

# BLUE ASH CITY COUNCIL

January 25 & 26, 2018

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## **1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

A special meeting of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on January 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Mayor Thomas C. Adamec called the meeting to order at the Cooper Creek Event Center at 3:30 PM.

## **2. OPENING CEREMONIES**

Mayor Adamec led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **3. ROLL CALL**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vice Mayor Marc Sirkin, Councilwoman Linda Bauer,  
Councilman Joe Leet,

Councilman Pramod Jhaveri, Councilman Jeff Capell, Councilman Lee Czerwonka, and  
Mayor Tom Adamec

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager David Waltz, Assistant City Manager Kelly  
Harrington, Treasurer Sherry Poppe, Parks & Recreation  
Director Chuck Funk, Public Works Director Gordon Perry, Fire  
Chief Rick Brown, Police Chief Scott Noel, Administrative  
Assistant Karla Plank

## **4. ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA**

Mayor Adamec moved, Vice Mayor Sirkin seconded to accept the agenda. A voice vote was taken. All members present voted yes. Motion carried.

1. *MEETING CALLED TO ORDER*
2. *OPENING CEREMONIES*
3. *ROLL CALL*
4. *ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA*
5. *WORK SESSION – STRATEGIC PLANNING*
6. *ADJOURNMENT*

## **5. WORK SESSION**

The City of Blue Ash City Council held a retreat with the City Department Heads on January 25 and 26 to review the foundation for effective governance, affirm their strategic planning framework, and discuss the workplan for the coming year. The retreat was facilitated by The Novak Consulting Group.

### Welcome & Introductions

The City Manager provided a welcome and overview of the agenda for the two-day retreat. Revisit our vision and our broad objectives and develop a workplan. Day One was looking at the group level – things to think about, how we work better as a team; Day Two focused on how to get it done.

The facilitator walked the group through the agenda and introduced Dr. John Nalbandian. She also led everyone through the Bridging the Gap document, which discusses the various roles of elected officials (policy vs. administration), how they interrelate, and where you spend your time.

## **High Performing Governance – Governing Body and Staff in Partnership**

Dr. John Nalbandian provided a workshop/presentation on high performing government. John asserts that the essential prerequisite to effective governance is connecting what is “politically acceptable” with what is “administratively sustainable.” Bridging this gap requires an understanding of unavoidable obstacles – conflicting political values and differences in perspective that governing body and staff bring to their work. High performing governance is enhanced with this awareness.

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This session was more like a workshop with a case study that illustrated the information. It presented a unique way to look at your work – a framework or different understanding for those things that seem unexplainable. Dr. Nalbandian also reviewed areas of the Council governance and the relationship of Council and Staff.

### Concept of Cups

- The cup contains the quality of your life
- As the cup fills and overflows, that's when people can give back
- No two people have the same size cup
- Some have small cups and others large (thimble or large as a vat and never full)
- If a person's cup is virtually empty, does the concept of aspiration make sense?
- What's the difference between an aspiration or a hope? – *action versus passive*
- If aspiration resonates with people, you are doing something that encourages them to give back, which creates resiliency
- What is the City providing or doing that creates aspiration?
  - Provides quality services – police, fire
- There are lots of diverse ways to look at our work; one way is “filling people's cups”
- Some cups will be filled, and others will be reduced – results in tough decisions – politics of who benefits and who will lose

Model Citizens – not high profile, but people who realize the quality of their life and their family depends on more than what they can do individually. There are some collective enterprises (school, neighborhood, etc.). Living a good life is not an isolated event. It can be your neighbor, someone who volunteers – those who give back to the community.

