

SPECIAL MEETING CITY COUNCIL

January 26, 2022

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a special session focusing on strategic planning on Wednesday, January 26th at 4:00 p.m. at EE Waddell Community Center at 612 Wall 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 Shirley D. Lowder. Absent: Councilmember Bill Aldridge.

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
- Kimber Hurlocker – Assistant 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
- Dan Worl – Public Utilities Department Director

Facilitating the session or presenting were:

- Geraldine Gardner – Executive Director, Centralina Regional Council
- Emily Parker – Senior Planner, Centralina Regional Council
- Nina Barrett – GAME Coordinator, 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. The Leadership Team created a presentation packet outlining the Year 1 Strategic Implementation Plan using the goals and strategies agreed upon by the Leadership Team, the working committee and Council. Staff will cover the final proposed monitoring and evaluation plan, with a Council prioritization exercise to include ARPA phase II funding projects scheduled at the end of the session.

Ms. Gardner from Centralina Regional Council (CRC) began with a recap of the strategic planning process to date, how the different steps in the process have built the plan over time, and how the process factored into developing the Year 1 Implementation Plan being proposed tonight.

Ms. Barrett went over ground rules for the session. Ms. Parker facilitated an icebreaker with Council asking them what they were fearful and hopeful about regarding the strategic plan and future planning efforts.

Comments from the report out by Council included:

Fears about strategic planning process/future:

- Too much data and information overload
- Unforeseen dynamics such as the COVID19 pandemic make it difficult to plan for
- Dynamics out of City control impacting City business and operations
- Inability to follow the strategic plan due to external and/or internal factors
- Lack of resources to implement the strategic plan
- Negative responses from residents about implementing the strategic plan, such as a possible tax increase
- Making sure that the City makes good use of 1-time, unique funding such as ARPA rather than absorbing it for projects and initiatives which could be paid for with other funds

Hopes for the strategic plan, the process, and implementation moving forward:

- There is a plan to follow now
- The plan contains realistic information which can be used and implemented
- The plan will be able to demonstrate to the public that the City is meeting their expectations
- The development trend is good
- It's a plan to generate support with the public, and progress can be professionally measured
- A good strategic plan results in good services, which results in happy customers, which drives better customer service

Strategic Plan Framework Recap /Monitoring and Evaluation Approach

Ms. Gardner introduced this section of the meeting by recapping the process her team, the Leadership Team, and the strategic plan working committee used in order to obtain the proposed Year 1 implementation plan to be presented tonight. She reviewed what an annual implementation plan would look like, and emphasized that it would be tied to budget and would identify opportunities for new investment. Finally, she identified the scope and components of the final strategic plan that CRC would deliver to the City.

Monitoring and Evaluation Approach

Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser presented the proposed monitoring and evaluation plan to Council. She first described and compared the purpose of a monitoring plan and an evaluation plan.

For the monitoring plan process, she identified roles and responsibilities among City Administration, the Leadership Team, and Council. The process, engaged in over an annual cycle, was mapped out and would include the following steps: department directors would track progress on strategic plan tactics and include in departmental monthly reports; the City Manager would prepare quarterly reports to Council; and the Public Information Officer would share any success stories and progress towards tactics/strategies fulfillment with the public and media.

For the evaluation plan process, she identified roles and responsibilities among City Administration, the Leadership Team, and Council, and shared impact measures. The evaluation process, implemented on an annual basis, would include: the Strategic Plan Working Group would meet twice a year before the budget is developed and at the end of the year to generate information for a report each time; the report would be reviewed by the City Manager and submitted to Council twice a year; and Council would review the reports and make decisions to either recommend the plan as submitted or request changes.

Potential triggers for changes to the evaluation plan were considered and include: the current pandemic; big changes to the economy; legislative changes; catastrophes/disasters; strategies are not considered effective; strategies are not meeting goals; and/or political changes.

Ms. Gardner thanked Ms. Kiser, the Leadership Team, and the strategic plan working committee for working through the multiple levels of the strategic planning process this cycle.

Council feedback and discussion on the monitoring and evaluation plan proposal included: a question about whether department heads would prioritize which tactics to fulfill during the FY 2022-23 budget preparation process. All tactics covered in the meeting will be addressed in FY 2022-2023.

Would the City use other outlets besides the website to report ongoing results? Staff hopes that sharing progress towards City goals, strategies, and tactics would not be limited to just the website and social media.

Council members made a few requests, one of which is to have “mission moments” once a month in Council meetings, and the other is to keep the monitoring and evaluation plans realistic and grounded in reality.

There was a short dinner break.

Year 1 Implementation Plan Review

City Manager Michael J. Ferris introduced this portion of the session. The Leadership Team worked with CRC to develop tactics which would align with the agreed upon strategies and goals. The implementation plan which the Leadership Team will present is the roadmap of what the City plans

to do, and what it can commit to do over the next fiscal year. Tonight the presentation will be reverse ordered by goals, with Goal 5 first and Goal 1 last due to the level of ability to use resources to accomplish the tactics. Goal 1, Organizational Capacity, will be layered on top of everything else, since personnel will be essential to accomplishing everything.

