

CITY OF COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL

ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING SUMMIT

Saturday, 29 January 2011, 8:30 a.m. — 3:30 p.m., Tacoma Nature Center

FINAL SUMMARY

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

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

Absent: Council member Marlla Mhoon was ill on the day of the retreat and could not attend.

THE MAJOR AGREEMENT OF THE SUMMIT AND FOLLOW-UP TASKS

The major agreement of the 2011 Summit was the City Council's consensus decision to establish a public engagement process to: 1) consider the programs and projects needed to achieve the Council's vision; 2) identify the resources needed to implement those programs and projects; and 3) recommend options for funding them.

As a result of today's meeting, staff has three assignments:

1. After March 31st, present to the Council options for strengthening economic development opportunities in the city. Among the options mentioned today, which may be part of the staff's analysis and report, were hire a full- or part-time economic development manager, hire a consultant to perform the duties and functions of an economic development position, or hire the Buxton Company or another similar firm to conduct a market analysis of retail opportunities within the city and to assist in identifying local and national retailers who would meet the criteria that results from the analysis.
2. Investigate and assess the shuttle bus services in Kent and Ellensburg, and, perhaps, elsewhere, to enable the Council to determine if such services should be provided in Covington's Town Center as a means of stimulating economic growth. (No timeline was provided for staff to bring forward the findings of this research and analysis.)
3. Present to Council a proposal for forming the public engagement process that would advise it of options to fund the programs and projects needed to achieve the Council's vision.

THE CITY'S MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2010 AND THE PAST FIVE YEARS

We began the annual strategic planning summit by highlighting the accomplishments of 2010 of which we as Council and management team members are most proud. These are individual's perspectives; there wasn't any attempt or reason to reach consensus on them.

January 29, 2011 Annual Strategic Planning Summit Final Summary

Approved: March 8, 2011

- The ordinance addressing panhandling in the city and the process used to adopt it. “It was a message to the citizens that the Council listens to and responds to their concerns and needs.”
- The Council’s and management team’s leadership on regional issues, including at the Suburban Cities’ Association (SCA), in dealings with the “triangle cities” (Covington, Maple Valley, and Black Diamond), and at the State level.
- The City is building a positive working relationship with the business community.
- The **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan**, including the public involvement in developing and reviewing it.
- Covington’s embrace of technology.
- Town Center Plan, including zoning regulations, illustrates the city is positioning itself for the future.
- Multi-Care Hospital, which the Council’s presence at the hearing helped to secure.
- Highway 516 Corridor Study.
- The work of the police force and the City’s relationship with the King County Sheriff’s Office.
- Greater efficiencies, such as the move away from accepting cash and taking credit cards as the means of payment.
- The increasing sophistication of our messaging. Examples: the new design of our website, which is both attractive and more user-friendly; our entry into the world of facebook; and messages the City communicated to citizens through The Reporter.
- Discussions we initiated with the Covington Water District, Soos Creek Water and Sewer District, Renton Technical College, and Green River Community College.
- The Council has its “act” together. We are respectful of and civil to each another. Although we are certainly independent and “of our own minds,” we are not fractured and are united in terms of acting in the best interests of our community. This makes it a better environment for staff, too.
- The creation of the Regional Fire Authority (RFA), which is now serving as a model for others.
- Decisions to waive the banner fee and change roofing regulations were other illustrations of the Council listening to citizens.
- Staff rallied to make improvements to parks despite the challenging economic and budgetary climates. And we received few complaints from citizens because of higher fees at the Aquatic Center because our customers understand what it requires of the City to offer the Center’s services.
- Staff is doing more with less, but it is not easy. We lost many colleagues and friends to budget cuts in 2009, but we handled it well in 2010 by providing excellent customer service. Derek’s leadership was a key factor in how staff responded and in stabilizing the situation.
- Departments work very effectively and easily with each other. No “functional silos” in evidence.
- Staff supports the Council’s vision and is motivated to go well beyond our job descriptions to get the work done.
- We have had no audit or budget findings. The Surface Water Management (SWM) audit went well.
- The city is looking neat, clean, and better all the time.
- More citizens are involved.
- “We love our city and we like each other.”

