2017 SUMMIT
THE COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL’S ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING

Saturday, January 28th, 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Maplewood Golf Club, Renton

SUMMARY

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Attended: Mayor Jeff Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem Sean Smith, Councilmembers Joe Cimaomo, Margaret Harto, Fran Hollums, Mark Lanza, and Marilla Mhoon; City Manager Regan Bolli; Leadership Team members Noreen Beaufrere, Rob Hendrickson, Andy McCurdy, Ethan Newton, Sharon Scott, Karla Slate, and Don Vondran; Principal Planner Salina Lyons and Senior Accountant Casey Parker; Facilitator Jim Reid

THE COUNCIL’S MAJOR DISCUSSIONS AND CONSENSUS AGREEMENTS

This document summarizes the important discussions of the City Council’s 2017 strategic planning summit. The Council’s consensus agreements appear in italics.

A. VISION, MISSION, GOALS AND STRATEGIC PLAN

1. The City Council agreed that its vision, mission, and goal statements are continuing to provide the right direction for Covington.

   - Councilmembers observed that because the Council and staff have been laser focused on their long-term vision, the City is addressing important quality of life issues and enhancing its reputation.

   - To become even more of a destination, one or two Councilmembers suggested that the City could broaden its focus to other elements of its vision, including cultural and arts offerings (theatre, music, and lectures), sporting events, and nightlife (restaurants).

2. The Council agreed that in late February or early March it will review one more time the objectives under the goals in the current edition of the draft community-wide strategic plan.

These steps will be taken to finalize the plan:

   a. After Council tentatively finalizes the objectives, staff will identify action plan priorities for a workplan covering 2017 and, perhaps, 2018.

   b. The plan will then be brought back to Council for review and tentative approval before it is shared with the City Commissioners for reactions.
After the Commissioners have reviewed and commented on the objectives, Council will then finalize the plan.

Councilmember Mhoon cited the City of Shoreline’s strategic plan and work program as a possible template. It includes “progress indicators” that Shoreline uses to gauge its performance in advancing the Council’s goals.

NOTE: In addition to the graphics that communicate the Council’s vision, mission, and goals, a Councilmember suggested that staff develop two organizational charts, both of which would include photographs. One will be of staff, the other of the Commissioners. And Councilmembers requested that a new, updated photo of the Council be taken, given that Councilmember Hollums has recently joined them.

B. Community Survey

The Council was not asked to reach any consensus agreements regarding the community survey that Elway Research conducted for the City during December 2016. Karla Slate guided the Council and Leadership Team through a summary of the survey. Everyone had the opportunity to ask questions, offer observations, and make suggestions.

- The public’s priorities are police, street maintenance, emergency management, and the City’s outreach to the public. The survey also indicated that people would be willing to pay higher taxes for these services: police, streets, parks, sidewalks, and transit.

- 53% of respondents stated they would probably or definitely support higher taxes to pay for the development of Town Center, while 40% would probably or definitely oppose higher taxes for its development. Because only 21% of respondents strongly support raising taxes to pay for Town Center while 40% strongly or may oppose doing so, it was noted that support for financing Town Center in the survey was -19%.

- More people responded to the survey using their computers than through telephone interviews. This is likely the reason why there was a slight increase in critical comments.

- Compared to 2009 and 2013, the percentage of respondents who indicated they are not paying attention to city government increased. This is a typical trend whenever a city’s population grows.

- Most respondents receive news about the City from The Covington Reporter or the City’s website. While 56% of the survey participants rely on The Reporter for their news about city government, that is a lower percentage than in the 2013 or 2009 surveys, reflecting the trend of declining newspaper readership across the region, state, and nation.

- Council appeared interested in using the survey results to spark conversations with the public, but there was not a consensus on any of the suggested strategies. They were:
  - place the survey findings on the City’s website, either the raw data or a summary or both;
  - get The Covington Reporter to write a story about the survey findings;
  - meet with the editors of The Reporter to discuss the findings and highlight the importance of the paper in educating the community about what the City is doing;
  - conduct follow-up focus groups;
  - insert fliers or information about City activities in utility bills;
  - email to the public a weekly update from the Mayor;
  - share key findings at the National Night Out; and
  - review and discuss the findings at the annual Tri-City meeting.
C. PUBLIC SAFETY

3. The Council agreed to direct staff to begin to explore the possibility of placing a levy proposal before the voters at a future date to fund four or five new police officers.

