the public should incorporate these key interests of the public: 1) safety; 2) mobility; 3) efficiency and timeliness; and 4) economic growth and prosperity. These interests are also at stake in finding long-term, stable funding sources. An important additional interest of the Council's is fiscal responsibility.

The public should understand that the City can no longer maintain such high service levels because of State budget cuts and unfunded State mandates. If Covington is to continue to provide the high levels of service that they have come to expect, the citizens will need to pay for them.

The City can lay the groundwork for this message. For example, the City can communicate to the public the popularity and importance of youth sports programs, and how much they cost. Celebrating their role in the lives of kids and families will raise the visibility of these programs. The City could also distribute "I Love Youth Sports" decals or buttons to attract broader support from citizens and the business community. By helping the community better understand the role of youth sports programs in the fabric of community life and the costs of operating them, the City can help lay the groundwork for a potential future ballot measure to fund parks and recreation.

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Council members' presence at community events could also be valuable in raising the City's profile and communicating what the City is doing and the benefits of its programs. Council member Sean Smith volunteered to attend HOA meetings, and other Council members said they would attend parks, recreational and sporting events. PTA meetings might be another avenue for reaching out to school administrators and teachers and to parents. And the National Night Out may be another event for communicating the City's messages.

Finally, some Council members suggested that a strategic communications plan would allow the City to build public awareness of and support for the direction it is going and its services and programs. An element of that plan should be a coordinated approach for public outreach by the Council members.

G. AN UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF THE YOUTH ATHLETICS PROGRAM

With the assistance of parks and recreation director Scott Thomas, the Council assessed the status of the youth athletics program nearly a year after the City assumed management responsibility for it from Covington Community Sports. Since taking control of the program in 2014, the City has: 1) added a customer service staff person plus an athletics specialist; 2) recruited coaches and officials; 3) and offered fall soccer, volleyball, basketball, and flag football, which is moving to summertime in 2015.

The financial "footing" of the program looks solid. The number of kids who participated in the program was down a little from when Covington Sports managed it, but the number is increasing. Staff expects even more young people to participate in 2015. One strategy being employed to sustain the program is to attract 6-8 year olds because they would become long-time customers, and, hopefully, influence their younger siblings to participate.

Council members suggested that one vehicle for marketing the program is the Chamber of Commerce's newsletter. And one member proposed that businesses be given the opportunity to sponsor teams. They could print their business' name on the team jerseys to promote themselves.

Council requested that Scott refine the estimate for 2015 costs and revenues based on the actual experience of 2014.

MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2014

As in past years, the Council cited the most important accomplishments of the previous year. By doing so, Council members provided the context and foundation for their goals and priorities during 2015-'16. The biggest accomplishments of 2014 were:

1. Hiring a qualified new City Manager and the process by which he was hired. Also, the confidence the Council exhibited as it advanced the process.
2. The transition from Derek Matheson to Rob Hendrickson as Interim City Manager to Regan Bolli as the new City Manager.
3. Staff's orientation session for Regan and new City Council member Sean Smith.
4. Public-private partnerships to advance the Council's vision for Town Center.
5. The relationship the City established with Eastern Washington University (EWU).
6. The City took Covington Days to a new level of success.
7. The seamless transition of the Youth Sports Program to City management.
8. The Police Department's School Resource Officer is in place in the schools.
9. City of Covington branding.
10. The graffiti problem is declining.
11. Bond rating increased.

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12. Opportunities for citizens to interact with staff, including the public's influence of City thinking and decisions regarding the Jenkins Creek Bridge and the Hawk property.
13. Partnership with Oakpointe (Yarrow Bay).
14. The City's growing economy.
15. Implementing the use of credit cards for citizens to pay bills and for services.
16. The exit interviews of staff and Commission members yielded helpful information and garnered goodwill.
17. The art installation outside the pool.
18. The City stood its ground in working on the affordable housing component of the mixed-use project for the Inland Group in Town Center.
19. Governor Inslee attended the hospital ribbon-cutting ceremony, which gave him the opportunity to learn more about the community. His visit has had a positive ripple affect.
20. The City increased its support of human services.
21. The Interlocal agreement between Covington, Maple Valley, and Black Diamond.
22. No personal agendas. Everyone puts the interests and needs of the City first.
23. The effectiveness of the City's Code Enforcement Program with three very high profile cases that resulted in protecting neighborhoods and environmental quality.

After citing the accomplishments of 2014, individual Council members mentioned these issues where more progress is needed:

1. The loss by thirty-nine votes of the TBD ballot measure. We need to convince an even greater majority of the electorate of the value of the proposal.
2. In light of that loss at the polls, the City didn't enact a car tab proposal so there is still not a stable, long-term funding source for transportation projects.
3. We still need one or two more police officers.
4. We should attract a theatre to Town Center.
5. We need to locate a permanent home for Covington Days.
6. Work to get citizens more involved in the protection of their neighborhoods.
7. Need to more effectively relate the City's transportation goals to economic development opportunities so that citizens understand our economic expansion depends on an efficient transportation system.

FUTURE ISSUES ON THE CITY'S HORIZON

Here are issues the Council members cited at the end of the summit that are likely to be on the Council's agenda at some point in the future:

1. The status of revenue streams if some or any of the 13-17 initiatives that Tim Eyman is proposing pass.
2. Failure of the State Legislature to pass a transportation package.
3. The impact on the City of the work slowdowns at the Port of Seattle.
4. A public safety strategic plan.
5. Train traffic through Covington, including transport by rail of any toxic or hazardous materials.
6. Create a well-managed volunteer program that is run by a designated Volunteer Coordinator.
7. Recommendations for the parks citizens' advisory committee on additional revenue sources for parks and recreation facilities and programs.
8. Town Center and the Hawk property.
9. Banners.
10. At uncontrolled crosswalks (i.e., Roundabouts), have flashing beacons that can be activated by pedestrians when needing to cross the street.
11. Bring "3 on 3" basketball tournaments/jamborees to Covington.