

**City of College Station, TX**  
**Council Policy Retreat**  
**June 13 & 14, 2005**  
**600 del Lago Boulevard**  
**Montgomery, Texas**

The Mayor and City Council (Council) of the City of College Station, Texas met at the Del Lago Resort for a two-day policy level retreat and planning session. The City of College Station is a community that is well positioned geographically, anchored by a growing university, financially strong and very interested in developing proactive guiding policy to shape its future in an aggressive growth environment. The Council has several relatively new members and is seeking to find the common policy issues that all will share and when addressed will shape College Station's future in a positive fashion.

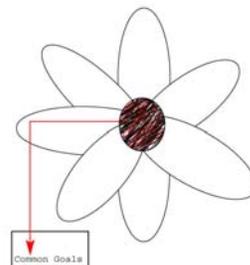
**Introduction**

Each member of the Council was interviewed two weeks before the retreat to gather data to be used in design of the retreat and to provide starting points for important discussions during the retreat. Policy level retreats can easily waste valuable time and energy establishing a beginning point for dialogue. Advance input allows us to hit the ground running and dedicate the valuable Council time to the intent, discussing Key result Areas (KRAs) for policy consideration. This report reflects the notes taken by the facilitator during the retreat and observations from the Council dialogue. It is not intended to be the formal minutes of the meeting. The report is best read with the Power Point summary as a companion. The Power Point has detailed information that was shared with the Council to focus discussion and inform regarding several points and principles of policy formation. That summary is attached.

**Council introductory remarks**

At the beginning of the retreat, the Council was asked to spend a few minutes each describing their personal view of College Station... the things they like the most and least. The intent is to hear each person's viewpoint at the beginning of the discussion to both understand the differences and to identify the similarities. These are unstructured but give a pretty good indicator of some issues that emerge in the process that follows. This report will reflect the key issues several times as they emerge form different discussions. This amplifies their importance to this policy body and provides the foundation for identification of their primary areas for collective policy attention.

The following is a summary of the comments made by the Council. College Station is a well-educated and informed community inhabited by people who love the City and care about the things we do. Texas A&M as the City's centerpiece, we have a dynamic educational foundation on

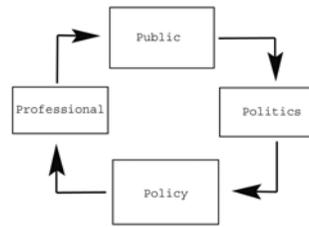


which to build a bright future that embraces new possibilities while maintaining our character and quality of life. CS is a young, dynamic community with a general sense of energy and excitement generated largely by the activities at the university. CS has a very special resident population of involved, capable and intelligent people. They have a positive progressive attitude and generally understand the City's problems. College Station a safe city with a strong economy and a high quality of life. The opportunity to expand the community well-being in concert with the university expansion is a significant opportunity for positive economic growth. The students keep the fresh perspective of youth yet pose some community challenges. Concerns include the tensions that exist between the City and the university regarding neighborhood impact, traffic, noise, parking, rental occupancy issues, etc. Traffic, in general, is an issue needing to address both within the City limits and through regional and statewide decision-making forums regarding larger arterials. The City is growing at a steady pace but is not as inclusive as it needs to be. Foreign students, resident minorities need equal opportunity. Concerned that, at times, we are distracted from the vision we are trying to achieve by the demand for attention to the small immediate items.

### **What do we want to accomplish with this retreat?**

The Council indicated a number of desired outcomes for this retreat. The following summarize the common themes. As with each point in this report I suggest the reader refer to the attached PowerPoint summary for more specific detail from the Council interview input.

- To focus collectively on major policy issues we need to address
- Get to know each other and individual preferences and interests better
- To strengthen our capacity to be an effective Council.
- To understand and collectively address our weaknesses and amplify our strengths
- Share concerns to address personal perception issues, motives and intentions to develop trust, mutual support & respect



Roles in the Public Policy Process

### **What are the major long-term issues we face as a policy body?**

The Council divided into two groups. Each discussed the question and arrived at a list. They were asked to keep the list to 5 or 6. While this work did not exhaust the possibilities or limit opportunities to add items, it began to focus attention on the “vital few” that will most significantly impact the citizens of College Station. Long term was suggested to be 5-8 years. The senior staff members present were also asked to answer this question. Their comments are reflected below but were not directly blended into the policy-level discussion unless done so by the Council.

