



**CITY COUNCIL MINUTES
2017 CITY COUNCIL PLANNING SESSION
FEBRUARY 4, 2017**

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Bruce Bassett called the 2017 City Council Planning Session to order at 8:30 am in the Luther Burbank Room at the Mercer Island Community and Event Center, 8236 SE 24th Street, Mercer Island, WA.

Mayor Bruce Bassett, Deputy Mayor Debbie Bertlin, and Councilmembers Dan Grausz, Jeff Sanderson, Wendy Weiker, David Wisenteiner, and Benson Wong were present.

The attached report is hereby incorporated by reference as the minutes of the 2017 City Council Planning Session.

ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Session adjourned at 5:45 pm.

Attest:

Bruce Bassett, Mayor

Allison Spietz, City Clerk

Mercer Island City Council 2017 Planning Session
Mercer Island Community and Event Center
Saturday, February 4, 2017

ATTENDEES

City Council

Bruce Bassett, Mayor
Debbie Bertlin, Deputy Mayor
Dan Grausz, Councilmember
Jeff Sanderson, Councilmember
Wendy Weiker, Councilmember
Dave Wisenteiner, Councilmember
Benson Wong, Councilmember

Facilitator

Marci Wright

City Staff

Julie Underwood, City Manager
Bruce Fletcher, Parks & Recreation Director
Chip Corder, Asst City Manager/Finance Director
Ross Freeman, Sustainability & Communications Mgr
Cindy Goodwin, Youth & Family Services Director
Ed Holmes, Police Chief
Mike Kaser, IS Director
Jason Kintner, Public Works Director
Evan Maxim, Planning Manager
Kryss Segle, Human Resources Director
Kari Sand, City Attorney
Ali Spietz, City Clerk
Kirsten Taylor, Assistant City Manager

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

The Mayor and City Manager made introductory remarks and introduced the facilitator. Attendees participated in a brief demonstration of the City's new instant polling technology (this demonstration activity was repeated periodically throughout the day).

Attendees reviewed proposed **Planning Session Norms as follows:**

- Everyone participates and is engaged
 - Listen with respect
 - Let others finish before you start talking
 - Be attentive to the speaker
 - Disagree agreeably-look for opportunities to agree
- Questions of clarification are encouraged
- Disparaging comments and side conversations are discouraged
- Conflict must be focused on the issues, not on personalities
- Strive for consensus and provide clear direction
- Silence is agreement
- Remember the power of "and" & "if"
 - Practice "yes, and" rather than "yes/no, but"
 - In seeking consensus consider something that you may disagree with and consider "if" something changed how you might be able to move to consensus
 - Put another way, if you cannot live with the direction, you must offer an alternative
- Be productive and have fun!

Attendees agreed to add an additional item

- Use cell phones only during breaks

Attendees confirmed agreement with the **Planning Session Norms**

REVIEW 2016 ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND SUCCESSES

Attendees reviewed the following 2016 accomplishments:

- Hired new City Manager
 - City Council demonstrated courage in not choosing a candidate in first process (which was led by an outside consultant)

