

SPECIAL MEETING CITY COUNCIL

December 13, 2021

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a special session focusing on strategic planning on Monday, December 13th at 4:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Room of Central United Methodist Church at 172 North Second Street in Albemarle. Mayor Ronnie Michael and the following Councilmembers were present, to-wit: Mayor Pro Tem Martha Sue Hall and Councilmembers Martha E. Hughes, Dexter Townsend, Christopher Whitley, Benton Dry, and Bill Aldridge. Absent: Councilmember Shirley D. Lowder.

Also present were the following City of Albemarle staff:

- Michael J. Ferris – City Manager
- Britt A. Burch – City Attorney
- Cindy Stone – Clerk/Assistant to the City Manager
- David Fath – Public Information Officer
- Chief T. Pierre Brewton – Fire Department
- Jacob Weavil – Finance Department Director
- Dana Chaney – Human Resources Department Director
- Owen Squires – Information Systems Department Director
- Lisa Kiser – Parks and Recreation Department Director
- Kevin Robinson – Planning and Development Services Director
- Chief Jason Bollhorst – Police Department
- Judy Redwine – Public Utilities Department Director
- Dan Worl – Public Utilities Department Assistant Director
- Ross Holshouser – Public Works Department Director

Facilitating the session or presenting was Geraldine Gardner – Executive Director, Centralina Regional Council.

The Mayor called the meeting to order.

Introduction and Meeting Overview

City Manager Michael J. Ferris opened the session by welcoming everyone and briefly summarizing the intent of the meeting.

Ms. Gardner from Centralina Regional Council (CRC) began with an overview of the agenda, a summary of how the meeting would proceed, and went over a brief recap of the strategic planning process conducted thus far in 2021.

Tying Strategies to Goals

Ms. Gardner provided a high level overview of the process undertaken by the Leadership Team and the strategic planning committee to tie the new goals the group set to strategies and tactics. This process will provide more specific guidance to Council and City staff on matching the City's vision and mission to budget allocations later in the strategic planning / budget cycle.

She also provided guidance on crafting actionable strategies with Council, and reiterated the criteria Council should use when evaluating strategies.

Strategic Plan Strategies Presentations

Ms. Gardner introduced this section of the meeting by recapping the process the Leadership Team used in order to obtain proposed strategies and tactics to be presented tonight.

City staff teams came up in turn to make their presentations to Council.

Team 1 (Dana Chaney, Owen Squires, Jacob Weavil): Organizational Capacity – Invest in our workforce to enhance City operations and efficiency to better serve the community.

Strategies:

- Fund additional resources and services to support anticipated growth
- Develop ongoing feedback and evaluation processes that incentivize continuous improvement and providing excellent levels of service.
- Provide ongoing training and development to all staff.

Potential FY 2022-23 Tactics:

- For “additional resources” – Identify headcount and contract service benchmarks for high-performing cities of similar size
- For “feedback and incentives” – Develop plan to provide incentives for excellent performance
- For “training and development” – Implement Learning Management System and engage supervisors in coaching and developing staff.

Council feedback included:

- Liked that the leadership team included benchmarking with similar cities.
- Since City growth is expected to occur, headcount of personnel will need to be addressed.
- Liked that the leadership team included the training aspect – it is important to focus on, and can sometimes be missed in discussions about personnel.
- Thought that engaging staff to help City grow would be better than letting them watch the City grow.
- Making sure that staff are told they are doing a good job as part of incentivizing them in addition to paying them; this can be done and kept permanently in their personnel file via the NeoGov application.