- Rob Hendrickson stated that the voters of Tumwater recently approved a ballot measure that increased the size of the police department. As the first step in beginning to explore a levy proposal, Rob will talk to his counterpart in Tumwater to learn about that city’s experience.

The Council’s consensus agreement resulted from the briefing by Police Chief Andy McCurdy. He offered the Council insights into the increasingly complex nature of crime in southeast King County. His remarks prompted discussion among the Council about the resources the City could use to combat it.

- The annual number of calls for service increased by about 1,000 between 2011 and 2016. That rate outpaced the rate of Covington’s population growth during that time.

- As the Power Point slides that Andy showed indicated, the nature of crime is more complex and violent. Armed robberies, “strong armed” robberies, and bank robberies were indicators of more violent crimes in 2016. Criminals are also more desperate because heroin is increasingly an underlying cause of crime.

- Covington’s growth and development are also causes of crime. Criminal activity in Covington is more comparable to that of larger cities such as Federal Way, Burien, Auburn, Renton, and Kent rather than to smaller towns such as Maple Valley and Black Diamond.

- Nine of the twelve “high profile” crimes in 2016 resulted in the arrest of a suspect. Andy attributed this partly to the new 4/10 schedules in which police officers work a ten-hour shift for four consecutive days. Because of the new schedule, officers’ shifts overlap for three or four hours, meaning that are as many as five or six officers on duty during the shift overlap.

- To prevent crime, Andy contended that the City should continue to work with the School District, business owners, neighborhood groups, homeowners’ associations, the residents of apartment buildings, and the general public. He also stated that more regional coordination could prevent or reduce crime. A lack of resources is preventing the police department from conducting as much outreach as is needed.

- Between 2018 and 2022, Andy envisions that police services will need to expand and grow as follows:
  a. 2018: Add a civilian liaison between the police department and community;
  b. 2019: Add a storefront police officer and a part-time investigator;
  c. 2021: Add an officer at Lakepointe and, possibly, a sergeant; and
  d. 2022: Add a SET detective to the force. He and the Council discussed getting more grants to help fund these additions to the department.

As the discussion about public safety neared an end, the Council briefly discussed the use of fireworks in Covington. The Council is interested in learning from the experiences of Kent and Maple Valley, which recently banned sales and use of fireworks within their city limits. Councilmembers predicted these bans will be hard to enforce, and stated that what may really be needed to reduce the use of illegal fireworks is changing peoples’ perspectives and giving them alternatives.
D. FUNDING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS, INCLUDING TOWN CENTER

While discussing Town Center, the Councilmembers expanded the conversation’s focus to include the entire Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). They agreed on the need to hire a financial consultant to identify and assess options for funding capital improvements, including, but not limited to, a parking garage, plaza, and City Hall in Town Center, and streets, bridges, sidewalks, and trails to support the development of Town Center and growth and development throughout Covington. (See consensus agreement #6 on the next page.)

4. The Council agreed that within the next year or two the City should purchase the portion of the Kent School District’s property that is envisioned for Covington Town Center.
   - City staff members are already coordinating with School District staff regarding the District short platting the acreage so that the City could purchase only the parcel needed for Town Center.

5. The Council agreed that once that parcel is purchased, the City will take no further action to develop Town Center until revenues from Lakepointe begin to flow into City coffers.
   - Once fully developed, the annual revenue from Lakepointe is estimated to be $3 million. After a few years of saving a portion of sales tax revenues generated by the Lakepointe development, the City could afford to begin to develop Town Center.
   - This means that the City will not build a parking garage at Town Center before beginning to receive funds from the development of Lakepointe. It may also mean that the City does not stay engaged with a potential developer of the City’s Town Center projects until five or six years from now. But a developer of projects on other parcels within or adjacent to Town Center could apply for construction permits, such as one for a movie theatre that has been discussed.

6. The Council authorized staff to hire a financial consultant to identify and assess options for funding capital improvements, including, but not limited to, a parking garage, plaza, and City Hall in Town Center, and streets, bridges, sidewalks, and trails to support the development of Town Center and growth and development throughout Covington.
   - One task for the consultant is to identify and assess options for generating the revenue needed to purchase the land for Town Center from the School District. The Council is interested in understanding the arguments for and against each viable option.
   - Another part of the consultant’s work plan should be investigating the “passive” Business and Occupation (B&O) tax to see if it is a model that might help generate funding for capital improvements.
   - The Council requested that staff schedule a study session to review and discuss the financial consultant’s findings and recommendations.

