

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Tom Brymer, City Manager

DATE: June 7, 2004

SUBJECT: Recommendations for Follow-up to Council's Recent Retreat

INTRODUCTION

At the Council's May 25, 2004 retreat, Council spent the day focused on how it could be more effective in its work on behalf of College Station citizens. Council discussed a number of areas and went through a number of exercises, all with the focus of improving Council's effectiveness. One of those exercises involved the Council identifying its roles (both individually and collectively) as well as the City Manager's roles. Two of the roles identified by Council for the City Manager included:

- Facilitating the role of the Council
- Guiding the Council on critical issues for the future

With those roles in mind, I would like to offer some thoughts and ideas for the Council to consider in moving forward and putting to use what the Council discussed at its retreat. These suggestions are formulated around the ten (10) principles of good practices for City Councils discussed at the retreat. While a detailed description of each principle is attached, a summary of those principles is as follows:

- Principle 1- Clear Sense of Direction
- Principle 2- Clear Sense of Role
- Principle 3- Council Authority Vested in the Council
- Principle 4 - Council Sees Itself as a Team
- Principle 5- Clear Lines of Authority/Accountability
- Principle 6- Council Monitors and Evaluates Its Performance
- Principle 7- Established Policy Agenda
- Principle 8- Responsibility to Stakeholders
- Principle 9- Creative Ways to Insure Citizen Involvement
- Principle 10- Advocates Continuous Learning

Council did a self-evaluation at the retreat using these 10 principles. Council rated itself as being fairly strong as a body on some of the principles, while others offered opportunities for improvement. On some of the principles, Council "split" the evaluation between theory and practice with the idea being that in theory Council may have addressed this principle, but the practice of the principle

could be enhanced. Principles 3, 4, and 6 were evaluated by Council as those which the Council needed to work on the most so it could improve its effectiveness.

ENHANCING COUNCIL EFFECTIVENESS- FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 1- Revise Workshop Format

The Council's workshop meetings offer the best on-going opportunity for the Council to address, develop, and monitor its policy agenda (IE- strategic plan). To utilize the workshop in this manner requires some "time management" decisions by the Council that everyone (Council and staff) must "buy into" and honor. Failure to do so will not allow the Council to accomplish addressing the areas that Council evaluated itself as needing improvement. By using workshop meeting time in this way, Council will be honing in on Principle 1, a clear sense of strategic direction that is monitored and evaluated as well as Principle 7, a well thought out policy agenda. Specifically, the Council indicated at the retreat that it wanted to spend more time evaluating its effectiveness as it relates to attaining its policy objectives.

To achieve this end, it is recommended that Council set aside at least one hour at each workshop for policy discussion as it relates to its strategic plan. This discussion should cover not only specific current policies and strategic objectives, but also how we got to where we are today in regards to these policies. The discussion should also ask the question, how are we doing in terms of reaching our policy objective? What modifications should we make to it, if any? Should we keep it on the Council's policy "radar screen", IE- the strategic plan? **This can be accomplished by coming up with policy discussion calendar and "sticking to it".** It would mean that workshop agendas should be held to not more than three (3) items assuming the workshop would start at 3:00PM and end about 5:30PM for executive session.

This policy discussion calendar can be fashioned to follow the Council's strategic plan in terms of the Council's vision statements and existing strategies to move towards those visions. Additionally, this policy discussion calendar could allow for regular opportunities for policy discussion with Council advisory boards such as the Planning & Zoning Commission, Parks Advisory Board, and the Research Valley Partnership. This also provides the Council with a forum to make sure that the Council and their boards are "in sync" on major policy issues. This policy calendar would also give City staff an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding Council's emphasis and priorities for its policy agenda. This would include discussion as to how we are doing in achieving the Council's policy objectives and what changes should be made for the future.

As mentioned above, in order to accomplish this recommendation, time management commitments are important. Addition of new agenda items by

Council must receive a careful Council “self test” before making a decision to even take that item up for discussion. That “self-test” should include passing the proposed agenda item through the filter of these questions:

- What relationship does this item have to the Council's existing policy agenda (strategic plan)?
- Is this something Council did not identify earlier in its strategic planning that should be included now? IE- have circumstances or conditions changed significantly so that it must be addressed now?
- Or, is it something that should wait and be discussed by Council within the context of the Council's entire policy agenda at its mid-year strategic planning retreat?
- If Council takes up discussion of this agenda item, is Council willing to ask what resources will it take to accomplish it and shift resources as well as reprioritize from existing strategic directions if necessary?