- Staff successfully led a second recruitment and selection process
 - City provided services during period of two interim City Managers without a gap
- Leadership Team, staff, and City Council kept the City running
- Updated Comprehensive Plan and Town Center Plan
- City Attorney successfully resolved catastrophic injury lawsuit, fire station issue, sewer backup case, and land use issue
- Held 45 Council Meetings (24 in 2015)
 - 23 Special Meetings
 - 49 Executive Sessions (16 in 2015)
- Responded to 730 public record requests
- City held numerous Planning Commission meetings for Comprehensive Plan and Town Center Plan updates
- Senior staff kept the wheels on the bus in a **very** busy year
- Adopted code amendments to allow for school bus cameras
- Council adopted a Principles and Values Proclamation
 - Kenmore Mayor complimented the City on the document
 - Mercer Island community appreciates the document
- 99% complete on the boil water advisory follow-up steps
- City now has a dedicated Emergency Operations Center and is more prepared for emergencies
- Diversity and Inclusion Committee progressed to the implementation phase on work efforts
- New Public Works management team
 - Have made a wholesale change in way of doing business
 - Much greater use of technology
- Youth and Family Services maintained services during increase in population and demand for services without any increase in staff
 - Changed staff configuration
 - Have used two federal 5-year grants
 - Are completing one and have successfully integrated its activities into the regular program
 - Decreased teen drinking statistics
 - MIYFS Foundation activities and events have increased
- Parks completed Calkins Landing and Calkins Point projects and received a \$500k RCO grant for Island Crest Park
- New Parks Field User Policy and worked on off-leash dog issues
- Development Services staffing has stabilized, including the Planning Team. Had a very busy year of projects and permits
 - Most permits since 2007 (3100)
 - Adopted Town Center Vision and Development and Design Guidelines
 - Implemented traffic impact fees
 - Adopted 2015 construction codes
 - Hired more planning resources, and began work on residential development standards
- Finished 2016 with a budget surplus
- Completed many road projects—on time and on budget
 - Schools
 - Island Crest Way Resurfacing
 - 86th & SE 40th Street restriping and lane configuration
- Had 3 new City Councilmembers and they successfully got up to speed on City issues and Council role
- Accomplished many Communication efforts with a 0.6 FTE
- Sustainability-leader in the region
 - Residential solar installations continue at a good pace
 - Added more electric vehicles to City fleet
 - 40% decreases in costs due to LED light project at MICEC Parking Lot
 - Expanded recycling and composting at City buildings
 - Purchasing 100% green power for City buildings (one of few in region)
 - K4C Coalition participation amplifies Mercer Island's voice in state climate issues
- Public Safety
 - Cracked a 3-million-dollar crime ring
 - Very appreciated by the community/popular on Facebook
 - Our dialogue with community in Mercer Island is very different one from the national dialogue between police and citizens
- Strong partnership with the Mercer Island School District

- Received national recognition from Let's Move program
- Parks successfully replaced 5 leadership staff positions in 2016 (out of 7 total staff)
 - No major impact on operations
 - 100% by promotion from within
- City Clerk has been without Deputy Clerk since November and has successfully maintained service level
- Unprecedented demand from community for information. We've done a lot to provide information using 0.6 Communications FTE and other City staff
- Completed I-90 Bollard Study and have begun removing bollards for safety
- Public Works Audit pushed us in a good direction and we will be implementing a new asset management system
- Great interaction within our City staff
- Public Works did great work on the water system problem
- City received another clean audit—22 years in a row
- Budget balanced for 2017 and for the remaining deficit in 2018 will be bridged when the Criminal Justice Fund is closed and folded into the General Fund
- City Attorney staff was amazing—handled very large work volume with excellent quality and timeliness
- Staff doesn't know how City Council does it all—amazing how much time/effort/results are accomplished. No way for public to fully appreciate Council accomplishments—but staff does
- Fire Department stays under the radar (as is appropriate). Do great work and are making a difference in our community and saving lives. And had more turnover than usual in 2016
- All 4 collective bargaining agreements were open in 2016 which was rare and all were successfully settled

A great deal of valuable work was accomplished in 2016, during a very busy year with unusually trying circumstances. The efforts and results of 2016 have set us up for a successful 2017.

LESSONS LEARNED IN 2016 AND MAJOR CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT IN 2017

Attendees discussed the following lessons learned and ways to improve in 2017:

- Desire to move back to a strong City Manager form of government with less Council detail and task involvement. Allow the City Council to resume role/responsibility for policy:
 - With a new City Manager timing is good for Council to make shift out of the weeds and into a higher-level view
 - Concern-if Council doesn't agree with what staff presents, Council shouldn't be silent.
 - E.g. Proud of how Council pushed back about the intersection at SE 40th Street—if we hadn't City would have spent too much money
 - Staff could improve by offering better/clearer alternatives with their recommendations
 - Concern that too often pros/cons are worded just to support the staff recommendations
 - It is a reasonable expectation of staff to provide reasonable alternatives
 - And one alternative is always the status quo
- With very lean staff, we need to match our expectations to the amount of staff being funded. Need to balance.
 - City Council sometimes goes into staff augmentation role-sometimes maybe by default. Important to consider intent—are we saying the City Council will do this for a reason? Council needs to be clear and intentional when we are doing this. When Council supplements staff work, it can negatively impact staff buy-in
 - Does appear to be past practice of Council overdoing this and this can interfere with staff doing their best work
 - Best practice
 - City Council gives direction
 - City Manager works with staff to do the work
 - If City Council wants a change, then direct the City Manager to work with staff
- Successful City Manager hiring process was focused on trying to move back to a strong City Manager form of government
 - City Council needs to better articulate our goal/desired outcome
 - If staff doesn't reach it, staff needs to go back to drawing board
 - Staff also needs to provide multiple reasonable options
 - Last year's TIP: City Council just got the final product as negotiated with the School District—the City Council needs the opportunity to define the outcomes-get to say what we're looking for

