

CITY OF COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL

## **ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING SUMMIT**

Saturday, 26 January 2013, 8:05 a.m. — 3:01 p.m.  
Covington Real Life Church

# **SUMMARY**

## **OF THE MEETING'S KEY DISCUSSIONS, DECISIONS AND AGREEMENTS**

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**Attending:** Mayor Margaret Harto, Mayor Pro Tem Jeff Wagner, Council members Mark Lanza, Marlla Mhoon, David Lucavish, Jim Scott, and Wayne Snoey; City Manager Derek Matheson; Management Team members Glenn Akramoff, Noreen Beaufriere, Richard Hart, Rob Hendrickson, Kevin Klason, Sharon Scott, Karla Slate and Scott Thomas; facilitator Jim Reid.

**Guests:** Mary Prichard, Freedom Noble, Leroy Stevenson, Leslie Hamada and Dave Clark

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### **THE KEY AGREEMENTS OF THE SUMMIT**

The key agreements of the City Council at its 2013 Summit were:

1. **Vision, Mission, and Goals:**

- The vision was reaffirmed.
- The mission statement was updated so that it will now read: "Covington is a destination community where citizens, businesses and civic leaders collaborate to preserve and foster a strong sense of unity."
- The goal that addresses downtown was changed so that it will now be: "**Town Center:** Establish Covington Town Center as a vibrant residential, commercial, educational, social, and cultural gathering place that is safe, pedestrian-friendly, well-designed, and well-maintained."

2. **BPAC Recommendations:**

*Forming a Transportation Benefit District:*

- Council endorsed the recommendation of the Budget Priorities Advisory Committee (BPAC) to establish a Transportation Benefit District (TBD) and increase the sales tax by two-tenths of a percent (from 8.6 to 8.8%) for the purpose of improving the City's transportation infrastructure.
- Voters need to approve the increase of the sales tax. The Council agreed that is more likely that this measure will be submitted to voters in 2014 than this year. Council directed staff to prepare for the vote by taking the following steps: a) produce the documents to establish the TBD; b) identify options for using the General Fund revenues that are currently being transferred into the Street Fund (the Council appears to favor reallocating those funds for public safety and parks); and c) identifying "dos and don'ts" for elected officials and staff once this measure becomes a political campaign.

***Providing Sustainable Funding for Parks:***

- The Council members share an interest in creating a stable and sustainable funding source for parks and recreation. They would like to see a citizen-based effort recommend strategies for creating a stable, sustainable funding stream for parks and recreation. Because they were impressed by BPAC's process and the quality of its recommendations, Council agreed to examine options for parks and recreation funding with the assistance of the community. Scott Thomas, the Parks and Recreation Department's director, will develop and submit to the Council a proposed process. It will include recommendations for involving the members of the Parks Commission and any additional citizens, including, possibly, some BPAC members.

***Formally Thanking the BPAC Members:***

- The Council members agreed that they would like to host the members of the BPAC to a dinner at which time they will formally and publicly thank the Committee for its work.

***Miscellaneous:***

- Council briefly discussed the possibility of increasing funding for the neighborhood "block watch" program. Council members directed staff to research the cost of a community crime prevention officer, including the cost of supervising the position if it were a volunteer assignment.
- Council members were also intrigued by the BPAC proposal that the City assess a "rental tax." They asked staff to get more information on it for a future discussion.

**3. Capital Improvement Program Update:**

- The Council agreed to add a new City Hall to the Capital Improvement Program (CIIP) list of projects, but there is no timetable for construction of the building. In placing a new City Hall on the list, the Council authorized further study to be conducted of the costs and feasibility of the project.

**4. Town Center and the Northern Gateway:**

- To potentially accelerate the development of Town Center, the Council agreed to authorize staff to propose amendments to the City's code that will allow for a development agreement between the City and a developer or developers.
- The Council distinguished Town Center from the Northern Gateway by reiterating its vision that Town Center will someday serve as the pedestrian-friendly gathering place for the community while the Northern Gateway will contain "big box" stores and be more car-oriented.
- To prevent competition between the two centers, the Council expressed an interest in preventing movie theatres and other entertainment from being placed in the Northern Gateway to not dilute the attraction of Town Center as a "hub" for entertainment.
- Council stated its unanimous support for working with an institution of higher education to place a branch campus in Town Center.

**5. Rebranding the City and the 2013 Citizens' Survey:**

- The Council supports and appreciates the work to date to "rebrand" the City and is interested in the reactions and comments of such organizations as the Covington Economic Development Council (CEDC) and the Chamber of Commerce.

