

MINUTES - JOINT MEETING OF COUNCIL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE – APRIL 25, 2005 – PAGE 1

Present: Council – President Domzal; Members: Koss, Pfeifer, McCleary and Taylor

Strategic Planning Development Committee – Barb Aylesworth, Ann Bernardini, Greg Burry, Gary Grabowski, Fran Knorr, John Mentag, Jim Merritt, Rose McLennan, Cynthia Nagle, Walter Piper, Pam Rijnovean, Burt Schwartz, Donna Selenich, Brad Strader, Karl Woodard, Bob Wiszowaty

Also Present: Village Manager, Spallasso
Village Clerk, Marshall
Facilitators from DESC, Gene Jacoby and Suzanne Dibble

Council President Domzal called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and thanked everyone for attending. He asked SPDC member James Merritt to co-chair the meeting.

Domzal stated that the strategic planning process has been a citizen driven initiative. While it is at the point where Council has assumed responsibility for implementation of the plan, there will be opportunities for input from the committee and from the public. Council wants to make sure that everyone continues to be involved in the process.

Committee members introduced themselves noting the subcommittee on which they served and what their expectations were for tonight's meeting. Members stated that they expected Council to prioritize the key strategic issues of the Village, set goals, establish the next steps, and move forward on action plans. The comment was made that there are enough interested citizens to see these plans through.

Overview of what has taken place up to now

Gene Jacoby, facilitator from Detroit Executive Services Corps, provided a brief overview of the strategic planning process in the Village. The committee has prepared a good preliminary plan for Beverly Hills for the next 3-5 years. The group identified key strategic issues as well as strategic objectives. The Village is at the point where it should come up with a mechanism to fill in the final details and go through a prioritization process.

Koss commented on the time and effort contributed by the core group and the ad hoc committees. She suggested that a goal for this evening should be to break down each key strategic issue independently and prioritize the topics.

Review of Strategic Initiatives

A representative of each KSI group briefly summarized what they thought were the most important findings of their subcommittee.

Maintain Current Level of Services – McLennan commented that the subcommittee identified existing services recognizing that everything must be done within the confines of the Village's fiscal resources.

Improve/Update Infrastructure – Merritt reported that it was determined that the infrastructure needs of the community are being addressed by Village administration. Continuous maintenance, updating and improvements reduce the overall cost of large capital expenditures.

Establish a Long Term Financial Plan – Due to budget shortfalls and lack of funding from the State, the fund balance is being depleted. The Village will be in a budget crisis in the next few years. Burry stated that the subcommittee realized that it is essential that the Village establish a financial committee to look at long term financial planning. It was noted that balancing the budget and long term financial planning were number one priorities of the Village-wide survey results.

Develop an Ecologically Sound Environmental Plan - Knorr stated that there are environmental actions that residents can undertake at little or no cost with the proper public awareness. Spallasso added that the Village is involved in mandated programs to address environmental issues that will cost Beverly Hills a substantial amount of money.

Increase Public Awareness/Participation and Interest in Beverly Hills Issues – Nagle remarked that communication on topics that are important to people is not being exchanged regularly. Consideration should be given on how to maintain that dialog. Communication and participation result in a better neighborhood and a better village.

Suggestions were forthcoming from a number of members in terms of avenues to pursue to ensure increased communication: volunteerism, community gatherings, newsletters, cable spots, state of the Village address, town hall meetings, and web based info.

Maintain and Increase Value of Property – Grabowski commented on the importance of finding ways to increase property value for the reason that property tax is a primary source of revenue for the Village.

Strader stated that there is a need to make sure that the Planning Board and Council audit Village zoning regulations to assure that they allow people to reinvest in their property at a reasonable level while drawing the line in terms of unwanted redevelopment such as big foot housing. Following review and appropriate revisions to current regulations, the Zoning Board of Appeals should enforce the amended ordinance. Public awareness should be promoted so that people recognize the entire community and not just the neighborhood where they live. The image of the Village will have a direct relationship on property value enhancement.

Prioritization of Initiatives – Discuss Action Plans

Merritt led the group in a discussion of prioritization of the initiatives. There was agreement that each one of the key strategic issues would remain in the plan and that the issues are interrelated.

Village finances was the top priority identified by residents who responded to the community survey. There followed a discussion concerning the Village's financial condition and challenges in terms of maintaining the current level of services in lieu of budget shortfalls due to decreases in state shared revenue and the Headlee effect on the millage rate.

Subcomponents of maintaining the level of services include an educational component and planning element. There is also an infrastructure component in terms of identifying costs. Spallasso addressed the status of infrastructure issues including completed and new projects.

Merritt reiterated that the infrastructure subgroup concluded that continuous maintenance and updating of the infrastructure is being done by Village administration and that there is a priority list in place. Infrastructure will remain a key strategic issue but does not require involvement or oversight at this time. Communication of infrastructure issues will remain vital.

Woodard commented that, while public awareness is not a high priority KSI, it is a component of all the key strategic issues as they go forward. Strader stated that suggestions for regular monitoring of communication that came out of his committee were the use of a kiosk in a public area like Beverly Park and having an informal “meet the Council members” at a Village wide event in the park. The Village should always be looking for low cost ways to reach people who are not reading the newsletter.

Gary Grabowski volunteered to lead the drive to look for ways to communicate through cable television, the Village web site, email, public forums, and signage. He will work with Council member Pfeifer to be a champion of public awareness and help disseminate methods of communication to each subgroup.