## GROUP 1

Develop, adopt, communicate and follow through on policies to:

- Attract and support business
- Assure adequate transportation systems... State, regional & local
- Improve collaboration with the University and Bryan
- Address neighborhood issues... rentals, energy issues

## GROUP 2

- Proactive growth management regarding transportation, quality of life, and land use
- Collaboration and cooperation between the City, Bryan, A&M to foster regionalism. What is good for Bryan is good for College Station (generally)
- Policies to support neighborhood well-being, communication and differing lifestyles
- Become a destination City through economic develop policies
- City Center as a point of pride supported by the citizens

The Council members were given an opportunity to select their top priorities from the list generated by the two groups. They each had 2 red dots (highest priority) and 4 not red (important but lower priority). They were able to distribute them in any way they wished. The staff items listed below were not included in the Council list of choices but could be drawn from if the Council chose to do so.

## STAFF

- Better-defined interaction with A&M leadership.
- More concise definition of roles (Council, staff, committee policy)
- Tax base growth and broader/revenue structure (fiscal/financial policy)
- Clarity regarding how far we go with collaboration? Clear expectations in general to avoid assumptions.
- Capitalize on our asset of knowledge based community

## **What are the key policy concerns?**

The Council selection indicated that the following four items, agreed upon by all, are the primary policy areas on which to concentrate their effort.

1. Growth management to assure that the City is both ahead of the growth curve in its definition of systems and policies to manage growth and very clear about their intentions for the character and quality of growth.
2. Collaboration with other entities (especially Bryan, A&M, schools, county, TexDOT) to form mutually productive alliances that strengthen the community.
3. Economic Development to diversify the revenue base, strengthen the fiscal position and provide appropriate support to define and encourage target industries

- that will best serve a balanced community. Related areas that must be considered in relationship to economic development include:
- a. Quality of Life
  - b. Transportation
  - c. Land Use
  - d. Support and attract business
  - e. Knowledge based community
4. Neighborhood well being includes a broad array of interests including student occupancy, noise and parking control, code enforcement and general neighborhood support and enhancement.

Substantial discussion accompanied each of the above. The intent was to stay focused at the highest policy level and to do so in relationship to the areas where the greatest need and opportunity for significant impact rest. The following represents more detailed discussion regarding each of the four Key Result Areas (KRAs). While they are not intended to be in a fixed rank order, the sequence does represent the weight of value placed on each area through the selection process.

The following are presented in “dot point” fashion to represent the breadth of comment. These discussions continued the focus on policy and concluded with a policy action plan that provides a general guideline for further development and adoption of specific policy to guide the effort. As each discussion flows, the reader may see opposing or contradictory points being made. That is representative of the give and take of the dialogue.

## **1. Growth Management**

- Manage growth wisely in a proactive and consistent manner. Don't let the growth process get ahead of our identification of what we want to become.
- Examine the policies and systems in place and adjust to be certain that zoning regulations and infrastructure are consistent with positive business growth.
- Focus on the attraction of desired new businesses and the retention of current ones.
- Review our land use plan and how we do zoning to be sure it serves the vision the community holds for itself.
- Annexation policy needs to be reviewed to be sure it serves College Station well.
- Citizen communication and involvement is critical. Policy discussions need to be communicated well to our citizens and their active involvement in forming policy encouraged.
- Engage all stakeholders in policy discussions.
- It is very important that we first have vision clarity from Council regarding what we see for the future of College Station.
- Our fundamental challenge is to maintain our quality of life, the “small town feel” that defines College Station, while we grow.”

- Smart growth requires balance and a distributed economic base. It is important that we use the tools we have to bring the right type of growth. We first need to be able to identify the desired element of successful growth. (see Economic Development section below)
- Council needs to stay focused on the College Station vision and make decisions in the context of that vision.
- The current vision is all things to all people, which makes it less useful, and we tend to sway from it when the pressure is on.
- Communication is very important the “why we are doing things” needs to be communicated proactively.
- A shared vision centers us.

### **Growth Management... Actions**

- Review the current mission and vision of the Council for the future of College Station and update as needed to have a shared Council perspective.
- Develop improved ways to communicate with the public to both inform and engage regarding key policy formation.
- In preparation for further policy discussion on the growth management issue, the City Manager will prepare a working paper to inform and serve as a starting point for a study session or series of study sessions. (Note: The idea of special study sessions to discuss important issues in depth without the burden of an action agenda was discussed a number of times throughout the day as a way to bring needed focus of attention and dialogue to the KRAs.)