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- Council members agreed that a major focus of the 2013 survey of Covington residents should be on parks and recreation.

### 6. Operations:

- Council authorized the City Manager to bring to the Council's attention at mid-year potential additions to the budget if the financial situation allows. Potential additions would be based on discussions the previous autumn during the process of approving the City's annual budget.
- Council agreed to institutionalize the date it meets with each of the City's Boards and Commissions. They also decided to reexamine the missions of these bodies.

## **OUR BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2012**

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 2013. The biggest accomplishments of 2012 were:

1. The Budget Priorities Advisory Committee (BPAC).
2. The City's new phone system, which is easier to use and more efficient.
3. Creation of the South End Area Regional Coalition for Housing (SEARCH), the South King County affordable housing multi-jurisdictional oversight committee that is patterned on the work of ARCH, the Eastside affordable housing committee that has been in existence for nearly twenty years.
4. The new Covington Community Park.
5. The completion of the Human Services Master Plan.
6. Initiating the Northern Gateway planning process.
7. Community response to the destruction of the its Christmas Tree.
8. The manner in which the Public Works Department provided services throughout the City during the snow and ice storm of early 2012.
9. The success of our previous Olympia lobbyist and hiring a new one.
10. Holding our January 2012 summit locally.
11. The City's management team is in tact.
12. The City's and School District's agreement that the City shall have the "right of first offer" when the District sells the Covington Elementary School property.
13. The Office of the Sheriff moved into City Hall. This provided the City with additional income and allowed for closer communication and cooperation between the City and the Police Department.
14. Businesses moved into the community.
15. Opening of the emergency room in town.
16. "Destination Covington."
17. In 2012 we celebrated our tenth year as a "Tree City USA."
18. We helped keep Cedar Valley Elementary School open.
19. Covington was well represented on regional boards and committees.
20. The City remained financially stable and won an award for it.
21. Council members are respectful of each other and work together well.
22. The process of and community involvement in appointing citizens to serve on City Commissions. The Council listened carefully to the citizenry and demonstrated that we are approachable.
23. 2012 was a "banner year" for grants; we received over three-quarters of a million dollars.
24. We continued to forge a strong partnership with Green River Community College.
25. A sign that the City is maturing is our engagement in recycling and solid waste.
26. The Kent-Kangley project is advancing through the citizens' advisory committee.
27. The concert series, and the fact that a staff person is designated to managing it.

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28. The City's communications. (On behalf of the City, Derek will receive an award on February 5<sup>th</sup> for our communications during last year's snow and ice storm.)
29. Karla's performance as our communications and public relations manager.
30. The planting of cherry trees and the involvement of students and the General Counsel in the tree-planting ceremony.
31. Over 90,000 people used the Aquatics Center last year. This attendance standard illustrates that the Center is exceeding its business goals.
32. In the Community Development Department, a temporary planning position was converted to a FTE, which strengthens the City's long-range planning functions.
33. Construction of new homes accelerated, thus bringing additional income to the City.
34. The implementation of the Police Department's citizens volunteer program.
35. The implementation of the Narcotic Activity Emphasis pilot project by one of our patrol officers, which is enabling that officer to one day a week focus on narcotics-related case follow-up investigations. That in turn is taking pressure off our detective so she can better focus on other priority investigations.
36. The initiation of a strategic plan for tree management. Our work last year will pay off because the plan will be adopted in 2013.
37. We set the stage to restart recreation classes this year.
38. Implementation of two new employee recognition programs.

After citing the accomplishments of 2012, individual Council members mentioned these five items that should be addressed in the near-term future. These items are:

- Resolve the Urban Growth Boundary and address the Northern Gateway.
- Implement our vision for Town Center.
- Build a new City Hall.
- Place funding for streets and parks on a solid, more sustainable footing.
- Hire staff to work on economic development.

### **COUNCIL ENVISIONS COVINGTON IN 5-10 YEARS**

In five to ten years, the Council wants Covington to:

- be a destination with a solid identify. The City will be a destination for shopping, recreation, entertainment and business.
- have a pedestrian-oriented Town Center that connects to pedestrian-oriented Jenkins Creek Park.
- have a central outdoor gathering place in Town Center, a Community Center that serves as an indoor gathering place, and vibrant commercial areas in both Town Center and the Northern Gateway.
- host major events, such as a jazz festival or a "Tour de Covington," that draw people from afar.
- be a "hub" for medical research and development, education and/or entertainment. One strategy for making the City the "hub" for research and development or education is to become the site of a branch campus of a two or four-year higher educational institution.
- be even more family-oriented.
- ensure that Covington Days is a major event.
- have a hotel or motel.
- have sidewalks connecting the library to schools and, perhaps, have the library located in Town Center.
- complete the trails system.