It should be noted that staff would need to ask these same questions before adding agenda items and be willing to make the same commitment before adding new agenda items for Council consideration.

Recommendation No. 2- Continue This Year's Practice Regarding Strategic Planning With Some Additions

This year Council made changes as to the time of year that it revisited its strategic plan. Instead of reviewing its strategic plan after the May elections in a strategic planning retreat, Council did this in January. It is recommended that the Council continue this practice and allocate a full day in January or February for a mid-year Council strategic planning retreat. It is further recommended that the retreat following May Council elections be allocated for Council team building, governance, relations, and team effectiveness. With that in mind, the Council's strategic planning, budget, and governance calendar would include these major events:

- May retreat Council governance, relations, team effectiveness
- June-July Council work on strategic plan for FY'05
- Aug.- Sept. Council work on/adopt budget for FY '05
- Jan- Feb. Council retreat to revisit/assess FY '05 strategic plan

This calendar should assist the Council in addressing Principle 7, establishing a well thought out policy agenda to move the organization forward toward its strategic objectives. It should also address Principle 4, Council views itself as a team.

It is further recommended that the Council spend time in the next month refining its value statements that it developed at the retreat. Also, it is recommended that

Council spend some time in the context of strategic planning asking and applying to our organization the three questions from the “hedge hog concept” in Collins’ *Good to Great* which are:

- What can we be the best in the world at?
- What are we deeply passionate about?
- What drives our economic engine?

Recommendation No. 3- Schedule Further In-House Council Professional Development

Due to time constraints, there were some topic areas that Council did not cover at the retreat. Those topics were: “identifying stakeholders” and “leading in partnerships”. In addition to scheduling follow-up sessions with Terry Childers on these topics, I would also recommend that Council schedule a follow-up with Mr. Childers on “Building Effective Teams”. Stephen Covey in his book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* calls this “sharpening the saw”, IE- emphasizing the Council’s continuous learning.

Covering these topics will help build Principle 4 (Council views itself as a team), and Principle 8 (responsibility to stakeholders) while at the same time addressing Principle 10 (advocate continuous learning). It is recommended that the Council develop its own professional development learning calendar for the remainder of calendar 2004 and schedule half-day learning events with Terry Childers to cover these areas (and any other areas Council wishes to cover). Finally, it is recommended that on an on-going basis Council set an annual professional development calendar that addresses the areas that it thinks need additional improvement as a body. This should be done after the Council does a self-assessment using the 10 principles.

Recommendation No. 4- Continue Council Evaluations with Certain Revisions

Last year Council determined that it wished to evaluate itself quarterly. It is recommended that this practice continue, however, one revision is recommended. It is recommended that Council utilize the 10 principles mentioned above and use them as a part of a quarterly self-evaluation (similar to the self-evaluation Council did at the retreat). This revised approach would address Principle 4 (Council views itself as a team), Principle 5 (clear lines of authority/accountability) and Principle 6 (Council monitors and evaluates its performance). It will also address Principle 10, continuous learning. If Council conducts these evaluations regularly and effectively, it will, in my opinion, be one of the few Councils that does this and in so doing, will be setting the standard for effective municipal governance.

CONCLUSION

If Council is interested in pursuing these recommendations, I would be happy to put together a policy discussion calendar tied to the Council's strategic plan as well as schedule the Council's quarterly evaluations. The Council is to be highly commended for its desire to become a best practice, highly effective governing board for the citizens of College Station.

cc: Management Team

Attachments

10 Principles of Good Practice for City Councils (with explanation of each practice) and Other Council Retreat Notes

Council Retreat Notes
Tuesday, May 25, 2004
Tonkaway Ranch College Station, Texas

- I. Council Role as a Council**
 - a. Blueprint for vision for the future
 - b. Setting policy and prioritizing
 - c. Empowering City Manager and staff, working through City Manager
 - d. Planning/following through
 - e. Advocates greater City tone
 - f. Report/Monitor/Evaluate
 - g. Review Strategic Plan, allocate resources (budget oversight)
 - h. Represent Citizens
 - i. Trust
 - j. Respect

- II. Council Roles as Individuals**
 - a. Policy maker
 - b. Help solve problems
 - c. Works with fellow Council members
 - d. Represents citizens of College Station
 - e. Community leader
 - f. Listens to citizens/Council
 - g. Conduit to citizens
 - h. Board member
 - i. Communicates to citizens/Council
 - j. Issue leadership
 - k. Education/personal development
 - l. Serves
 - m. Courage to speak up
 - n. Socratic Method