### Maria Math Metaphor (Elected Officials and Voting)

- Students voted on the correct answer in math class (i.e.  $2+2=4$  or  $2+3=4$ )
- Math class shouldn't be a democracy; the answer is a fact
- Problems where there are correct answers versus when there is a right answer (right refers to the morally right answer); correct refers to factually accurate ( $2+2=4$ )
- Voting is not applicable to correct answers
- Voting is applicable when there are multiple choices or no correct answer
- Voting is applicable to political issues
- Elected officials are put in a position that is unique – weigh, decide, review – which consequence/decision ultimately will prevail
- Try to build consensus/compromise
- Logic of negotiation and compromise
- Build a political consensus that will get something done that will reduce the negative impact on people's cups; the alternative is to divide and conquer; you may win, but you end up alienating; the fewer people with cups filled results in compliance and no investment

### Objectives

- Bridging the gap between what is political acceptable and administratively/operationally sustainable
- Describe three attributes of the high performing governing body
- Discuss the obstacles/challenges

### Governance Prerequisite

- Bridge the gap between what is politically acceptable and administratively/operationally sustainable
- Nothing gets done unless there is a connection; the challenge is that the gap is growing

### The High Performing Governing Body

- Addresses difficult policy problems
- Builds capacity to work effectively together
- Develops productive relationships with staff

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### Obstacles

- Examine conflicting values that drive policymaking
- Identify conditions that make public policymaking difficult
  - No boss creates unique environment
  - By choice do their work
- Describe perspectives of elected officials and staff
  - Often use a different language to speak to one another

### Feedback/Discussion

- Really liked the analogy of the cups; what's the difference between those who serve and those who don't? It's the size of our cups.
- What about the individual who has the problem XYZ and the elected official who gives them the honest answer. – *Individual transactions regarding who did what get lost in people's minds; they are built over time. Learn to deploy the strengths that satisfy you and others will see as adding strength to the collective enterprise. If you want to influence, you have to have respect.*
- Gaps between administration and political – what are some tools of the trade?
  - Working in the bridge – requires political astuteness; recognize and understand the values differences; need to have the ability to work within that arena
  - Linguistic metaphor
- Everyone has a right to speak; not everyone has the right to be listened to; it must be earned.
- Crosstalk and discussion among Councilmembers – tone, how is it done?
  - Council Meetings are your business meetings
  - Treating each other with respect

### Values

- Responsiveness =
  - Representation/Participation+
    - elected by the people – accountable to them; they have a right to speak
  - Efficiency/Professionalism+
    - Respect that we have rational/analytical thinking
  - Social Equity+
    - One neighborhood view; groups systematically deprived of political access or power (not perceived; in actuality)
  - Individual rights
    - Property; civil – individual rights are incredibly important because most of the time they are captured in law; powerful
- You cannot have all four values at the same time
- You can conflict within the values
- All values are important if community building is the goal
- Efficiency is one of four values if community building is the goal
- No one of the values is parallel – they are all important

The group then participated in case studies – Scenario I, Scenario II, Scenario III. (Try to convince the hypothetical who has no stake in the outcome; the advocate won't change their minds.)

### Governing Body Working Conditions

- No hierarchy
- Vague task definition
- No specialization
- Little feedback
- Open meetings

Not a productive working condition – must create it.

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### Create Productive Working Conditions

- Facilitative leadership
- Know the various roles you might play
- Goals setting – know council priorities
- Establish council protocol and stick to it
- Team building – know and respect each other and other styles; deploy your talents in ways that others respect
- Work with staff in partnership

### Alignment of Governing Body and Staff

- What does the governing body need from staff?
- What is staff willing to provide to the governing body?
- What does the staff need from the governing body?
- What is the governing body willing to provide to staff?

### Characteristics of Politics and Administration

- Elected officials and staff may use the same words but are speaking a different language
- Role of the minority vote versus swing vote; how you articulate/communicate is key
- Two groups can create a chasm on the council
- Not obligated to speak on every issue
- Don't keep up bringing the same issue over and over (lose respect)
- What is it that an elected body can do that no one else can? Make decisions; not the work of staff – no knowledge, skills or abilities required for the job
- Detail helps you understand the mechanics, not weigh the consequences.
  - Need expert knowledge to weigh options/make decisions
  - When you go into detail after detail with staff, ask yourself, “Does this detail help us make a decision about the consequences. Do we understand the consequences of the decisions we are making?”
- Power – Does anyone listen to you when you talk? Or when you change your mind?