## **2. Economic Development**

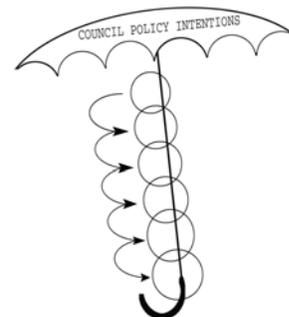
- We need to create policy that encourages job creation.
- As we work to serve College Station interests we need to avoid being seen as overly competition with other entities. (Note: This comment links well to the later comment about finding the balance between cooperation and self-interest. Both need to be served)
- Expand the tourism base.
- Sales tax revenue is 40% of the General Fund operating budget. Seeking economic development that contributes to expanding that revenue source is important.
- Leverage the knowledge based character of College Station, identifying and promoting the ‘right’ kind of growth. (Note: ‘Right’ became a discussion point in itself resulting in a general agreement that it is important to identify the intention for economic development so all will agree on what the term means and what industries are most attractive.)
- We should attract clean industry, not smoke stack, environment unfriendly, min-wage or vulnerable due to their cyclical nature.

- Leverage A&M as a core asset and work collaboratively on economic development strategies that represent mutual benefit.
- Enhance and support knowledge-based industries.
- White-collar business opportunities will represent intellectual capital.
- At the same time, our children must have opportunities to stay and work after graduation. (Note: This theme of balance continues through the day with comfort that somewhat contradictory ideas can coexist in a well designed economic development policy)
- Synergy between A&M and the City is a core element of a College Station economic development policy.
- One observation was that “We are a net exporter of talent.” and need to change that equation.
- Getting students more involved in the City may help to engage them both in the vision and in considering opportunities in College Station after graduation.
- How do we convey that College Station is best choice? “Package it better”
- Be sure to get a seat at the table in the right forums to support decisions that encourage businesses we want.
- Be seen as business friendly.
- Take advantage of our central location in the triangle.
- Infrastructure issues must be addressed to assure an attractive environment for business attraction.
- Work in collaboration to develop educational support for target industries... A&M, vocational, junior college, etc.
- Form regional education cooperatives.
- Seek alliances to enhance efforts at Business retention and educational infrastructure. Bring partners along with us through policy discussions.
- Enroll IGC and others in the strategy.
- Share the Credit!
- All boats rise when we work together.
- The RVP has strategic plan, may or may not be consistent with College Station



### **Economic Development... Actions**

- Set meeting between College Station and Blinn leaders to discuss economic development opportunities.
- Engage Chamber, RVP & others in the discussion of economic development with the expectation that they will be proactive. We will take the lead in creating the dialogue.
- Get the right people on the RVP and ‘charter’ their assignment. It is expected that the City representative(s) on this or any other committee will be working toward the City goals as established by the Council. Get our reps on the



same page as us. Representatives appointed by the Council report to the Council.

- Develop and adopt an economic development master plan. We currently have pieces of an economic development plan (some policies re: economic development in retail) but nothing comprehensive.
- Establish a business Retention Policy
- Include support of business interests in legislative agenda.
- Establish an ad hoc committee ('skunk works') task force appointed by Mayor with specific charter and timing to begin identification of key elements for an economic development plan.

### **3. Collaboration**

- Be clear regarding the intent of our efforts to collaborate.
- We are not now seen as collaborative but want to be. We believe we are more collaborative than some perceive we are.
- Effective collaboration necessitates that all parties win?
- Rather than simply expect collaboration in all matters, it is important that we behave in a thoughtful & responsible way with consideration given to the College Station benefit.

#### **Collaboration ... Actions**

- Establish guiding principles for collaborative relationships where all parties gain.
- Establish systems and structures to enable collaboration.
- (Note: The consensus of the Council, as this discussion concluded, was that collaboration is more of a universal expectation for how the City does business than a stand alone KRA. You will note that the second day discussion treated it as such.)

### **4. Neighborhoods**

- The City held a neighborhood task force last year. Consider the results of that work as we go forward.
- Student housing issues are a primary concern... much like other college cities.
- The number of unrelated inhabitants in a single dwelling is a concern.
- Noise, parking & poorly maintained property are part of the problem.
- Bryan is currently having the same discussion. Can we collaborate?
- We are taking proactive actions but citizens still see it as a major unresolved problem.
- We need an established program that will mitigate major issues quickly & systematically.
- How can we get to the students/parents to share suggestions directly?

