2020
COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL SUMMIT
Saturday, 25 January, 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., City Hall Council Chambers

SUMMARY
OF THE MEETING’S KEY DISCUSSIONS AND AGREEMENTS

ATTENDED: Mayor Jeff Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem Sean Smith, Council Members Fran Hollums, Jennifer Harjehausen, Kristina Soltys, and Jared Koukal; City Manager Regan Bolli; Leadership Team Members Sharon Scott (City Clerk), Karla Slate (Communications), Casey Parker (Finance), Noreen Beaufreere (Human Resources), Gina Estep (Community Development), Don Vondran (Public Works), Ethan Newton (Parks and Recreation), and Andy McCurdy (Police); Staff members Bill Fealy and Jeremy Terwillegar (Public Works Maintenance); and Facilitator Jim Reid (The Falconer Group).

AS IN YEARS PAST, THE PRIMARY GOAL OF THE CITY COUNCIL SUMMIT WAS TO IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIC PATH THAT WILL ADVANCE THE CITY’S VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS. WITH THREE NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS SINCE THE 2019 SUMMIT, ANOTHER IMPORTANT GOAL WAS TO HELP THE COUNCIL AND LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS LEARN ABOUT AND UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER SO THAT THEY CAN FORM AN EFFECTIVE TEAM.

AGREEMENTS OF THE 2020 COUNCIL SUMMIT

Here are the consensus agreements from this year’s City Council summit:

1. During 2020 review and revise the vision, mission, and goals to ensure they reflect current conditions in Covington, given that the community has witnessed rapid change in recent years. The Council and Leadership Team share an interest in making the focus of these documents more specific and meaningful. In updating the vision, consider making the vision and tag line, “growing toward greatness,” identical, and in updating the goals, consider replacing “Customer Service” with “Public Service.” Make the process of updating these documents transparent to the public and seek the public’s input. Once the vision, mission, and goals are revised, label the document with the date of their adoption for historic purposes.

2. In light of the above agreement, revise the strategic plan to reflect the updated vision, mission, and goal statements.

3. To achieve the interest of the Council in ensuring that the people, neighborhoods, and businesses of Covington are safe and secure, examine two potential sustainable sources of revenue to fund public
safety. They are increasing property taxes (a levy lid lift) and instituting a Business and Occupation (B&O) tax increase. In examining these options, provide Council information about the taxes businesses are currently paying and how much they pay, the pros and cons of each option, and the potential impacts on senior citizens and strategies to ameliorate them. In addition, ensure that the public is kept abreast of the Council’s deliberations of the options, and assess the appropriate timing for potentially placing an initiative or initiatives on the ballot.

4. To achieve the interest expressed by some members of City Commissions to have more interaction with and receive more direction from the City Council, the annual joint meetings need to be productive, meaning that they will result in clearer guidance and direction from the Council and a stronger link between the Commissions’ work plans and the City’s vision, mission, and goals. The monthly reports should be standardized to ensure the Council is treating the Commissions equitably. The Council continues to support the Mayor meeting individually with Commission chairs when requested to do so.

5. Retain the requirement that City Commissioners live within Covington or within three miles of its boundaries.

6. Retain the current system for Council to recruit, interview, and appoint Commission members. Revise the questions asked of applicants to reflect the updated vision, mission, and goals and to provide a more holistic picture of the applicant’s interests and qualifications.

7. Abolish the requirement that one or two representatives of youth serve on the Commissions and continue to support the important role of the Youth Council within the City’s structure of advisory groups. If a young person expresses interest in and applies to serve on a Commission, the application should be given the same consideration as the applications of adults.

8. No longer make any distinctions between Commission members who live within the city or within three miles of its boundaries. For example, abolish the requirement that a Commission contain at least one or two members who live outside but within three miles of Covington. If a Commission’s members all lived outside the city limits but within three miles of the city, the Council would be supportive of the Commission and grateful for the members’ interest and service.