### Summary

- Role of governing body is community building
- Good politics is about values, not right answers
- Value conflicts require compromise and negotiation if “cups” matter
- Do not ignore any value over a period of time
- Democratic process is “messy”
- Politics/administration = way of thinking
- Role of translator is critical
- Alignment is crucial

The Blue Ash City Manager provided a wrap up for Day One. He reinforced two things:

- Successful elected officials understand and are more self-aware of their role within the governing structure – policy/administration.
- A lot of elected officials tend to be professionals and often prefer to delve right into problem solving. What we really need is their decision-making skills.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

## **Day Two**

The group reconvened on Friday, January 26<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m. for further discussion on the strategic planning framework and the 2018 Workplan.

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## Opening Reflection

The group was asked to share a reflection on what was important to them about Dr. Nalbandian's workshop on Thursday afternoon.

- Helped us think about the different points of view
- Loyalty and quid pro quo can lead to blind adherence
- Four competing values
- Cups
- Case study demonstrating the different perspectives of Council and Staff
- Role of the City Manager in bridging the gap – the shift from “management team to leadership team”
- The Council needs “skills” to do their job well even though it isn't required to run for office
- Case study was relative to all disciplines
- How can I “fill the cups” of my staff?
- Appreciation for the difficulty of Council (political) decisions; there are some situation you cannot “data your way out”

The City Manager pointed out how the residents of Blue Ash are comfortable with the 2+2=4 decisions, and how it is difficult to then shift to the big picture role of the Council. Staff will take care of the 2+2 and need the Council to tackle the more difficult concepts.

## Strategic Planning in Blue Ash

The City Manager introduced the strategic plan and referenced the governance role discussion by remembering that there is not as much time spent on the big picture issues. While the group should spend some time on the details of the workplan, it was important to be intentional about spending time on the big picture. He referenced the work Jim Collins has done around “Good to Great in the Social Sector.” In the social sector, money is only an input; in the private sector it is both an input and an output. Performance then must be assessed to mission, not financial return. How effectively are we delivering on our mission? Are we having a distinctive impact? A distinctive impact would be what would happen if the “City of Blue Ash” disappeared? What key assets would disappear? Would Summit Park have been delivered to this community without the City? What objective are we trying to achieve?

He also shared an article on why to be unafraid of Big Hairy Audacious Goals. Money can follow a passion for a goal to “make people happy” or “give the world a new way to compute?” How can you know what your return on investment will be?

## Revisiting and Refining the Framework

The City Manager and Assistant City Manager shared the history of work on Priority Based Budgeting and developing “Results Maps” or “Critical Success Factors” that frame the work of the City.

### Safe Community

The group looked to incorporate the concepts of leadership, engagement, partnership, and community policing into the directional statements.

### Connected, Accessible and Reliable Transportation Network

The group wanted to incorporate these concepts:

- Balancing short-term and long-term needs
- Recognizing the role of quality infrastructure in revitalizing neighborhoods
- Being proactive
- Communicating changes with the community
- Investing in education about future transportation trends
- Researching and investing in sustainable transportation improvements
- Participating in regional initiatives to import workers
- Ensuring that access to alternative modes of transportation are inviting

### Governance

The group wanted to incorporate these concepts:

- Consistency and stability
- Engaging, communicating, and understanding the public
- Partnership, regional collaboration, and intergovernmental relations

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#### *Strong and Vibrant Economic Environment*

The group wanted to incorporate these concepts:

- Connecting the economic environment to how it benefits residents and supports community amenities
- Interacting with the regional economic development agency to support the regional economy

#### *Attractive and Well-Maintained Community*

The group had no changes to this area. They discussed the connection and dynamism of “neighborhoods” and the quality of connecting them to the community.

#### *Quality and Desirable Neighborhoods*

The group discussed adding these concepts:

- Fostering and supporting neighborhood identity; advocating and supporting the individual characteristics of those unique neighborhoods
- “Timely” infrastructure improvements
- Adding the word “neighborhood” in the last bullet to reinforce the idea of connecting neighborhoods to the larger community

#### *Quality and Diverse Leisure Time Activities*

There were no changes to this area.

### **Ongoing and New Initiatives**

Staff reviewed the current workplan items as they relate to each of the seven Critical Success Factors. Council was then asked if they had any specific initiatives they wanted to potentially add to the work plan. The January 19 memo from the City Manager that was provided to Council in preparation for the retreat is included as an attachment to this report.

#### *Strong and Vibrant Economic Environment*

Staff reviewed the Economic Development workplan and received support from the Council in pursuing the items included in the January 19 memo.