Councilmembers expressed an interest in using the community survey findings and the community-wide strategic plan to guide them in future decisions about the capital plan and Town Center. The survey and strategic plan could be helpful when talking to the public about funding options for the City’s capital needs, including Town Center.

During the course of this discussion, Council acknowledged that the lease of the building that houses City Hall will expire at the end of this year. Also, the Council requested that staff provide the annual cost to the City of operating and maintaining the Aquatics Center.
E. TRANSPORTATION

Don Vondran and Salina Lyons presented the transportation capital improvement plan, explaining how it aligns with the transportation element of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. The transportation CIP identifies projects that need to be constructed in the next twenty years to support projected growth. The two priority projects from the plan are: a) continue widening SR 516 to five lanes through the city limits; and b) build the Covington Connector. Councilmembers voiced continued support for the plan’s direction, saying it aligns with their vision.

6. **REPEATED:** The Council authorized staff to hire a financial consultant to identify and assess options for funding capital improvements, including, but not limited to, a parking garage, plaza, and City Hall in Town Center, and streets, bridges, sidewalks, and trails to support the development of Town Center and growth and development throughout Covington.

7. The Council agreed to suggest to the City Councils of Maple Valley and Black Diamond that this year’s Tri-City meeting should include the topic of whether or not they should join the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA, i.e., Sound Transit).

8. The Council also endorsed investing some of the $3 million generated by transportation impact fees to be able to compete for grants.

Finally, the Council requested that staff schedule a study session to review and discuss the financial consultant’s findings and recommendations.

F. FOR THE LOVE OF COVINGTON

Regan Bolli showed the Council a video produced by the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) that focused on fun things municipalities across the State of Washington are doing to reflect or encourage their residents' love of their communities. The Leadership Team has been discussing small things that would achieve outsized impacts to enliven Covington through innovation and fun.

9. Council members agreed that the City should ask the Youth Council, Arts Commission, and Parks and Recreation Commission for their ideas.

   - The Leadership Team will continue to think of innovative and fun things to do, and Councilmembers are encouraged to suggest their ideas to the Leadership Team.

G. EVENTS AND HONORING VOLUNTEERS

2017 is a celebratory year for Covington as it commemorates twenty years of cityhood and the fortieth anniversary of the Aquatics Center. Ethan Newton reported that staff is implementing the plan for commemorating the City’s 20th anniversary, and not planning any special celebration of the Aquatics Center. A suggestion was made that on the Center’s actual anniversary date the City could offer anyone turning forty in 2017 free use of the facility for the day.

The Council also discussed how to honor volunteers, particularly Commissioners. The Council acknowledged that the current practice of thanking coaches and aquatics volunteers is sufficient. The Council is primarily interested in ensuring that Commissioners feel appreciated and that events honoring them are well attended so that they are worth the City staff’s time since these events require a lot of time, effort, and costs. Noreen Beaufreere presented some ideas for how the City might more effectively express its gratitude to this set of volunteers.
10. The Council agreed that the City ought to ask Commissioners what they would find to be the most meaningful way to acknowledge their contributions. The staff was instructed to offer four choices:

a. Starting in January 2018, attend the State of the City address. Under this option, a Presidential Award would be presented along with the Volunteer of the Year and the Commissioner of the Year Awards. The event would include either a dinner or heavy appetizers. If the former, Councilmembers would each host a table at which the Commissioners would be seated.

b. Receive a gift card to a local business of universal appeal (such as to Fred Meyer) that would be included in the thank you cards that are mailed to each volunteer during the National Volunteer Appreciation Week in April.

c. Receive an invitation to the annual City-sponsored Family Movie Night along with a voucher applicable to the Commissioners and their family members for food from the City-sponsored food truck at the movie site.

d. A different option that the Commissioners agree on.

H. COUNCIL OPERATIONS

Councilmembers discussed the idea of staff sending them the packet for the Tuesday night Council meeting sometime the preceding Wednesday, rather than the preceding Friday. Not all Councilmembers said that they needed the packet earlier; some stated they find the current timeline workable.