9. Staff will draft a policy regarding the Council’s use of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The City recognizes that many people get most if not all their news from social media. As the use of these platforms grows, Council members are mindful that if they “like” or share their colleagues’ posts, they run the risk of engaging in a “rolling” meeting that would violate the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) in a way similar to participating in a chain of email messages.

10. In the future, public comment at City Council meetings will be noted by listing the names of the people who commented. The minutes of the meetings will neither characterize nor summarize public comments.

11. The Council supports the Communications plan that was presented by Karla Slate.

12. Move the Seal of the City from behind the dais to the front (which will require it to be smaller) and place behind the dais new city logo and tagline.
13. When the agenda is put on Facebook, place at the top of the agenda the list of the main topics to be discussed, akin to an Executive Summary of the agenda items.

14. Begin to host “Coffee with the Mayor” sessions for people who are interested to meet with and talk to the Mayor and one or two other Council members. These sessions will be held monthly or every six weeks or quarterly, and Council members will take turns joining the Mayor. Mayor Wagner and Karla discussed holding the first meeting at the library on Sunday, 23 February, from 1-3 p.m., but that will be confirmed soon.

15. To continue to utilize a variety of mechanisms for communicating with citizens, the City will continue to work with the Covington Reporter to have the newspaper regularly publish an article by the Mayor about what the City is doing and/or what’s happening in the community.

16. If there is an important issue facing the community, such as a public safety measure on the ballot, the Council members will consider doorbelling the neighborhoods to help educate and hear from the public.

17. Staff will compile a list of active Homeowners Associations and the dates of their monthly or quarterly and annual meetings so that the Council can consider attending some of these meetings to present to and learn from the residents.

18. Reflecting their interests in educating the public about City business and working even more closely and effectively with the Chamber of Commerce, Council members will attend City-sponsored events and Chamber events, like the monthly Chamber After Hours.

19. Staff will prepare a “blue sheet” highlighting the alternatives to replace the Community Tree that has died, and the costs of each alternative. The City is interested in continuing the holiday community gathering and focusing it on symbol of the holidays, whether that be a tree that has been cut down in the forest and brought to the round-about or an artificial tree or a flag pole that during the holidays supports lighting. These and other alternatives will be assessed in the briefing paper.

20. To ensure that public safety vehicles, particularly fire trucks, can reach the scene of an incident, the Public Works and Public Safety Departments will analyze whether or not these vehicles can get through streets where parking is allowed on both sides (“red streets” on the neighborhood maps that we examined at the meeting). Public Works will make a “deeper dive” into reviewing all the streets to determine if there are other streets (not shown on the map examined at the meeting) less than 28 feet wide with parking on both sides. The departments will present the analysis to the Council, which will then discuss whether or not to take action. The Council recognizes that the City may have limited influence on homeowners on private streets and the costs of enforcing potential regulations must be considered.

21. As a result of the brief discussion about the use of red-light cameras, Council recognized that a bigger traffic safety issue than drivers going through red lights may be that high traffic volumes leave cars blocking intersections when a light turns from red to green. The City is interested in reaching out to the public to reduce the incidence of blocked intersections on major thoroughfares. One idea was to publicize an Enforcement Day during which the police would ticket drivers who
block the intersection when the light changes. Another idea was to simply elevate this as an issue in City communications to residents.

22. Use appropriate methods to urge Homeowners Associations (HOAs) to ensure street lighting is maintained on those streets for which they are responsible. It was mentioned that the City’s annual electricity cost of City streetlights is approximately $120,000. The City is currently in the process of transitioning many of those streetlights to LED with Puget Sound Energy (PSE) through a Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) grant that will significantly reduce those electricity costs.

23. As a result of the discussion of addressing issues of homelessness and mental and behavioral health, the Council reiterated its support for the work of the Sound Cities Association’s Regional Housing Authority.

24. Council members share an interest in the quality of neighborhoods and have noted disparities among them. These factors were cited during the discussion: whether neighborhoods are the responsibility of the City or HOAs; the age of the housing stock; differences in income levels; design standards and code enforcement; and environmental justice (the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies).