#### **Neighborhood... Actions**

- Support the formation of neighborhood programs to address issues.
- Engage the University for their participation in party/noise/parking control.

- Establish dialogue with University on new opportunities to solve problems.
- Work with off-campus housing in collaboration to minimize problems.
- Review current code to determine its adequacy to help deal with neighborhood issues?

The first day of the retreat ended here having addressed the long-term issues. There were several other long-term issues that were not discussed in detail. Some will be subsets of the KRAs noted above while others will vie for attention as policy discussions occur throughout the year. The following are the result of discussion on the second day of the retreat.

### **Comments to introduce the second day discussion.**

The Council began the second day with a brief update from the first day and an outline of the plan for the second. They discussed what happens next with the work they do at the retreat. Since retreats such as this are not forums for making policy but rather to set up the framework to bring key points of policy interest into the decision-making arena where they will conduct public discussion to form specific policy, they need a specific understanding of how this goes forward. The Council discussed the role of the City Manager in bringing items forward for their formal consideration. The City manager is expected to prepare briefing papers with sufficient information to enable a well-informed continuation of the retreat discussions. They are not seeking recommendations as much as thorough research and options. Council will determine policy and administration will carry it out.

The KRAs that carried over from the first day and become the frame of reference for the second were Growth Management, Economic Development and Neighborhoods. They continued the discussion with the collective intention to:

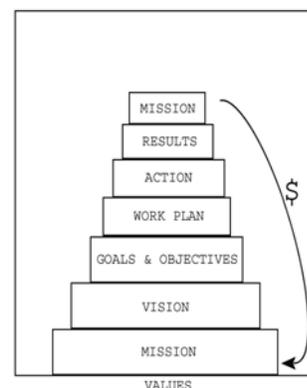
- Stay at the policy level
- Be specific about roles and expectations including Policy & Administration
- Follow thru!
- Clarify common vision

### **Short-term actions to achieve long-term goals**

The advance input from Council interviews formed the foundation for this discussion. The Council then divided into two groups, as they did with the long-term KRA discussion, to determine the most significant actions. The group members were mixed from the first such exercise to continually fuel new ideas. These are not in rank order. They are items that the Council wants to pursue in the next several months.

#### **GROUP 1**

- Develop and approve a fast track development process that expedites review without sacrificing quality.



- Establish goals and measures for Council appointees.
- Develop and apply an economic development plan
- Strengthen neighborhood code enforcement. Review the process we follow and the position within the organization for best fit.
- Consider holding a congress of neighborhoods
- Include students in the dialogue and communication regarding neighborhood problems associated with the University.
- Move forward on the Convention Center project. Agree on details and how to go forward including communication and collaboration with Bryan.
- Strengthen the Police Department with additional resources as needed.
- Enhance very positive teamwork mentality of Council as a team.

## GROUP 2

- Establish economic development policy and direction.
- Enhance communications
- Start with where we are now and where we want to go then, how we are doing in getting there. Have a clear vision to measure against.
- Report from RVP representatives to City Council to be in sync with City Council ... include ongoing communication plan.
- Develop a communication master plan with emphasis on both listening and assimilation. Need to include media relations and regular contact with service clubs. It was noted that there are 9 Civic Clubs, 6 Lions Clubs, 2 Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis and other opportunities to positively inform and influence the public.
- City Manager needs to update the City Council regularly.

## Short-term specifics

Some common themes were evident... vision, communication, role, action on delayed projects and a general bias for action. The following items were selected by the Council for further discussion and statement of specific expectations for what needs to be done in the short term.

- Communication
  - Staff now reports information regarding current activities. Council would like to see future ideas and projects in formation added to the reports.
  - Review and approve the Council reports/like reading the newspaper.
  - Want to hear from the City manager and all departments about what they see for the future.
  - Department plans communicated to Council through City Manager,
  - Department work plan and relationships to St. Plan. Should they be communicated to citizen?
  - Include citizen appointees in communication loop and expect feedback.
  - Include other key stakeholders beyond the obvious. Engage the thoughtful leaders.