Because this summit is taking a long look into the future, we also looked back to the past five years to answer the questions: “What has most excited us during the last five years?” and “What has frustrated us?” These are the responses:

- The change in leadership in City Hall. The Council is much more collegial and providing higher quality leadership. Derek’s leadership and that of the management team are also making a difference. And the staff is maturing and growing professionally.
- These improvements within City Hall are improving the City’s external relationships, one example of which is our leading role in coordinating the “tri-angle” cities.
- We are making our vision “come around” (become reality). Examples: the “roundabout” at 256th, as well as other traffic projects that have come to fruition; and the downtown plan.
- An outgrowth of these exciting developments of the past five years: The return of trust and respect by the community for City government. People are noticing that we are working hard, that the City looks better, and that our vision is coming to life.

- We have weathered the economic storm.
- Because of the efforts of the past five years, Covington seems much more a “place.” Sidewalks have been built, roadways have been improved, and landscaping has been added. Together these things have started to make the City more pedestrian-friendly. And graffiti is being eliminated so the City’s beauty is being maintained and enhanced.

We have faced these frustrations during the last five years:

- The downturn in the economy since Fall 2008 has thwarted some of our ambitions, including building a community center, creating a “community” park, and addressing some difficult transportation and traffic problems, such as the intersection of 240th at 180th.
- Police department is understaffed.
- We don’t have enough activities to engage youth.
- empty storefronts and QFC’s move
- The lack of family wage employment opportunities in the city.
- length of time to complete the downtown plan
- working as effectively as we would like with the Covington Water District
- Too few citizens attend Council meetings.
- A place as lively as Kent Station has not been developed in our town.
- The challenges faced by the Chamber of Commerce have prevented the Chamber and City from having as constructive a relationship as we would like.
- Perceptions of developers that Covington is a difficult place to do business persist despite our efforts. The City’s reputation may be affected by the work and culture of others, such as the Water District.

A SWOT ANALYSIS OF POLICY, RELATIONSHIPS, AND RESOURCES

To provide context and lay the foundation for our long-term look into the future, we conducted an analysis of the City’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in three areas: policy development; external relationships or the external environment; and operations, resources, and internal management. Here is what we found.

Policy Development: *Strengths*

- staff is excellent, continuously looks ahead, and discerns the Council’s policy preferences and needs
- the City is leading the way on a number of regional policy issues, which has strengthened our reputation
- Council members’ ability to work together has improved decision-making
- Council’s engagement with Commissions has placed us all on “the same track”

Policy Development: *Weaknesses*

- The primary weakness in the City’s policy development is that we are understaffed, and so it may take more time than any of us would like to advance policy initiatives.

External Environment: *Strengths*

- trust of citizens, which is partly a reflection of public education about City achievements, programs, and services
- relations with Maple Valley and Black Diamond, including the ability of our three cities to share and utilize information and resources, and to work together on such issues as public works and parks
- relationships with our delegation to the State Legislature and the effectiveness of our lobbyist in Olympia
- The Council’s and staff’s regional involvement has enhanced the City’s reputation

- relationship with King County

External Environment: *Weaknesses*

- some differences with the Covington Water District
- relationship with King County: some challenges in trying to determine who is responsible for providing some services
- it is a difficult environment in which to obtain grant funding
- challenging to develop relationships with some national retailers and developers because they need to take orders from national headquarters far from here, and so they aren't as responsive to local interests and needs as we would like or need them to be
- funding for human services cannot meet the current need

Operations and Resources: *Strengths*

- Derek's and the staff's leadership
- efficiency of staff ("We have a staff that is 'lean and mean'")
- "resetting" of government has made us better poised for the improvement in the economy
- police contract with King County
- many policies and processes have been streamlined and improved in the last few years

Operations and Resources: *Weaknesses*

- understaffed and under great pressure to perform
- lack of funding for many worthy programs and projects
- still have a number of old systems needing improvement, so we are not as efficient as we could be

Policy, Relations, and Resources: *Opportunities*

- Multi-Care Hospital will bring daytime activity, "family" or "living" wage jobs, and other "high end" health care-related jobs to the community. This may also enable Covington to position itself as a center for research and teaching related to health care. We should look to establish partnerships with WSU, Eastern Washington, and Green River Community College to enhance local educational opportunities and education-related jobs.
- Growth in jobs in these sectors (which are "green jobs") could also make our community more of a transportation "hub," attract a hotel or motel to the Town Center, and fuel the growth of existing businesses. And that may strengthen the Chamber of Commerce, allowing the City and Chamber to forge the closer alliance we desire.
- We might also share staff with the Chamber.
- The quality of our Commissions continues to improve. We are grooming them to be the next leaders of the City.
- Because we're building from the ground level, rather than rebuilding, we have a wider range of options and opportunities available to us.
- Up-to-date technology could help achieve our vision.