25. The City should impose a moratorium on storage units until new rules governing them can be adopted.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2019

Below are the City’s major accomplishments during 2019 that the City Council and Leadership Team cited at the beginning of this year’s strategic planning summit:

- Last February Public Works staff kept sidewalks and roads clear and helped businesses remain open in one of the biggest snowstorms in recent history.
- The City is making progress in land acquisitions for parks and transportation projects.
- New additions to the business community are expanding the economy.
- We are taking care of what we have.
- The City purchased Covington Elementary School.
- Both the City and Chamber of Commerce are sponsoring more public events.
- The 164th Avenue SE sidewalk is finished.
- Our events are maturing. Examples: Covington Days; Movie Nights at the Park.
- The new sheltered areas at Covington Community Park are now available for people to rent.
- Our City is going “above and beyond.” We are doing things right. This is a beautiful, family-oriented community.
- The campaign gave us the opportunity to meet and hear from our constituents. We learned a lot about what they think and need.
- The transition in the Finance Department from Rob Hendrickson to Casey Parker was smooth and effective.
- Covington is a leader in the Southeast Area Legislative Transportation Coalition (SEALTC).
- The dirt is piling up at Lakepointe, demonstrating the development is underway. This development presents great opportunities as well as some challenges, primarily in public safety.
During the year we experienced unexpected attrition when some employees left to move out of state. The vacancies were filled appropriately. In Public Works, for example, we had staff move up the ladder, demonstrating that we have a deep bench. The same was true in Community Development, where the three most senior staff left in 2019. But staff people with less seniority stepped up beautifully to take these positions. As a result, “we have not missed a beat.” And when Rob left Finance, every employee was promoted. “We have a great team and are working well together.”

The City has been successful in securing grants. Examples: $1 million for the Aquatic/Recreation Center Feasibility Study; King County grant to help expand Jenkins Creek Park.

Finance implemented electronic time sheets.

On-line engagement increased “super significantly!”

Relations between the City and Chamber of Commerce improved. One illustration of this is that when the City cancelled the parade, the Chamber stepped in to take our place and sponsor it. In addition, “Ready Set Play” is an example of a new program that brings the City and Chamber together in an effective partnership.

The legislature calls asking for our opinion. We are becoming more renowned for our policy acumen and leadership.

The City is jumping onto opportunities, and there is a positive attitude along with confidence and pride.

It is an honor to serve on the Council and be supported by an amazing staff.

Our engagement with the Muckleshoot Tribe is a positive development.

We have had many requests to continue popular events such as Covington Days and Make a Difference Day.

The recreation programs are hitting on all cylinders. The Mayor’s Day of Concern was also hailed. Our outreach is paying off!

Thanks to Regan and Karla, the City has a better relationship with the Covington Reporter.

**REFLECTIONS ON THE VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS**

The discussion that resulted in the decision to update the vision, mission, and goals began with the Council and Leadership Team citing ways in which these tools guide and assist them.

“‘They help me as an elected official focus my attention and what I want to get done.’”

“I’ve helped the Council gain consensus on most tough policy decisions.”

“They are a living document that helps us signal who we are and what we want to achieve. They’ve given us visibility and helped us stand out.”

“We need them to signal clear, concise messages to our constituents. I like that they appear on one page.”

“The current vision, mission, and goals have gotten us really far. But they could be a more effective outward facing, marketable document.”

“I fashion whatever I am doing to them, whether it is the State of the City or some other event or outreach strategy.”

“The vision, mission, and goals are helpful because they are a mini-Comp Plan.”

“The Council and Leadership Team have changed. It’s time for new ideas. We welcome fresh perspectives that reflect the changing city and region.”
Regan followed up these comments by reviewing the status of 2019 Summit Action Items and the strategic plan. When the Council agreed that the vision, mission, and goals should be updated this year, he commented that updating them would prompt the updating of the strategic plan, too.