Team 2 (Jason Bollhorst and Pierre Brewton): Safety and Security – Enhance resources and improve practices to protect our residents and safeguard the City in order to improve the quality of life

Strategies:

- Develop public safety and preparedness plan
- Review resources, policies, and guidelines for accountability
- Utilize data and technology to increase effective and efficient service delivery

Potential FY 2022-23 Tactics:

- For “develop public safety and preparedness plan” – Improve city-wide communication capabilities and implement systems to better plan, prepare,
- For “review resources, policies, and guidelines for accountability” – Conduct assessments for resource allocation and evaluation and implement policy and guideline review measures
- For “utilize data and technology to increase effective and efficient service delivery” – Implement security systems to better protect citizens and staff and develop warning devices to better alert staff and citizens of possible dangers

Council feedback included:

- Where’s the “people piece” for this strategy? That is contained in strategies for Goal 1 so that there is not redundancy. What about benefits to the public? That ties into recruitment and retention of personnel in order to benefit the public.
- There will be resource allocation using technology to help utilize other personnel in addition to safety measures to communicate and distribute information.
- Use of policies and procedures are good but employees also need to be held accountable.
- Police and Planning are working together to team up to go out into the community to educate and give early warnings to be more proactive about public safety issues.

Team 3 (Ross Holshouser and Dan Worl): Infrastructure – Invest in infrastructure needed to ensure reliable and consistent service delivery

Strategies:

- Plan for and fund infrastructure resilience
- Fund community infrastructure at sufficient levels
- Streamline and modify systems and polices to improve service levels
- Invest in technology and equipment to improve service delivery

Potential FY 2022-23 Tactics:

- For “plan for and fund infrastructure resilience” – Analyze rate and fee structures to fund at sufficient levels
- For “fund community infrastructure at sufficient levels” – Assessment of City’s networks of streets, sidewalks, facilities, and parks
- For “streamline and modify systems and polices to improve service levels” – Observe and modify policies and procedures to gain efficiencies and analyze processes and procedures to ensure efficient and effective service levels
- For “invest in technology and equipment to improve service delivery” – Fund strategies recommended in recent Information Systems assessment and evaluate equipment used to maintain all infrastructure for City of Albemarle operations

Council feedback included:

- With changes in policies and procedures employees should not slide back into old habits and ways of doing things.
- Funding infrastructure at “sufficient levels” will be a challenge.
- In terms of the ABC infrastructure, the City is going in the right direction with industries moving forward.
- “Sufficient levels” is subjective and the City should be realistic when trying to implement. Should the City look to best practice for funding infrastructure?
- Council and staff discussed smart meters implementation as an example of an infrastructure project which has been mentioned in the past and wondered if the City was planning on moving forward on it. Mr. Worl responded by saying that Public Utilities has been working on phases of it and gave a brief status update on the project.

Team 4 (Kevin Robinson and Keith Tunnell): Community and Economic Growth

Opportunities – Guide growth and facilitate economic opportunities in order to benefit all residents and businesses

Strategies:

- Anticipate new growth and educate residents, business owners, staff and elected officials on the importance of structured, well-planned growth
- Ensure Albemarle has a wide range of housing options for everyone
- Diversify community and economic investments
- Prioritize downtown revitalization and beautification
- Improve workforce training

Potential FY 2022-23 Tactics:

- For “anticipate new growth” – Determine true long term costs and impacts of development in Albemarle and update Comprehensive Plan with focus on desired growth outcomes based on strategic infrastructure and transportation improvements

- For “housing options” – Develop a comprehensive housing strategy and actively pursue tax foreclosures in order to get abandoned properties to those who can add new affordable housing inventory in existing neighborhoods
- For “diversify community and economic investments” – Fund ABC initiatives including the spec building and create a business spotlight for businesses that meet the City’s vision
- For “prioritize downtown revitalization and beautification” – Implement building conditions study and implement Retails Strategies Downtown plan
- For “workforce training” – partner with existing industries to determine the training needs of the community.

Council feedback included:

- Will ordinance change occur with growth? Yes the City will write changes into the Code to incentivize growth.
- The City needs to have a friendly environment for businesses.
- Need to balance growth so as to not cluster it in a few areas, but instead distribute growth
- Should Council begin reviewing the 2028 Land Use Plan in the next few years rather than wait until FY 2025?
- For workforce training, will any of that be facilitated in conjunction with Stanly Community College? Yes it will and there is hope that high schools can also be incorporated for vocational training.