Policy, Relations, and Resources: *Threats*

- The economic recovery is proceeding at a snail's pace and showing miniscule gains. This will create a threat to our ability to achieve the opportunities cited above.
- Lack of citizen support for a stable revenue stream would stymie our bold and ambitious agenda.
- Expenditures are continuing to grow faster than revenues. That creates a threat to being able to preserve what we have today.

- Changes in leadership at the Council or among the management team could set us back in achieving our vision. But over the long-term, change in both teams will prevent City government from stagnating.

OUR LONG-TERM VISION FOR COVINGTON'S FUTURE

After assessing the recent past and the present, and anticipating opportunities and threats on the horizon, we brainstormed what we want the city to be and to look like in ten years. This discussion both complemented and expanded on our current vision, mission, and goals.

- “Destination Covington” is a reality. The city is attracting people from near and far to offerings such as a performing arts center, a downtown plaza, a history museum focusing on steam engines, public art, holiday festivals, and unique shopping opportunities. One feature that attracts tourists is a train taking people from Covington to eastern Washington’s wine country
- Covington has a thriving downtown with jobs related to healthcare, education, research and technology (“living wage jobs”) in the midst of it. Because downtown has more daytime activity, a higher density of development, and higher income jobs, transit services—buses, shuttles, trolleys, trains—are more prevalent. This growth and development has led to the redevelopment and refurbishment of older sections of downtown.
- We have a trail system that connects neighborhoods throughout the city, including downtown. This system, combined with an improved transit system, mean that the people of Covington drive less often, which is leading to less road congestion and a cleaner environment. The trail system also connects Covington to its neighbors to the southeast, Maple Valley and Black Diamond, therefore allowing people to recreate without the need for a car.
- In addition to being a destination and a “green city,” Covington is known as a place that sustains healthy living.
- Jenkins Creek Park is Covington’s “Central Park.”
- Timberlane has been transformed into an area for smaller homes available to first-time buyers and “empty nesters.”
- Covington has a thriving community center.
- Police “walk the beat” through neighborhoods.
- There is a grocery store behind The Home Depot.
- The western gateway into the city has been developed, and in the area are soccer fields and a mix of commercial and multi-family housing.
- In the southwest portion of the city the sewer issues have been solved.
- The boundaries of the city are “squared off.”
- A roundabout has been constructed by Tahoma High School.
- The Covington School District exists.

- City government has created strong working relationships with the Chamber of Commerce, businesses, civic leaders. We are all working together for the betterment of Covington; the business community takes an even greater share of responsibility for the community's vitality and growth. Public-private partnerships flourish, which also enables the community to be as strong and prosperous as possible.
- The City is also known as the "leader of southeast King County" because of its partnerships with other jurisdictions, organizations, and agencies throughout the area. One example: Covington is influencing decisions and policy-making at the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). And this all means we do not need to rely so heavily on King County for certain services.
- Our police department is better staffed, thus providing the level of safety and security to Covington residents that we have long imagined and striven for.
- Utility service is provided efficiently and economically to all citizens and businesses.
- There is a steady, reliable revenue stream to fund needed programs and services that continue to raise the standard of living in our community.

As the discussion concluded, we noted that our vision is dependent on partnerships—partnerships between government and the citizens it serves, between the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and between a host of local (including special purpose districts), regional, state, and federal agencies. A second theme to emerge from this discussion is the importance of more stable funding sources for the programs and services that our citizens need and demand. We need to begin now to educate our residents about what the City of Covington has achieved since it incorporated, what it hopes to achieve in the next ten years and beyond, why it is so important that citizens become involved in civic affairs and engage with the City, why a steady, reliable source of funding is necessary to not slide backward and lose the gains we have made, and what options are available for funding our vision, goals, programs, and projects.

