



City of Alameda City Council Strategic Planning Workshop Follow-Up Report

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April 2022





I. BACKGROUND

The City of Alameda reached out to MRG for assistance with planning and facilitating a Strategic Planning Workshop for the City Council. MRG Consultant Marie Knight, Owner of Knight Leadership Solutions, met with the City Manager Eric Levitt and Mayor Ezzy Ashcroft to discuss their needs and a plan moving forward. After this initial meeting MRG was engaged for this event and Marie Knight was engaged to facilitate the workshop.

In preparation for the workshop, Ms. Knight conducted the following activities: (1) Multiple planning meetings with the City Manager, some of those meetings also included the Assistant City Manager and Human Resources Director, to obtain background information and discuss their goals for the workshop in order to prepare the agenda for the Workshop. Ms. Knight interviewed four of the five City Councilmembers in advance of the workshop. (Scheduling conflicts prevented an interview with the fifth member of the Council.) All interviews were conducted virtually via zoom and lasted on average 45 minutes. The Councilmembers were asked the three questions with respect to the five current City Council Priorities. All were asked to provide candid, honest feedback in return for anonymity, and were assured that any comments made would be shared in general manner and not attributed to any one person. The Councilmembers were asked the following questions with respect to the five existing City Council Priority Areas:

1. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being close to full achievement) -What do you believe to be the status of achieving the goal and why?
2. On a scale of 1-5 -How is the staff doing in this area?
3. Is there anything related to the priority area that you feel we should either Start doing, Stop Doing, or Continue and why?
4. Other than these priority areas, what are three other “Top of Mind” issues you have going into this workshop?

After the interviews, Ms. Knight discussed the comments received with the City Manager and finalized the agenda. Based on comments received during the interview process, there was some consensus from the Council that it would be helpful if some of the following information was covered during the workshop:

- The Roles and Responsibility of the City Council and Staff
- Creating better communication between Councilmembers, and consensus building
- Review the Council Priority Areas and creating more defined goals for the future.

The City Manager approved the final agenda as well as the power point presentation that Ms. Knight would utilize during the workshop.



II. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM COUNCIL INTERVIEWS

For each of the five Council Priority Areas, the summary below outlines areas of consensus and common ground among the Councilmembers interviewed as well as additional individual comments.

Common Ground: These are comments that were shared by several of the Councilmembers

- *How can we get Council to work together more as a body – instead of individual voices?*
- *Council rules of conduct were enacted 3 years ago, but some are not abiding by them.*
- *There is not a good understanding of the Council/Manager relationship.*
- *Self-awareness and self-reflection is lacking with respect to how some Councilmembers are behaving.*
- *Staff is not treated well, at times there is a “toxic” “hostile” environment created by Council. staff are leaving due to how they are treated.*
- *Council Priorities are too broad, open to multiple interpretations with no specific outcomes identified.*
- *We need meaningful goals and measures.*
- *Climate change and sea level rise is a huge issue and not well understood in the community. We need to do more to educate the community. We have a good staff team leading this.*
- *Councilmembers are worried about staffing challenges as we ramp up for the future needs. It is unsustainable having people do more with less long term.*
- *Staff has risen to the occasion during Covid and taken the brunt of things. Trying to keep good staff on controversial projects is difficult, there is burn out with the number of public meetings.*
- *There is concerned about the unfunded liability – pensions growing, this will impact service delivery - a plan is needed.*
- *Council meetings are not productive or enjoyable.*
- *The City has an amazing staff – small and mighty, what they get done is amazing, however, there is concern that they are over committed with workload.*
- *The City Manager should be the one who prioritizes staff work, not the Council.*
- *We need to streamline our processes – get out of our own way.*

Additional Thoughts made by individual Councilmembers:

- *We need to model behavior needed from the community i.e.. – Drought tolerant landscape at City Facilities.*
- *We struggle with housing and city long term planning, and unique challenges at Alameda point.*
- *Community safety should be in every sense of the word – low crime rate, safe streets – we are close to being there, have safe parks – don't sit back and rest on our laurels.*
- *We are coming to a place where we have made promises about funding certain things and the funds may not be there – difficult conversations will need to take place.*
- *We need more of a plan for providing services and support to businesses, how can they be supported with marketing etc.?*



- *Council needs to get out of the way – sometimes we appear to be antagonistic towards business.*
- *We need to get away from the “project of the moment”.*
- *Livable is different throughout the city- neighborhoods needs are different – where are the walkable – livable needs like preschools etc.... don’t design to push everyone to one spot.*
- *At times staff culture is to make policy- they need to bring policy to Council.*
- *Economic Development efforts and team could be stronger.*
- *We need good communication within the organization and City Manager needs to know what is going on in the community –internal communication needs to improve, and we need to discuss what meets the threshold that the Council should be informed.*
- *Council priorities are used to determine what can come before Council, this is wrong, a Councilmember should be allowed to bring any issue forward.*
- *Would love to see more creative approach to business retention.*
- *Not in favor of establishing Council priorities, goals or objectives – staff will tell the council what they need.*
- *We are often in the weeds too much as policy makers.*
- *During Covid, would have liked to have seen more cohesion and uniformity related to outdoor dining.*
- *At times we struggle as we see ourselves as tiny bedroom community, yet we provide full services, there is tension around those things.*