Tactics for Goal 5: Inclusive Community Engagement were presented by Mr. Ferris and Ms. Kiser.

The team went over the tactics for the 4 strategies, and answered questions Council had. Council feedback included:

- Liking the needs assessments of East and North Albemarle;
- Performing community service creates visibility in the community;
- The City should engage the Stanly County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and other organizations in the county to partner for community activities and projects;
- The tactics seem precise and measurable in terms of impacts.

Tactics for Goal 4: Community and Economic Growth Opportunities were presented by Mr. Tunnell and Mr. Robinson.

The team went over the tactics for the 5 strategies, and answered questions from Council. Council feedback included:

- Will the City's other downtown improvement projects such as the Alleyway Project, streetscaping, etc. be incorporated into the tactics? Yes they will be included.
- It's good that the comprehensive plan update is in there – how long will it take for this? Between 6 months and a year.

Tactics for Goal 3: Infrastructure were presented by Mr. Worl.

He went over tactics for the 4 strategies, and answered questions from Council. Council feedback included:

- Council actions will need to align with tactics, with an example of selling property on Pee Dee Avenue versus building a park there. There is a hope that Council and staff discuss and concur on addressing tactics.

Tactics for Goal 2: Safety and Security were presented by Fire Chief Brewton and Police Chief Bollhorst.

The team went over the tactics for the 3 strategies, and answered questions from Council. Chief Bollhorst noted that many tactics under this goal have been rolled in under other goals.

Tactics for Goal 1: Organizational Capacity were presented by Dana Chaney, Jacob Weavil, and Owen Squires.

The team went over the tactics for the 3 strategies, and answered questions from Council.

Council feedback included:

- Glad to see training of personnel taking precedence and hope the City stays on course with this
- Concern about retention of police, fire, and Public Utilities personnel due to the current job market where they could be lured to a more lucrative offer in another municipality. Might need to take a look at tweaking the rates per the compensation study results sooner than the planned timeframe.

Ms. Gardner thanked everyone for a good discussion around the Year 1 implementation plan. She introduced Council to a ranking exercise using dots for the goal/strategy/tactic combinations they thought should be a focus of the second tranche of ARPA funds.

The highest 5 ranked goal/strategy/tactic combinations included:

- Goal 3: Infrastructure – Strategy 2: Fund community infrastructure at sufficient levels
- Goal 1: Organization Capacity – Strategy 1: Fund additional resources and services to support anticipated growth
- Goal 4: Community and Economic Development Growth Opportunities – Strategy 3: Diversify community and economic investments
- Tie for the following:
 - Goal 4: Community and Economic Development Growth Opportunities – Strategy 1: Anticipate new growth and educate residents, business owners, staff, and elected officials on the importance of structured, well-planned growth
 - Goal 4: Community and Economic Development Growth Opportunities – Strategy 2: Ensure Albemarle has a wide range of housing options for everyone
 - Goal 4: Community and Economic Development Growth Opportunities – Strategy 4: Prioritize downtown revitalization and beautification
 - Goal 1: Organization Capacity – Strategy 3: Provide ongoing training and development to all staff

Next Steps in the Budget Process

Mr. Ferris summarized the upcoming February 10th budget planning meeting, noting that Finance Director Jacob Weavil would present the financial plan, First Tryon would present financial modeling, and Chris Nida from NCLM would provide a remote presentation of the current status of the NC economy on the municipality level and compare Albemarle to other municipalities for a range of economic statistics/indicators.

He thanked CRC, the Leadership team, the strategic planning working committee and Council for a collaborative strategic planning process over the last few fiscal years, and expressed the opinion that he believes that the decisions made have been what's best for citizens of the City.

Before ending the meeting Mayor Pro Tem Hall requested that a summary of ARPA funds dedicated so far be provided to Council. That will be made available to Council as part of tomorrow's City Manager weekly update to Council.

Ms. Hall also announced that the state retirement system board was meeting tomorrow and expected to approve a raise in retirees' pension payouts. She noted that local retirees are expected to receive a 2% bonus.

The Mayor called for a quick discussion with Council. City Attorney Britt Burch was also present for the discussion. The Mayor stated that for the 1st on Main apartment public parking easement situation, the ongoing discussion with the Lowder family for a small parcel in back of the apartment complex has not outright been successful so far. He believes if the City proposes to "swap" parcels with Steven Chambers, agreeing to give him the alleyway parcel without egress with the City's which does adjoin another alley with access to the street so that the City can develop public parking, he would be receptive. The Mayor wanted to poll Council on whether they would agree to have the City Attorney draw up an agreement for the parcel swap for creation of public parking spaces once the swap is completed. Council agreed to this plan.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hughes, seconded by Councilmember Whitley, unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned to January 27, 2022 at 4:00 pm in EE Waddell Community Center for a stormwater management plan work session.