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- have a mass transit system that gets citizens quickly from the City to other communities around the region and a shopping shuttle that transports them efficiently within the City.
- attract greater tourism, including becoming the “jumping off point” for wine tours to central and eastern Washington.
- build a parking garage in Town Center so that there are no longer miles of blacktop in the central downtown.
- improve the Kent-Kangley corridor.

When the Council finished articulating the above vision for the City’s future, Freedom Noble, the Youth Pastor at the Real Life Church and a guest in the audience, offered these ideas: a) He supports the Council’s vision for Town Center and suggested the City try to build an underground parking garage. B) Turn the library into a Teen Center if a new library were built in Town Center. c) Create more opportunities for businesses to invest in Covington through public-private financing. D) Hold concerts, show movies and host fireworks displays on the Church’s property and in other parks or gathering places in town.

### **COUNCIL DISCUSSES AND AGREES ON PATH TO ADVANCE BPAC RECOMMENDATIONS**

After imagining Covington in five to ten years, the Council turned its attention to the recommendations that were recently submitted to it by the Budget Priorities Advisory Committee. The specific agreements of the Council that resulted from this review and discussion are detailed on pages 2 and 3.

Council members quickly agreed on BPAC’s recommendations that the City create a Transportation Benefit District (TBD) and submit to the voters a measure to increase the sales tax to fund transportation infrastructure projects. They also agreed that it is more likely that this measure will be submitted to voters in 2014, not 2013, although they did not rule out placing it on the ballot this year in either August or November. In supporting this recommendation, the Council cited their interests in stabilizing and sustaining the Street Fund and in “freeing up” the City’s General Funds that now go into the Street Fund so that they can be used for other worthy purposes. It appears that approximately \$250,000 could be reallocated from the Street Fund to other uses. The Council members cited the decline in federal and state funding for transportation as a reason why the City needs to stabilize and sustain the Street Fund.

In looking ahead to the time when this initiative is submitted to the voters, the Council agreed that a major educational effort will be needed to help the community understand why the TBD and sales tax increase are needed and what projects they will pay for. Council members also mentioned that other economic development projects the City is working on should continue so that the citizens see that the City is working on many fronts to not only deliver high quality services and be as efficient with tax dollars as possible, but to build a diverse funding portfolio to support City services and projects.

In determining the election date for this measure, the City will consider when various countywide tax measures, such as the Emergency Management Services (EMS) levy, are likely to be placed before the voters. But the Council members all agreed a campaign committee should get to work now and the members of BPAC would be logical organizers and the initial leaders of the campaign.

Council members cited BPAC’s success as a major reason why they would like to see a similar citizen-based effort recommend strategies for creating a stable, sustainable funding stream for parks and recreation. As a result of a brief discussion, Scott Thomas of the Parks and Recreation Department was given the job of developing a proposed process by which citizens would examine the issues around creating a stable funding source for parks. He’ll bring the proposal back to Council later this year.

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As the review of the BPAC recommendations was nearly finished, the Council briefly discussed its neighborhood “block watch” program. Some Council members expressed an interest in finding more funding to support the program. More specifically, they suggested that the program could use a community crime prevention officer. Chief Klason knows a retired officer who might do the job on a part-time basis. Some Council members suggested the City might find retired police officers who would perform the role as volunteers.

Council directed staff to research the cost of a community crime prevention officer, including the cost of supervising the position if it were a volunteer assignment.

Finally, Council members were also intrigued by the BPAC proposal that the City assess a “rental tax” and asked staff to get more information on it for future discussion.

### **COUNCIL AGREES TO PLACE NEW CITY HALL ON CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM LIST**

In 2013 the City will update its Capital Improvement Program (CIP) list. Therefore, the Council reviewed the current list of projects during the retreat to provide initial direction to staff as the update is launched. During this discussion, architect Dave Clark, who recently conducted an initial study on the potential costs of a new City Hall, presented his findings. After talking with Mr. Clark, the Council agreed that a new City Hall should be added to the CIP list of projects this year. But there is no timetable for construction of the building.

In placing a new City Hall on the list, the Council authorized continued study of the costs and feasibility of the project. Once the study is completed, the City will have information to “shop around” to citizens to obtain their reactions and comments. Council briefly discussed the option of purchasing and remodeling Covington Elementary School for the new City Hall but ruled it out because of the prohibitive cost of converting an older building into a facility that meets the City’s needs. Remodeling the school could cost more than building from scratch.