- III. City Manager Roles**
 - a. Implement Strategic Plan/policies
 - b. Oversee management operations
 - c. Facilitate role of Council
 - d. Guide Council on control of future issues
 - e. Communicate with Council/community
 - f. Create trust with Council/community
 - g. Represent interest of City

- IV. Council Values**
 - a. Trust
 - b. Loyalty
 - c. Commitment
 - d. Excellence

- e. **Efficiency**
- f. **Effectiveness**
- g. **Integrity**
- h. **Respect**
- i. **Faith**
- j. **Objectivity**
- k. **Altruism**

V. Ten Principles of Good Practice for City Councils (Strengths) (*Weaknesses*)

- a. **Principle 1- Clear Sense Strategic Direction**
The Council has a very clear sense of the Strategic Direction for the city organization. They not only know the Strategic Direction, they continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the organization against the Council mandated Strategic Direction. They ask continually whether their policies are consistent with the agreed upon strategic direction and whether the course of action being pursued will permit them to arrive at the strategic objectives of the Council.
- b. **Principle 2- Clear Sense of Role**
The Council has a clear sense of its role and function in the community and the city organization. They understand their role in making and monitoring policy. The Council focuses on “making policy” not “doing policy.” The Council monitors and evaluates expected outcomes while continually posing the question Why? Rather than What?
- c. **Principle 3- Council Authority Vested in Council**
The Council has in place clear written policies which vest authority in the entire Council not blocks or factions. No one individual Council member speaks for the Council. The Council speaks with one voice on matters of importance while respecting each Council member’s need to disagree on various issues. Once the will of the Council has been expressed, each individual member supports the will of the Council to the best of his/her ability.
- d. **Principle 4- Council View Self as Team**
The Council views itself as a Team and understands its role as a Team in the broader context of city government. Council members respect each other and value the diversity of opinions and perspectives each member brings to the Council. They all insure every Council member is actively involved in the work and decision making of the Council as a valued team member.
- e. **Principle 5- Clear Lines Authority/Accountability**
The Council establishes clear lines of authority and accountability to run the business of city government. It insures it has a highly competent professional manager and staff to do the work required to implement its policies. The City Manager is given clear direction through its policy setting process and holds him/her accountable for results. Individual Council members refrain from giving personal direction to staff on any matters no matter how innocent it appears on the surface.
- f. **Principle 6- monitors and Evaluates Performance**
The Council monitors and evaluates its own performance as a Team to insure compliance with its own rules of conduct and expectations. The Council recognizes its effectiveness in achieving strategic objectives can be

impacted by its own actions or inactions. It examines itself to insure it fulfills its role of leading the organization in its agreed upon strategic direction.

- g.** Principle 7- Established Policy Agenda
The Council has a well thought out and agreed upon policy agenda to move the organization towards its strategic objectives. The Council recognizes its primary function is to set, monitor, and evaluate policy and therefore is deliberate in creating an agenda for itself and the organization to follow.
- h.** Principle 8- Responsibility to Stakeholders
The Council understands its responsibility to its stakeholders and holds itself accountable to the entire community of stakeholders for its work and results. They take a big picture perspective with regard to community interest and concerns.
- i.** Principle 9- Creative Ways for Citizen Involvement
The City Council finds creative ways to insure citizen involvement but never allows citizen input to substitute for the Council's need to make decisions which are in the best interest of the organization and the Council's strategic direction.
- j.** *Principle 10- Advocates Continuous Learning*
The Council advocates and supports a continuous learning environment in the city organization seeking to find creative solutions to problems to advance its strategic agenda.
- k. Council Evaluation on Ten Practices-**

1.3,4,A,3,3,4,2	avg. 3
2.3,2,3,2,3,3,3	avg. 3
3.practice 1,2,A,2,2,2,-1	avg. 1
5,5,5,5,5,5,5	avg. 5
4. practice 2,1,2,2,2,2,2	avg. 2
5,4,4,3,4,4	avg. 4
5. cc 4,4,4,4,4,4,A	avg. 4
Mgr. 5,5,5,5,5,5,5	avg. 5
6.	
7.4,3,4,4,4	avg. 3
8.4,5,4,5,4,4,4	avg. 4
9.5,4,3,3,5,4,3	avg. 4
10.4,5,4,5,5,4,5	avg. 5

****strengths**

****weaknesses**