Strategic Planning Workshop – April 12, 2022

City Council Attendees: Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft, Vice Mayor Malia Vella, Councilmember Tony Daysog, Councilmember Trish Herrera Spencer, Councilmember Kohn Knox White

City Staff Attendees: City Manager Eric Levitt, Assistant City Manager Gerry Beaudin, City Attorney Yibin Shen, City Clerk Lara Weisiger

MRG Consultant and Facilitator Marie Knight

The Mayor opened the meeting, introduced the purpose for the workshop, introduced the facilitator, and then turned it over to the facilitator Ms. Knight. The Following is a summary of the various exercises and discussions throughout the workshop. Attachment A is the Power Point presentation the facilitator used to guide the workshop discussions.



Top of Mind Issues (slide 2 of Attachment A)

Ms. Knight started the workshop reviewing the agenda, as well as some of the “Rules” for the workshop. She then asked the Council for their “Top of Mind” issues and concerns. Each Councilmember and staff were allowed to enter 5 comments into the ap Mentimeter.com on their phone. The results are in the diagram below. All comments are anonymous, and those comments/words in the diagram below that are larger than others indicate that more people entered in the same comments.

What are your Top of Mind Issues?



Overview of Best Practices, Roles, and Responsibilities for Effective Public Governance (Slides 6-26 on Attachment A)

Ms. Knight led a discussion related to effective public governance, the role of the City Council, the challenges of being an elected official. She reviewed the information gathered during the pre-workshop interviews with the Council, and the benefits of seeking Mutual Purpose as an elected body.

Ms. Knight also led a discussion on the “90/10 Rule”. City employees are hired with a job to do, and generally 90% of their time is focused on that job. Depending on capacity, there may only be room for an additional 10% of new projects and initiatives. In some cases, staff may be at or over capacity and have no room for additional projects.



Ms. Knight and Assistant City Manager Gerry Beaudin provided examples of priorities or projects where, although the work falls into the job description of a staff member, they may already be at or over their capacity with their current workload to take more on. Thus, in order to ensure that there is capacity to move a new project or initiative forward there are questions that the Council should be asking of staff, and information staff should be providing as new projects, initiatives, and needs arise:

- (1) How does this relate to the Council's Priorities/Goals?
- (2) What is the capacity of the staff to take this on?
- (3) What are the resources available to move this forward?
- (4) Will something else have to be put on the back burner to make this a priority?
- (5) What is the impact vs effort?

It was also discussed that it is critical to keep in mind that workload overload, among other things, can negatively affect the culture and environment and ultimately the ability to recruit the best and the brightest in today's job market.

Picture the Future of Alameda (Slides 28-32 on Attachment A)

During this exercise Council and Staff were asked to think about the future of the City. What is the vision of the future that the Council and Staff should be striving towards? All were asked to fill in a diagram that asked for:

- (1) A Headline – 5 years from now, what do you want the frontpage story to be about Alameda?
- (2) Some of the supporting information to the story
- (3) Provide a few quotes about the headline they would like to hear from others
- 4) Talk about what would need to change to make this happen.

The following are the responses to this exercise:

Headline: 2027 Point in Time Count finds only 24 individuals living unsheltered in Alameda!

- **Subtext:** The City Council in 2022 laid the groundwork, formulated policies, and followed through to achieve this result which was made possible by the hard work of the dedicated City staff
- **Quotes:** "We made life changing and lifesaving decisions" "Alameda was a good steward of the funds we granted it to reduce homelessness"
- **What would have to change to achieve this?** Keep doing what we are doing, keep funding streams flowing. Focus on funding



Headline: *West Alameda has it all!*

- **Subtext:** The bike/pedestrian bridge is underway, Housing is built, multimodal commitment, Housing jobs
- **Quotes:** “Best place to live” “Alameda is California’s blueprint for Housing” “Alameda is a model for housing – how to have it all” “Alameda is bridging the old and new”
- **What would have to change to achieve this?** RHNA #’s, Backbone infrastructure, City Council Consensus, Bring in More partners, Bike Ped bridge, Policies, CARP Commitment organizational change

Headline: *Crime is down, Alameda is in the top 10 safest cities in California!*

- **Subtext:** City/State has to address crime.
- **Quotes:** “I can feel safe walking outside” “I don’t have to worry about waking up in the morning hand having my car stolen” “Part 1 and Part 2 Crimes are down”
- **What would have to change to achieve this?** Council, County and State will need to work together to address crime

Headline: *Alameda ranked the most livable inclusive city in the world!*

- **Subtext:** by focusing on people centered goals, Alameda has become carbon-negative while addressing affordability, mobility, and safety. Due to its focus on outcomes rather than maintaining the status quo, City meets the needs the residents say re most important
- **What would have to change to achieve this?** Agreed upon Goals and Vision. Commitment to prioritizing effective outcome solutions. Realigning of budget and projects to goals