Comments were taken from members of the public. Bunker Kelly commented on the issue of maintaining the current level of services. He suggested that the Village compare itself with other communities in terms of providing services and reducing spending. Kelly was a proponent of implementing ideas to promote public awareness.

Art Liberty expressed the view that there is a high level of public awareness and involvement as evidenced by the 40% response to the village-wide survey. Balancing the budget is the top priority of residents.

Bob Walsh suggested that the Village should expand the use of its capability to broadcast meetings and to educate people via cable television.

Domzal commented that it is projected that in the next budget cycle the Village will either have to 1) increase taxes, 2) cut services, or 3) provide service through consolidation of services with the associated loss of autonomy. An important question to be addressed is how everyone can work together as a community to establish a financial plan and communicate an understanding of the Village’s financial condition.

Koss stated that there are Council members in support of establishing a finance committee that would receive its direction from Council. She proposes that Council seek applications from citizens in the community who are interested and qualified to serve on a finance committee.

There was discussion on the focus of a finance committee. It was suggested by some members that Council should direct a finance committee to review specific issues. Another point of view was that the finance committee would have a broader scope.

Burry referred to the action plan submitted by his subgroup for creating a finance committee: The plan indicates: 1) solicit citizens for involvement, 2) identify projects, 3) report to Council, and 4) review financial successes and failures annually.

Domzal proposed that the answer may be that the first thrust of the finance committee could be to address broad, long-term issues and to adopt a narrower scope over time to focus on specific issues.

Merritt summarized the discussion on Village finances by stating that seeking additional revenue should be considered together with cost cutting measures.

Burry volunteered to lead a subcommittee of Wiszowaty and Taylor to prepare a job description and recommendation for the formation of a finance committee and bring it back to Council within 30 days. The suggestion was made that the subcommittee talk to members of Council who have worked with the former finance committee as well as contacting former finance committee members for their input.

Pfeifer stated that the survey indicated an interest among respondents about the threat of “big foot” housing in the Village. Pfeifer has expressed a concern with the issue of how much space can be covered on any lot. Many of the front and side yard setbacks of houses primarily on the east side in the Village do not conform to the ordinance because the homes were built prior to the adoption of the zoning ordinance. The Village wants to encourage upgrading of the housing stock while at the same time prohibit “big foot” construction.

Council has directed the Planning Board to update the Village Master plan. As part of its proposed work program, the Board has identified the need for a housing and neighborhood plan that would ensure viable and attractive neighborhoods to maintain high occupancy levels and strong, competitive housing stock in all areas of the Village.

Brad Strader related that the existing master plan is broad policy based. The idea of the master plan update is to focus on how to encourage reinvestment in homes and to look at a foundation for changes in the ordinance. Using the master plan process to interact with the public is a way to set the foundation for identifying whether the zoning ordinance should include maximum lot coverage restrictions and possibly different zoning districts in the Village. This part of the plan will be a precursor to changes to the regulations. That is how the Planning Board intends to proceed.

Pfeifer stated that there will probably be some rebuilding in areas of the Village that are older. The master plan should address and control redevelopment. Strader added that, once there is agreement on what that vision is, there will be discussion about the financial tools that are available in terms of redevelopment.

Domzal observed that there is a fundamental tension between people in the Village that don't want lot splits, tear downs, or larger homes and those people who want to grow the tax base. It should be recognized that the system works such that there are trade-offs.

Ann Bernardini and John Mentag volunteered to meet with the Planning Board chairperson and the Zoning Board of Appeals chair separately to discuss the work of the subcommittee that focuses on maintaining and increasing property value and to discuss opportunities for collaborations with those bodies on the issues. The subgroup is interested in knowing what the ZBA struggles with and what their hot issues are.

Strader stated that the Planning Board will hold a public forum or workshop on the master plan. The SPDC could participate in that meeting as well as assist the Planning Board in getting the word out to the citizens about the session.

With respect to an action plan for the environmental KSI, Knorr has indicated that there are things that can be done without a great deal of expense. She volunteered to draft an article for the Villager newsletter that would list environmentally sound practices that homeowners can accomplish.

Strader remarked that informed school kids will often encourage their parents to be more environmentally oriented. In addition, schools look for environmental projects every spring.

Rijnovean observed that Beverly Hills does not receive coverage in the local newspapers. Spallasso will contact the Eccentric to request that the reporter assigned to this area pay more attention to the Village of Beverly Hills. The Village receives more exposure from the Birmingham Eagle reporter. Grabowski expressed an interest seeking out freelance writers who live in Beverly Hills to assist with communicating with the public.

Nagle commented that an additional method of communication would be to use the Memorial Day Carnival gathering in the park, Halloween Hoot, and summer music concerts as a forum for getting messages out to the community.

Domzal concluded the meeting by suggesting that each person who presented an overview of one of the six key strategic issues write out what action items they think were achieved at this meeting and send it to Spallasso. The results will be compiled and emailed to all members.

Domzal proposed that the Council and Strategic Planning Committee members meet at least one more time as a large group in about 60 days to gauge the progress of the group. Monday, June 27 was selected as a tentative date for this meeting. Council thanked all of the SPDC members for the hours they have put into the strategic planning process.

Motion by McCleary, second by Taylor, to adjourn the meeting at 9:17 p.m.

Motion passed.

Dave Domzal
Council President

Ellen E. Marshall
Village Clerk

Susan Bernard
Recording Secretary