- Staff doesn't bristle with City Council suggesting changes-that process important. If want an amendment, should make that motion at an open meeting and see if you get a second.
 - If inclined to wordsmith, best to focus on your intent. If staff is not meeting your needs, start with stating your intent and what you want. Then if you want to suggest language change, go ahead and should be an easier conversation.
- Residential Development Code-staff is happy to get edits ahead of time-especially if Council is catching an error or major issue
- Council has a desire for more study sessions on many issues. Helpful to get more information to all members and also opportunity for all to see and understand edits
 - This is also helpful for public process—citizens get to see the interactions and back and forth
 - Increased study sessions were effective at the City of Shoreline
 - Also could allow more use of Consent Calendar-enable us to get back to how we used to use it
- City Manager wants to move to staff table and off the dais, which will allow her to see all 7 Councilmembers and be better able to get consensus City Council direction
- Important for staff to be sure is majority support (4 thumbs up) for changes at meetings
- If City Manager needs more staff, she should come to the City Council and ask for more staff
 - In 2015 & second half of 2016, staff always said “no” to ideas and always said “we don't have enough staff.” Instead we want the City Manager to hear what Council wants done and then come back and say how it can be done (including a change in priorities or an increase in staff)
- Mercer Island should be a modern, 21st Century City. A good example of that are the recent changes in Public Works.
 - Concern that we are tooled for a City 20 years ago. Often hear we do not have the capacity in our current staff
 - Need a proactive strategic look at 21st City issue to get us there
- If a City Councilmember sends an email to staff as just 1 of 7 Councilmembers saying “I want this” and then staff then does it, it can be a tremendous waste of time if the item/issue doesn't have 4+ Councilmember votes
- We need a plan from the City Manager for how we can get from here (Council in the weeds) to strong City Manager/goal-focused City Council (with more study sessions, more staff, whatever)
 - City Council must be open to making this change-commit to doing so
 - City Manager must then give us a plan to get us there
- Could be as simple as the City Council committing to act in a different manner and then staff needs to act to support the Council
 - Current way of doing business is causing a lot of stress
- City Council needs to follow best practices.
 - All emails to staff need to cc the City Manager
- An example of a success—in City Manager contract discussions Councilmember focused on the objective and then Council and staff worked together to get language to achieve the objective
- City Council sometimes assumes staff has the capacity and truth may be that the capacity does not exist
 - Need to be careful of this
 - Therefore, will be good to get to the objectives—then City Manager can push back when can't do it without change in priorities or more staff
 - City Council role is to set objectives/direction/goals. Then City Manager needs to work with staff to figure out how and bring the plan back to Council.

Consensus View: City Council agrees we are in the weeds and want to move to a strong City Manager with Council role of setting goals and objectives.

- City Manager to give the City Council a plan of how we can get there. May include steps like:
 - More study sessions
 - City Manager getting to know each City Councilmember better and have regular check-ins with each
 - Periodic Council Operation meetings
 - Open meeting with dinner prior to regular meeting
 - Float ideas/get initial sense of interest
 - Planning schedules/strategies
 - Being more proactive and less reactive
- City Manager should be the center of the wheel.

2017-2018 CITY GOALS

Each City Councilmember individually brainstormed ideas for Goals. Each goal idea was collected and common ideas were combined into the following nineteen general Goal Categories:

- Enhance Parks & Recreation Areas
- Maintain Public Safety
- Create Stand Alone 2017 School Counselor Levy
- Collaborate & Leverage Partnership with School District
- Optimize Infrastructure Investments
- Enhance Communication with Community
- Revise City Codes (later combined with #8)
- Critical Areas/GMA/Code Compliance
- Bike/Pedestrian Fixes Along I-90
- Residential Development Code
- I-90 Access/Sound Transit
- Pedestrian Safety
- Complete Transition Back to Strong City Manager
- Capital Levy/City Financial Sustainability
- Town Center
- Eliminate City Council Salaries
- Enhanced IT Systems
- Sustainable Staff Workload
- Advance Sustainability Program

Council decided that (1) I-90 Access/Sound Transit and (2) Complete Transition Back to Strong City Manager would be 2017-2018 Goals.