Council members also speculated that a new City Hall could be an anchor for Town Center and would stimulate development that advances the Council’s vision for downtown. There was also mention of a public-private partnership to help minimize construction costs; City Hall would share space with a library, school or offices, or part of the building would not be completed and would remain vacant until a private company or a group of businesses chose to finish it and occupy those spaces.

The Council members did not add any new transportation projects to the CIP list, but briefly discussed constructing the 204<sup>th</sup> “loop” and a western entrance into the City, and extending the Kent-Kangley Road. Glenn Akramoff, Public Works Director, stated that he would use the Council’s conversation to model five transportation scenarios for the Council’s CIP study session in March that will more formally commence the update of the City’s CIP.

The Council also signaled its interest in expanding the City’s inventory of parkland and completing the trail system. Council quickly discussed private parks—those within housing developments that are governed by Home Owners’ Associations (HOAs). Council members concluded that while these parks serve a purpose, they are not a significant part of the equation in the City’s efforts to provide high quality parks and recreation services to its citizens. Council members proposed that they and Parks Department staff attend HOA meetings to help educate citizens about what it takes to maintain their parks. As the discussion of parks and recreation CIP projects ended, the Council reiterated its intent to add to the inventory of trails and community and neighborhood parks.

### **COUNCIL AUTHORIZES EXPLORING A DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT FOR TOWN CENTER**

The Council distinguished Town Center from the Northern Gateway by reiterating its vision that Town Center will someday serve as the pedestrian-friendly gathering place for the community while the Northern Gateway will contain “big box” stores and be more car-oriented, partly due to its visibility from the freeway. They could compete for entertainment venues, but Council members expressed an interest in preventing movie theatres and other entertainment from being placed in the Northern Gateway to not dilute the attraction of Town Center as a “hub” for entertainment.

Once Oakpointe (the Northern Gateway) is fully developed, it will include housing, parks and trails as well as commercial establishments. The City is about to initiate a twelve-month planning process for this subarea. During the discussion staff noted that developing the Northern Gateway may be easier and faster because one developer is proposing and managing the project and negotiating with the City.

In contrast, the City has approved a vision, policy direction and regulations for the future development of Town Center, but is waiting for developers to come along to implement the Council’s vision. This approach may mean that Town Center is not developed for a long time. To potentially accelerate the development of Town Center, the Council agreed to follow the example of the Northern Gateway by recruiting developers to partner with the City. The Council authorized staff to propose amendments to the City’s code that will allow for an agreement between the City and a one or more developers for the development of Town Center.

After further discussion, the Council agreed on this sequence of actions: a) staff will draft code amendments to allow for the development agreement; b) they will submit those proposed code amendments to the Planning Commission for review and discussion; c) meanwhile, the City Hall feasibility study will be completed; d) staff will begin to develop a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) or a Request for Proposal (RFP); and e) the proposed code amendments and RFQ/RFP will be presented to the Council. Council and staff expect these steps to take much of 2013. In other words, the City will not be seeking a development partner for Town Center immediately, but instead will get its “ducks in order” before going out to recruit the developers with whom it will work to expedite implementing the Council’s vision for Town Center.

Finally, the Council unanimously agreed that the City should work with an institution of higher education to place a branch campus in Town Center.

### **COUNCIL SUPPORTS THE WORK ON REBRANDING AND REQUESTS THAT 2013 CITIZENS’ SURVEY INCLUDE QUESTIONS ON PARKS AND RECREATION**

Karla Slate, the City’s Community Relations Coordinator, presented the latest work to “rebrand” the City. The Council was very supportive and appreciative. Karla is taking the rebranding proposal to the Chamber of Commerce and Covington Economic Development Council (CEDC). Council members expressed great interest in hearing the reactions of those groups to the rebranding proposal.

There was also a very brief discussion of the 2013 survey of Covington residents. Council requested that a major focus of the survey be on parks and recreation.

### **COUNCIL OKS TWO OPERATIONS ITEMS**

The last agreements of the Council at its 2013 Summit were:

- Council authorized the City Manager to bring to the Council's attention at mid-year potential additions to the budget if the financial situation allows. The possible additions would be based on discussions the previous autumn during the process of approving the City's annual budget. The City Manager might bring a decision card to Council that reflects projects that the Council had been interested in but which could not be funded as part of the annual budget.
  
- Council agreed to institutionalize the date it meets with each of the City's Boards and Commissions (in similar fashion to the Council institutionalizing the date of its Annual Strategic Planning Summit as the last Saturday in January). Sharon Scott will bring back to the Council proposed dates for the meeting with each Board or Commission. Council members also decided that the City should work with the Board and Commission members to reexamine the missions of each body.