- Council-to-Council communication should be consistent and based on agreed upon norms.
- Performance reviews for administrative appointees
  - Establish goals and objectives with City Manager and appointees for performance review purposes
  - There is no current Council appointee's performance evaluation process—established one.
- Council Leadership
  - Each Council member has a responsibility to provide leadership and support the leadership of others. The Mayor needs to exercise the responsibilities of the chair in a strong consistent manner.
  - Council group dynamics and mutual respect are important and should be exhibited publicly and privately to honor the group's common interests and intent.
  - Conduct productive debate with mutual respect.
  - Demand a level of decorum from the audience that is consistent with the rules established and the tenor set by Council
  - Mayor decides when a behavior is out of order and Council will support the decision and the gavel if used.
  - All will follow rules regarding speaker forms being filled out correctly and speaker time limits and decorum.
  - Staff will edit the form for speakers to include Council expectations noted above. Include a section where someone can check for or against and be included in the record without speaking.
- Neighborhoods
  - Engage the associations and traditional neighborhoods
  - Have a registration program for rentals to assure a responsible point of contact
  - Use WTAW radio spot every Friday to share with the public. Cable channel seems to have strong viewership Take advantage of the opportunity
  - Consider a way to convene neighborhoods to enhance communication on an ongoing basis
- City Center
  - Identify community leaders and engage them in the project to educate, inform and seek supportive feedback
  - This is the #1 project needing to be “reframed”. It is a good project that has gotten off on the wrong foot. We need to step back and reestablish clarity of intention.

- Naysayers currently tend to define the project and the City reacts.
- We now have a vision with no buy-in.
- Council needs to give guidance regarding policy direction for City Center.

Look at major projects in the hopper to assess where we are and determine if the Council commitment is strong and communication satisfactory.

### **Miscellaneous but important**

The Council discussed a number of items that don't fit in a tidy package but are important to them as they conduct the business of the City. They are listed in no particular order other than the sequence discussed.

- Selection process for appointed citizen committees. Draft done.  
Expand the online application.
- Work-study sessions will allow the Council to discuss the KRA policy items and others in a concentrated fashion separate from an action agenda. This will allow the same type of free-flowing discussion held during the retreat and so important to formation of complex public policy.
- "Talk less, say more". Agree to keep comments from the Council as brief as possible without limiting productive input. The perception is that there is repetition and at times long-winded recitations that consume valuable time. This type of word economy is particularly important to consider if the time limits for meetings is held facts.
- Consent agenda is effective now. Perhaps it can be even more efficient as well as effective if the bias is to seek answers in advance and to minimize withdrawal from the consent agenda to allow more time to be dedicated to the more complex items.
- Should Council memberships using personal resources be reimbursed?
- There is a time to make the decision and move on. Some perceive that the tough decisions are delayed unnecessarily to the detriment of the Council and community.
- Town Hall...consider open public hearings on key issues, some held in neighborhoods to get input and engender trust.

### **Observations & Suggestions**

The City of College Station is a wonderful community at an exciting point in its history. Growth and opportunity seem to be inexorably woven into the pattern of evolution described by the Council. While the Council's vision for College Station is unstated, their common focus suggests a desired future. Their attention to policy formation in the areas most likely to contribute to achievement of a desired future will pay dividends. Consistent with the discussions during the retreat, I encourage the Council to:

- Spend concentrated time determining their shared vision for the future of the City as well as clear expectations for processes and values that will guide the effort to achieve it.
- Charter all commission, committee and individual appointments by the Council. This means clearly stating what you expect from advisory groups and people appointed to represent the Council in other policy forums.
- Set aside time to discuss major policy issues in study sessions where the depth and breadth of an issue can be considered with the same level of critical thinking and healthy exchange as exhibited in the retreat.
- Clarify the expectations for each other regarding communication, meeting decorum, meeting management, conflict resolution, leadership expectations etc. This is not to solve existing problems but to prevent problems that can easily develop in strong active policy bodies.
- Establish and follow a simple, straightforward and relevant performance expectation and review process for Council appointed positions.
- Take time to stand back now and then to examine, improve and most important, celebrate the wonderful work you do.

## **Conclusion**

It has been a privilege to serve the City of College Station. I have come to appreciate the depth of civic commitment and sense of mission exhibited by the City Council and staff. I will watch the exciting years ahead for College Station with great interest and appreciation. I have enjoyed the high level of positive interaction, the willingness to work hard on tough issues, the variety of perspectives and the collective sense of resolve to make things happen. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

*R. A. Bowers*

Richard A. Bowers, President