Council asked about the current economic climate and how it was impacting business retention efforts. They requested that staff place on the workplan an initiative to ***reexamine the game plan for business retention and see if any adjustments need to be made.***

#### *Attractive and Well-Maintained Community*

Staff reviewed the Attractive and Well-Maintained Community workplan that was included in the January 19 memo and received support from the Council to pursue the four items identified.

The City will work to identify a pilot project relative to Gateways that can inform future initiatives to enhance neighborhood investment. This is still abstract, but there is support for keeping it on the workplan.

#### *Safe Community*

There are no new initiatives or issues from police and fire beyond continued operations.

#### *Quality and Desirable Neighborhoods*

Staff reviewed the four items that were included in the January 19 memo regarding Quality and Desirable Neighborhoods.

The Community Reinvestment Area is still a new project and staff wanted to know if Council was interested in continuing to support this initiative. The CRA is geographically connected to the older residential areas near the City’s downtown. The group agreed to make no changes to the program at this time and potentially revisit it in two years.

The group discussed and affirmed prior Council direction on the City’s approach to development in downtown and will only revisit if a developer submits a new project for City review.

Council affirmed the approach to property maintenance.

The City has been selling properties rather than acquiring and asked if that was the direction of this Council. There is consensus to pursue selective properties when they become available and bring the decision point back to Council for consideration.

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### Governance

The staff reviewed the five issues that were described in the January 19 memo.

Regarding Public Relations, there was support for improving and updating the City's website and continued use of social media channels. Determining when to communicate with the public about potentially controversial projects is challenging.

The City uses the University of Cincinnati to conduct the survey and will continue to do that in 2018.

Last year, the City conducted a Citizens Academy. It is a significant investment of staff time and the Council is supportive of having staff come back with a plan to continue the program but identify a pacing that is less impactful on staff time.

The population imbalance in the Wards is increasing and there is a need to reexamine them prior to the next municipal election. Council was supportive of pursuing this in preparation for the 2019 election.

Staff had mentioned the possibility of reviewing the Rules of Conduct. Tom suggested that Council could provide input to him as Council President. He could compile it and bring it back for Council conversation.

The Council discussed the possibility of having staff research options for videotaping/televising Council meetings. There was not support from a majority of the Council to add this to the agenda at this time.

### Quality and Diverse Leisure Time Activities

Staff reviewed the three items included in the January 19 memo.

There was consensus to live with Summit Park as developed for now before pursuing additional development in the park.

Staff was interested in reassessing the Town Square and identifying potential changes to it, so it has use beyond concerts.

The Hazelwood Community Center has reached the end of its useful life and staff is considering replacing it with a facility that might be more useful to the neighborhood – such as a picnic shelter with a summer kitchen, restrooms, etc. Council supported the concept.

### Connected, Accessible and Reliable Transportation Network

Staff reviewed the items in the January 19 memo. There was support for continuing to pursue the items listed on the current workplan. Council is eager to launch Zagster Bike Sharing in May.

Regarding Public Transit, there was an interest in seeing some additional bus shelters along Reed Hartman. Staff will provide some additional information to Council regarding what that might look like in terms of expense, etc.

Staff is interested in formalizing the response to complaints and request for traffic calming, etc. and Council was supportive of this.

## **Closing Remarks**

The City Manager shared some closing reflections for the group.

Staff is pleased that Council provided direction to continue with many initiatives on the workplan. Council also agreed to some new initiatives and he encouraged Council to be pleased with that risk taking. Council also furthered some cultural items by adding "regional" to several of the directional statements in the Critical Success Factors. There was also interest in pursuing some more focused neighborhood issues.

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To end the day, the group was asked to share one word to suggest how they felt about the 2018 retreat.

- More connected
- Open communication
- Encouraged
- Clarity
- Good opportunity
- Enlightened
- Perspective
- Interactive discussion
- Informative
- Engaged
- Productive
- Encouraged

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Councilman Jhaveri moved, Councilman Capell seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:00 PM on January 26, 2018.

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Thomas C. Adamec, Mayor

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Karla Plank, Deputy Clerk of Council

MINUTES RECORDED AND WRITTEN BY:

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Karla Plank, Administrative Assistant