Council then indicated their individual preferences for additional goals, resulting in initial support for the remaining Goal Categories as follows:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| ▪ Enhance Parks & Recreation Areas | 3 votes |
| ▪ Maintain Public Safety | 1 vote |
| ▪ Create Stand Alone 2017 School Councilor Levy | 1 vote |
| ▪ Collaborate & Leverage Partnership with School District | 0 votes |
| ▪ Optimize Infrastructure Investments | 2 votes |
| ▪ Enhance Communication with Community | 6 votes |
| ▪ Revise City Codes/Critical Areas/GMA/Code Compliance | 6 votes |
| ▪ Bike/Pedestrian Fixes Along I-90 | 0 votes |
| ▪ Residential Development Code | 5 votes |
| ▪ I-90 Access/Sound Transit | N/A |
| ▪ Pedestrian Safety | 2 votes |
| ▪ Town Center | 3 votes |
| ▪ Capital Levy/City Financial Sustainability | 3 votes |
| ▪ Eliminate City Council Salaries | 0 votes |
| ▪ Enhanced IT Systems | 0 votes |
| ▪ Sustainable Staff Workload | 1 vote |
| ▪ Advance Sustainability Program | 1 vote |

After discussing this initial data, Council focused on the following six goals for 2017-2018 along with comments for each (note wording of goal titles is tentative):

- **Preserve I-90 Access and Prepare for Light Rail**
 - Primary focus is the preparation for light rail
 - Need to address and mitigate loss of mobility
 - Critical to achieve Community's Negotiating Priorities-big focus currently
- **Strengthen & Re-Align City Manager Role and City Council Staff Relations**
- **Enhance Openness and Opportunities for Community Engagement**
 - Needs to reflect communication and engagement
 - Communications is a step within engagement
 - Something is not working in our current actions informing citizens of what the City is doing
 - Develop comprehensive communication structure/plan
- **Maintain City's Residential Character**
 - Question about use of term "character"-what does it mean?
 - Needs to be responsive to citizen concern/issues
 - Focus here is on Residential Development Code effort currently underway (not Town Center)
- **Address Outdated City Codes**
 - Critical areas ordinance

- GMA compliance and growth targets
- Staff needs to identify the codes to be worked on in 2017-2018
- **Financial Sustainability**
 - Maintaining/enhancing/preserving quality of life and level of services

Staff agreed to develop draft work plans for each goal and to bring the draft goals/work plans back to Council for final discussion and approval.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC ON CITY'S OPERATING & CAPITAL FUNDING NEEDS

Chip Corder, Assistant City Manager/Finance Director led a discussion based upon his memo and recommendation contained in the Planning Session packet.

Julie Underwood, City Manager explained her vision for the use of a Citizen Advisory Committee as part of the process, including the purpose and role of the Committee.

Attendees discussed options for timing of the process, whether to pursue one combined levy or two levies (one operating and one capital). Possible levy subjects included capital needs, city operating funds and school counselors.

After discussion, the Council consensus was to follow the staff recommendation contained in Mr. Corder's memo in the Planning Session packet.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Ross Freeman, Sustainability & Communications Manager made a power point presentation covering the City's current communication efforts.

Following the presentation, the attendees discussed current unmet communication needs and identified the following:

- City receives a lot of comments from the public but very little seems to be fed back to the community
 - E.g. At City Council Meetings, a former City Manager used to respond at the meeting to Public Comment. Provided answers or told then when/how would get the answer
 - Another idea would be for the City Manager to have a staff person attending the meeting to connect with the resident for more info or arrange for follow-up
 - Another idea—City Manager Report at the Council Meeting
- Emails to Council mailbox—what happens to them? Are they answered? How would Council know?
 - If email comes to individual mailbox, no one else sees it
 - Currently a problem that the person with the answer (to the question when comes into general mailbox) often doesn't have time to answer immediately
 - Also can be confusion if have multiple people answering without coordination of the response.
 - City Manager would like to be able to respond/coordinate
- Would be good to be able to replicate what Evan did on the Crown Castle issue (publishing comments?)
- Concerned that we are doing so much, yet we continue to identify communications as a big issue. It's not working.
 - Need to include a look at "what should we stop doing?" If it's not working, don't do it.
 - Hear from public that they don't get analysis-get so much info/facts—too much—so don't read it. Have passion to share information, but don't do analysis. Need analysis, not just document dump.
- We live in very rapidly changing environment and resulting increasing expectations by public.
- Have heard good things about virtual town hall
- Is there a way to use virtual town hall to be our "next door"? Or to set the record straight/clear up "next door" issues?
 - Sammamish, maybe Burien are using virtual town hall
 - Sammamish is using it in targeted way to capture comment on specific issues from people who wouldn't go to an actual City Council meeting
 - We should be using free polling technology on sites with lots of users
 - Also there are apps that do a good job with planning type issues
- Concerns with timeliness of responses and also questions about accuracy of staff responses
- Problem is ineffective strategy in this area
 - Public not satisfied