Sharon Scott said she would make an effort to send the packet earlier, particularly if it would allow new Councilmembers to feel more prepared for Council meetings. But she asked that the Council understand that the packet may be in “draft” form and that additional or updated information might be sent to the members on Thursday or Friday. Councilmembers acknowledged this possibility and said they could live with it, although a concern was voiced about the potential extra burden that this could place on the Clerk’s Office in particular and the staff in general.

MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2016

Council and Leadership Team members began this year’s summit by citing the most important accomplishments of the previous year. This discussion provided the context for their discussions about the biggest issues facing the City in 2017 and during the next three to ten years. The major accomplishments of 2016 that the Council and Leadership Team cited were:

- We laid the groundwork for changes at the regional level that will benefit Covington.
- The voters’ passage of the School Bond will lay the groundwork for the development of Town Center.
- We rebuilt the City’s relationship with the School District’s Board of Directors.
- The Police Department worked even more closely with the community.
- The City supported new developments with open houses and public hearings.
- Opening of the Senior Center affordable housing apartments.
- The City launched the Youth Council.
- The budget process and the adopted 2017 budget met the needs of the community. Our collaborative relationship with the State Legislature benefitted the community. An example was that the state granted money to the City for the widening of SE 272nd.
- We strengthened our partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and the Covington Economic Development Council (CEDC).
- Development plan for Lakepointe.
- We worked with a new partner to advance the development plan for Town Center.
The City strengthened its relationship with senior citizens.

The National Night Out was again successful.

The community events in summertime were successful and demonstrated the City could "pack a lot" into two months. The events engaged hundreds of people.

Our vision became a reality when the City purchased the first property that will become SoCo Park and moved ahead with the development of Covington Community Park.

We also made our first important commitment to the development of Jenkins Creek Park with the decision to complete a parks master plan.

The members of our commissions and many citizens demonstrated their devotion to Covington. Many citizens have applied to serve on the commissions, and most commissioners apply to serve a second term.

Town Center will give the community a centering point and help make Covington look like a real town. It will help send a welcoming message and give people an anchor.

We, the elected officials of the City supported by staff, are a great team, one that doesn't draw media attention for the wrong reasons.

We stood out in our positive and professional dealings with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and other regional partners.

Our community-wide strategic plan got underway.

Our staff is enthusiastic, devoted, and stable. Each member made a deep investment in our community and is a valuable asset to the City and community.

“Badges and Barbells”

The City supported the Seahorse Swim Team, which won two consecutive championships.

The DV Task Force.

The fact that City Councilmembers are re-elected without opposition demonstrates that the community is pleased with our work.

Covington is growing and embracing the challenges of the future.

The Council and staff are good at identifying opportunities and addressing challenges.

The City completed key projects, such as the skate park, that will benefit the community.

Public art projects, such as the mural at the skate park, have also been completed.

A new AA bond rating was issued as part of the bond refunding; it will save the city over $1 million.

The City got grants for additional public works projects. Because of the grants we’ve received, the City’s infrastructure is stable and meeting the challenges of growth.

Annexation of the Hawke property.

The employees feel recognized and appreciated. And the fact that they are super busy is a sign that the City is thriving.

We very successfully completed the Parks and Recreation Priorities Advisory Committee (PRePAC) process.

We welcomed a new Councilmember. And Fran already seems to be a seasoned member!

Large multi-family projects have been successfully managed because of close cooperation among the departments, and between the City and such entities as the Regional Fire Authority.

The Police captured one of Washington’s Most Wanted. In a number of cases the police have shown restraint and exercised the proper amount of force, ensuring that situations have not escalated.

The City’s website was redesigned and is now mobile friendly.

We received more applications on-line.

The new party room at the Aquatics Center opened.

**ISSUES ON THE CITY’S HORIZON**

The tradition is to end the annual summit by identifying issues that Councilmembers anticipate the City will need to address in the not-too-distant future. This year two issues were mentioned, and both appear to be challenges the City will face sooner than later.

1. The PSRC’s conditional approval of the City’s Comprehensive Plan.
2. The “trickle down” impact of reductions in federal grants to states and municipalities. Examples: Reducing or “freezing” grants for salmon habitat restoration and the cleanup of hazardous waste.

**FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE SUMMIT**

- The summit gave me greater understanding of what the Council does and why.
- Staff serves us well; they give us what we need and always give us more than we ask for.
- Nothing is static, everything is in flux.
- We can have fun.
- Today we had open, candid, productive discussions.