IMPLEMENTING OUR VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

The first discussion of the afternoon was a conversation about what it will take to implement our vision for downtown. Having articulated a vision for Town Center three years ago, and put into place the policy goals and zoning for downtown in the past two years, we are now ready to identify the specific action steps needed to achieve our vision and goals.

We focused on three areas for action: establishing partnerships, building the necessary infrastructure, and marketing Town Center to local and national audiences.

Partnerships needed to implement the downtown visions:

These are the significant partnerships the City needs to forge to implement the Council's vision for downtown:

- Multi-Care Hospital and related medical, secondary educational, and research businesses or organizations
- commercial and residential developers
- current businesses in the area
- restaurants and arts and entertainment organizations and venues that will enhance the "night life" of Town Center and attract young and middle-aged professionals with disposable income
- aging "baby boomers" who may be looking for smaller homes after their children have grown
- tourists and travel-related businesses
- the Kent School District: We should coordinate with the District in marketing its property in Town Center. Furthermore, we should negotiate with the District: 1) the right of first refusal when the

District sells the property; 2) the use of schools for community events; and 3) joint funding of the Buxton study.

- Puget Sound Regional Council regarding transportation projects and economic development opportunities
- Metro Transit regarding expanding transit options in Town Center
- the federal government for grants
- churches, for possibly sharing the costs of a shuttle

Infrastructure needs of Town Center:

- a wider variety of transportation modes, including trails, trains, trolleys, transit, shuttle buses, and sidewalks
- parks and open spaces
- conduits and fiber optics to increase technology “connectivity”
- additional parking spaces
- solutions to congestion on the Kent-Kangley Road: This is a State of Washington Department of Transportation problem that Covington and Maple Valley can help address. It is not our problem that WSDOT should assist us in addressing.

Marketing downtown:

- to baby boomers we could market the increasing health care services
- to younger adults we could market improving “night life”
- to “empty nesters” and senior citizens we could market smaller housing options within walking distance of key services and amenities
- to local and national retailers we could market opportunities to be part of a dynamic, bustling Town Center
- to all citizens throughout the city and region we need to market our ability to solve traffic congestion and other transportation-related problems
- to young people (ages 12-17) we should market a wider variety of entertainment and employment opportunities, and transit services upon which they can depend
- to the Chamber of Commerce we should market new growth opportunities, the attraction of new businesses, and new tourist attractions
- to people with an interest in art and history we should market public art, museums, and a performance center
- to restaurateurs we should market an increase in both daytime activity and “night life” to convince them to open establishments in Town Center that will cater to urban professionals
- to sports enthusiasts we could market Pacific Raceway and tournaments, such as soccer and “fast pitch”

IMPLEMENTING OUR VISION FOR PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE

Following the completion of the PROS (Parks, Recreation, and Open Space) Plan, the City needs to begin to implement it. A key theme of this conversation was the need to engage citizens in examining potential alternatives for funding the plan’s goals and strategies and for operations and maintenance.

One thing we will need to do is demonstrate to citizens (and voters) that what we have already done may not be sufficient to implement the plan. For example, our use of citizen volunteers helped reopen Jenkins Park. But can we always rely on volunteers to operate and maintain our parks? We have also been savvy and strategic about pursuing grants, but grant money is dwindling and such funding won’t be adequate to address the need. We can use partnerships with neighboring cities even more than we do currently, but at some point we must recognize that they have their own interests, needs, and limited capacity, and may not

be as willing to help serve our citizens. We might also create partnerships with private and non-profit organizations to provide services and maintain facilities, but from experience we know that these alliances cannot recoup all the costs of providing service.

We also mentioned the idea of creating a Metropolitan Parks District (MPD) as a means to get citizens to tax themselves for parks, recreation, and open space. We asked these questions during the conversation: What would the MPD pay for? What services, programs, and facilities would it include? What authority might the City of Covington give up by establishing an MPD? Would that contradict our vision?