Team 5 (Lisa Kiser and Michael J. Ferris): Inclusive Community Engagement – Enhance community amenities, programs, and services engage residents of different backgrounds, lifestyles, and generations

Strategies:

- Cultivate effective community relationships and communication
- Plan for inclusive services, programs, and amenities to enhance the diversity of our community
- Develop or enhance partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations to leverage combined resources for our community
- Develop opportunities for continuous feedback from our community

Potential FY 2022-23 Tactics:

- For “cultivate effective community relationships and communication” – Utilize PIO to generate and implement a comprehensive communication plan and develop a plan for community engagement
- For “plan for inclusive services, programs, and amenities to enhance the diversity of our community” – Evaluate special events/programs to ensure the attraction of a diverse audience that represents the Albemarle community and evaluate City services to ensure services are meeting the needs of our diverse community

- For “develop or enhance partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations to leverage combined resources for our community” – Engage Convention and Visitors Bureau to leverage resources to promote our community and engage Stanly County Schools to leverage resources
- For “develop opportunities for continuous feedback from our community” – Create multiple methods for community feedback, i.e., surveys, focus groups, town hall meetings and improve technology and processes for citizens to communicate issues and ask questions

Council feedback included:

- The Public Information Officer will have the creativity to reach a larger group of people in the City.
- Social media efforts should provide more of a forum for staff to reach out and frame the City’s efforts, as in the case of the recent post of the Avion subdivision approval.

There was a short dinner break.

Monitoring and Evaluation Approach

Ms. Gardner began this part of the meeting outlining the differences between monitoring and evaluation, and summarizing the steps used for a monitoring approach.

Monitoring Plan

The Strategic Planning Committee which included Councilmembers Martha Sue Hall and Chris Whitley, as well as City Manager Michael J. Ferris, Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser, Human Resources Director Dana Chaney, Economic Development Director Keith Tunnell, and Fire Chief Pierre Brewton, presented some ideas for a monitoring plan.

The recommendations for a monitoring plan include: 1). Finalize performance metrics for each goal; 2). Determine data collection frequency and responsible parties; 3). Finalize reporting frequency and audience; 4). Develop a report format; 5). Set internal roles and expectations for report development; and 6). Develop monitoring report communication strategy.

Council feedback included:

- Make it concise and simple for Council.
- How would the City operationalize it? It would be a tool to provide information on all strategies and would integrate them.
- The monitoring plan should be geared for problem-solving rather than being strictly analytical.
- There was discussion and agreement on Council that a quarterly monitoring plan would be appropriate.

Evaluation

Ms. Gardner gave an overview about evaluation and described the various roles and responsibilities City staff and Council have for evaluation. Finally she presided over a discussion about managing change.

Council concerns related to managing change included not knowing what would be coming up in the future, and continuity of monitoring and evaluation or even maintaining the City's goals and strategies if the public body (City Council) changed. Ms. Gardner recommended to Council and staff that in order to manage these concerns there should be thought given to new elected official orientation as a method for transmitting City values, mission, and strategies to newly elected members of Council.

Council discussed conditions under which a strategy might change, which could include: if it is not effective; if it is not meeting goals; and/or there is a leadership change.

Ms. Gardner thanked the Leadership Team for all of their work bringing strategies and potential monitoring and evaluation plans to Council.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Ms. Gardner noted the following were the next steps:

- Evaluation and monitoring approach finalization by the committee;
- Strategic plan drafting; and
- FY 2023 tactic development and budgeting process.

Mr. Ferris thanked everyone for participating tonight.

The Mayor called for a motion to go into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, unanimously carried, the motion passed.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Whitley, seconded by Councilmember Hall, unanimously carried, the City Council reconvened to an open session. Mayor Michael announced that a closed session was held pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel, and there was nothing to announce.

Mayor Michael reviewed the developments approved or under construction in the City. He noted that he had been asked recently by a developer if the City Council was will to accept development and grow. Council discussed the issue. Councilmember Hughes noted the development would occur over time which would allow the City to keep pace with the needed increase in services and support staff. The City Manager added that increasing population is what will provide for economic growth that supports local business, employees, and City operations. It was the general consensus that the City will continue to undertake activities to analyze and plan for growth as a way to manage the growth we are experiencing.

Council discussed economic activity in process or planned around the City.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Townsend, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned to December 20, 2021 at 6:30 pm in Council Chambers in City Hall.