- City Council often not satisfied
- Need to identify what we're trying to accomplish and develop strategies
- Identify best practices/maybe form a committee
- What is measure of success? How would you define success in outreach and engagement?
- Get targeted info from citizens with outreach expertise
- Day to day issues vs more extreme, peak event issues. Can we flex to respond to peak situations? (adequate staffing, resources, expertise)
- Need to have plan for major upcoming public engagement issues
- Need to define problem we're solving to define communications success
- Maybe we should do a survey to be sure there really is a problem with our outreach to public

After discussion, it was agreed that City Manager would work with staff to bring a proposal to Council concerning communication issues to the June Planning Session.

The June Mini-Planning Session was set for a full day on Saturday, June 17.

CITY MANAGER/CITY COUNCIL EXPECTATIONS

The City Council listed their expectations as follows:

- Council often sends questions/comments to staff during the weekend because that is the most convenient time to do so. But Council does not expect staff to respond during the weekend unless the Councilmember clearly states that expectation at the time (and the Councilmember would need a good reason for doing so)
- Staff should use "out of office" when on vacation or otherwise gone and should specify who to contact during the absence
- 1-hour rule is still in place; OK for a Councilmember to ask staff for information as long as it takes the staff member 1 hour or less to figure out the answer (staff member should respond with the answer as soon as reasonable to do so)
- Staff member should speak up if believe requests are being abused
- Councilmember can feel out of the loop on issues if there are dialogues going on outside of meetings. It is helpful for City Manager to play role to keep all Councilmembers "in the loop"
- Want the City Manager to have ideas and be proactive—keep it up!
- Appreciate the City Manager being the face/voice of the City. We need to all speak in one voice. Don't get out in front of the City Council
- City Manager should be City Manager for all 7 Councilmembers
- Weight off Mayor's shoulders that City Manager is stepping up and taking on responsibility
- Like the approach with the Planning Session—different than past ones and it's worked well. Great conversations!
- If have an issue with a Councilmember, talk directly to that Councilmember-don't go to someone else instead
- City Manager role/responsibility is to defend staff—but Council should be respectful in Council meetings. Councilmember should express concerns in private to the City Manager
- City Manager—don't let us backslide!

City Manager's expectations of the City Council:

- Include City Manager when contacting staff—and staff should also keep City Manager in the loop
- Takes direction from the full Council (not individual Councilmembers)
- City Manager will share information requests with all Councilmembers
- Councilmembers should express disagreement when disagree, but should accompany it with recommendation
- No surprises—keep City Manager informed
- Criticize in private
- Support work/life balance
 - Don't expect staff to respond to emails/requests during non-work hours unless it is an emergency
- Support reasonable risk taking. And staff commits to learning from mistakes
- Suspend judgment concerning customer service complaints until the facts are known
- City Manager does not take sides in disputes between Councilmembers

- City Council should communicate concerns to City Manager to allow an opportunity to fix it
- Assist the City Manager in creating a great workplace to keep and attract great staff

Council asked how staff feels about current City Council/Staff relations

- Feeling positive about where we're heading
- Great when Council recognizes our staff's work at meetings
- Agree with City Manager on importance of need for Council to publicly support and deal with concerns privately
- We want to make the City Council look great—want to do whatever we can to help you make the tough decisions you have to make. When we are criticized in public it makes it hard to keep up our best efforts. Very important how messages are delivered
- We've got the right people in the right seats and the best is yet to come!

CITIZEN OF THE YEAR SELECTION

Councilmembers nominated citizens for the 2016 Citizen of the Year award. Following discussion of the nominees, the Council voted and made their selection for 2016. The nominee will be honored at an upcoming Council meeting.