We came to two conclusions as a result of this discussion: 1) We need citizens to champion parks, recreation, and open space, and to advocate for a stable, reliable, and continuous source of funding; and 2) the discussion of various alternatives for implementing the PROS Plan, including establishment of an MPD, needs to be folded into a larger discussion with citizens about how we sufficiently fund City services and programs across the board. The first step in engaging the public may need to be education of citizens about what we have already accomplished and what options we have or are currently pursuing.

IMPLEMENTING OUR VISION FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

Next we turned our attention to how we implement our vision of public safety in this challenging economic and budgetary environment. A major theme that emerged from this discussion was educating the public about the challenges of maintaining a level of service that citizens have come to expect when resources are declining and options may be fewer.

Washington State ranks 47th of fifty states in the ratio of police officers per 1000 citizens. Today there are .76 officers per 1000 people in Covington, or thirteen police officers for the 18,500 residents of the city. To be able to reach a ratio of 1/1000, the City of Covington would need to add three police officers to its workforce.

We are certain the public is not aware of Washington State's national ranking and the ratio of officers to citizens in Covington. We also believe that the business community could be one of our strongest allies in advocating to increase police protection. The businesses in Town Center and across the community share an interest in preventing shoplifting, burglaries, assaults, graffiti, and gang activity because these crimes business prosperity. With the population of Covington expected to grow during the next ten years, operating at the current level of police service will likely mean that we won't be able to prevent an increase in such crimes.

As the discussion illuminated, two of the Council's interests in implementing its vision are: 1) Be more proactive than reactive in ensuring public safety. 2) Ensure that the level of police services contributes to enhancing economic development opportunities in Covington. One way to achieve these two interests is to improve the level of patrol response in neighborhoods, including downtown. Another strategy could be partnering with neighboring cities to make our investments go even further. An example: Work with Maple Valley and Black Diamond to provide programs for teens.

We also noted that a ramification of increased police services could be a higher number of criminals apprehended and prosecuted, which would affect the workloads and funding needs of prosecutors, public defenders, the Courts, and the jails.

IMPLEMENTING OUR VISION FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

We briefly discussed the capital projects that will help implement our vision for the future. Three that seem most vital to the future of Town Center are the community center, performing arts center, and downtown plaza. These projects currently appear to be very expensive, and we acknowledged that they may not seem essential to the citizens. With state and federal funds that might help pay for these and other capital

projects possibly declining, we may need to look more to private enterprises that want to work with the City to ensure our vision is achieved.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN SECURING OUR FUTURE

As a result of this discussion, the Council reached agreement to establish a public engagement process to: 1) consider the programs and projects needed to achieve the Council's vision; 2) identify the resources needed to implement those programs and projects; and 3) recommend options for funding them.

In reaching this agreement, we identified the following principles or interests:

1. We must be proactive in shaping our future, not just reactive.
2. Citizens must become the champions of the vision of the city's future. We need to cultivate the public's desire for the programs and services that fulfill or bring to life the vision.
3. Demonstrate that maintaining the status quo will result in us stepping backward.
4. Investments must be geared toward enhancing or strengthening the long-term quality of life in Covington.
5. Investments must also help stimulate additional resources.
6. Before we can expect citizens to provide more funding for City programs and services, we must be as creative and efficient as we can be in the use of existing resources (make existing resources go as far as they can go).
7. City government must be open and transparent about how it uses taxpayers' money.
8. To make our vision reality, we must build partnerships between government and citizens, between the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and between governments or public agencies.

The public engagement process should address issues of public safety, parks, recreation, and open space, infrastructure, Town Center and neighborhoods, and the entire range of services, programs, and projects we envision will help us make Covington the community we want it to be in the future, and how they might be funded in a sustainable manner.

Staff will take this direction, develop a proposed approach, and present it to the Council in the not-too-distant-future.

ISSUES ON THE HORIZON FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

We concluded the retreat by briefly listing issues we anticipate will face the Council in the future, and which could be topics for future Council discussion or summits. There wasn't any effort to try to reach consensus on these topics; they were ideas offered by individual Council members.

- future annexation areas, including the "notch" and gravel pit
- affordable housing
- updating our brand
- City Hall—where it will be in the future
- engaging and building a working relationship with the Muckelshoot Tribe
- future delivery of utility services