Headline: *West Alameda Bart Station to San Francisco ok’d!*

- **Subtext:** New BART station good for environment and traffic and regional and local economic wellbeing.
- **Quotes:** “Alameda Point Multi-modal transit dreamland!” “Ferry, Bart!” “Now we can build even more housing at Alameda Point- Bust the Navy Cap!”
- **What would have to change to achieve this?** Organizational commitment



Based on the Headlines, several *Aspirational Themes for the Future* emerged:

- Transportation
- Safety
- Livability
- Inclusive
- Economic Well Being
- Housing at all Levels

Goals and Objectives: (Slides 35 – 38 on Attachment A)

Ms. Knight led a discussion about goals and objectives outlining whose responsibility it is to set them, their purpose in guiding the work of the organization, and how to make them more specific and SMART.

Strategic Planning Workshops in the Future (Slide 39 on Attachment A)

Ms. Knight led a Group Discussion regarding the timing of future planning workshops related to the establishment of Council Goals, as well as the methods and means preferred by the Council to receive information and updates on major goals, projects, and initiatives.

(1) In the future when should Strategic Planning Workshops take place?

Council Consensus:

- These workshops should take place every two years coinciding with the most recent election and would be held by the end of February following the election.
- During the “off year” when there will not be a formal workshop, the City Manager should do an annual update on the Council Priorities/Goals noting accomplishments from the previous year and workplans for the coming year at a regular City Council Meeting.

(2) In between these annual meetings, what are the methods and means the City Council prefers staff uses to communicate movement in the priority/goal areas?

Council Consensus:

- The City Manager should utilize the bi-weekly Council Update memo to communicate progress and milestones.



- The City Council Priority Summary Report (which is currently posted online, and is sent to the Council occasionally, however not regularly) should be revised in the following ways in order to provide the Council more clarity on the status of the projects and projected completion dates:
 - (1) Create a separate column indicating anticipated completion dates
 - (2) Create a separate column that identifies the objectives for the coming year, (noting that many projects are long term)
 - (3) Some of the priorities may need to be broken up into multiple sections with shorter term goals for easier tracking purposes.

Review of the existing five Council Priority areas (Slides 40-45 on Attachment A)

The remainder of the workshop was dedicated to a discussion related to the existing five Council Priority areas. **(1) Preparing Alameda for the Future (2) Protecting Core Services (3) Supporting Enhanced Livability and Quality of Life (4) Encouraging Economic Development Across the Island (5) Ensuring Effective and Efficient Operations**

Ms. Knight started the discussion with a review of the five current Council Priorities. (During this discussion it was noted that using the word “current”, as it is on slide 40, to refer to the Council Priority Areas could be construed to mean that the currently seated City Council agreed to/developed these Priority Areas, which is not the case. Thus, in order to avoid further confusion, they will be referred to the “existing five” Council Priority Areas.) Ms. Knight question posed several questions to the Council related to these five areas:

- (1) Are these areas still relevant?**
- (2) If not, Why? What is missing?**
- (3) If they are, how do we make them more specific?**

Discussion ensued as to how these priorities came to be, how they are used in the Referral Process, how each one is very broad and can be interpreted to mean a variety of things, and what are the measurement metrics and indicators that will show success? In general, there was consensus that each priority area needed to be more specific with success indicators.



What Does Prepare for the Future of Alameda mean?

Starting with this first Priority Area, Ms. Knight led a discussion asking the Council what this means to them, and what would be indicators that this was achieved? The following responses were received:

- Balanced Budget while addressing the unfunded liability
- Housing at all levels
- Climate Action Plan in action
- Digital Divide is addressed along with equity access to computers and equipment
- Increased and improved recreation facilities
- Improved infrastructure
- More reliance on public transportation
- Elimination of rolling blackouts

Further, from this discussion came the suggestion that possibly there needed to be a separate Priority Area related to Climate Change. Through a brainstorming process, an example of a future goal in this area could include the following:

- **Goal: Prepare Alameda Climate for the Future Now:** By focusing on policies that will ensure the elimination of greenhouse gas emissions through the mitigation and adaptation to sea level rise and groundwater inundation.

******Due to several technical issues throughout the evening, the full agenda was not realized and there was not sufficient time to discuss each of the other four Priority Areas******

Next Steps

With the departure of the City Manager and Assistant City Manager in the next several weeks, Ms. Knight suggested the following next steps:

- As discussed earlier in the evening, the Council should plan to have another Strategic Planning Workshop in early 2023 after the November 2022 election.



- In the meantime, Council should be looking at the existing five priority areas and begin to think about the questions posed, and be ready to address these at the next workshop with the newly seated Council.
 - (1) Are these areas still relevant?
 - (2) If not, Why? What is missing?
 - (3) If they are, how do we make them more specific?



ATTACHMENT A

Facilitator's Power Point is included in the meeting materials here: <https://alameda.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5541437&GUID=0AC9E162-20CE-4D87-9E2B-7D3E955A218D&Options=&Search=>