THE CONTEXT FOR SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR POLICE

The summary of the Council’s agreement to consider increases in the property tax and B&O tax to fund public safety services is on page 2. In arriving at that decision, the Council and Leadership Team heard this background information from Police Chief Andy McCurdy:

- The Police Department has seventeen employees, thirteen of whom are patrol officers.
- All public safety funding comes from the General Fund. Last year the City spent $4.5 million on public safety, which continued the trend of annual increases in City resources devoted to the police contract.
- An appropriate standard for evaluating the need for police services is calls for service. Calls for service have been steadily increasing in Covington, particularly related to property crimes. The property crime rate is escalating in the business community; businesses are experiencing an increasing rate of thefts.
- As calls for service continue to grow, it would be prudent to consider raising the minimum staffing level from two to three officers.
- If six new patrol officers were added to the department, Covington would be able to attain the standard of having three officers on duty at all times.
- By 2035, the annual increase in police costs is projected to be $2.3 million.
- The Police Department utilizes volunteers to some extent. But the cost of recruiting, training, and maintaining volunteers is expensive.
- It is more costly to a city to have residents than businesses. If Covington wants to continue to attract commerce as a strategy to offset the costs of serving residents, the City should provide sufficient resources to prevent business theft.
- In considering options to provide sustainable funding for the police, consider that the criminal justice sales tax does not generate as much revenue as the levy lid lift or B & O tax and is more costly to administer.
- The department partners with other agencies to combat and prevent crime.

Following Andy’s comments, including responses to their questions, the Council members authorized examination of the pros and cons of raising the sales tax and/or property tax or implementing a B & O tax. The Council requested, too, that the City review the messages communicated by other cities to their voters when they placed a tax increase measure on the ballot and the voters approved it.

The Council would like the information that staff gathers to be presented in a special meeting (study session) immediately before a Council meeting so that the public might attend. Then the issue would be placed on the agenda of that Council meeting so that the discussion is fresh in everyone’s minds and the public would be there.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS STYLES

To enhance communications and teamwork, Council members shared their communication styles and techniques.

**Jared:** A visual learner who seeks as an outcome an educated decision. “I want to understand the intent and the pros and cons.”

**Sean:** “I like direct communication. Give me the facts.” In terms of methods, he prefers emails so he has time to think about what someone has said and can refer back to their message.

**Fran:** Also prefers direct communication and emails so she can follow-up. Listening is important to her, which means she may appear quiet. But she is listening to learn and consider. She enjoys speaking extemporaneously in front of crowds.

**Kristina:** “Text or call me. I like to see what someone is saying.”

**Jennifer:** “No texting. Email me please.” Loves to read information to understand it better and to detect biases. “I also prefer to be direct.”

**Jeff:** “I am open to everything. There’s no such thing as too much information.” He wants to hear all sides to an issue, “all three sides of the story.” Don’t surprise him. He likes in-person communication as well as texts, emails, and phone calls.

ISSUES ON THE HORIZON

- Revenue for roads.
- Balance the community’s growth with a desire to maintain Covington’s “feeling and flavor.”
- The Station by Vintage: Will the developer’s proposal change to become 100% affordable housing?
- Outdoor opportunities for residents, such as dog parks.
- Entertainment opportunities for teenagers.

TAKEWAYS FROM THIS YEAR’S SUMMIT

- We see the community’s potential and are willing to get things done to fulfill it.
- We had and need to keep having open, frank discussions.
- Today’s discussions were productive and relevant to our future.
- The problems we discussed today are not unrealistic or impossible to fix.
- This is a new beginning and today’s meeting was very productive.
2020 CITY COUNCIL SUMMIT QUIZ CHAMPIONS

Congratulations Noreen Beaufreere and Gina Estep!

They are the winners of the First Annual City Council Summit Quiz, “How Well Do You Really Know Covington?”

They and Karla tied with 5 correct answers out of 8 questions (62.5%). The quiz went into overtime with a tie-breaking question. Gina and Noreen guessed correctly; unfortunately, Karla did not. To thunderous applause, Noreen and Gina were crowned the Summit Quiz Champions of 2020.