

**BOARD OF MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS
STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT
FEBRUARY 26TH, 2021
VIA ZOOM**

MINUTES

Members Present: Jonathan Elmore, Mayor
Brian Fisher, Mayor Pro Tem
Lisa Shortell, Commissioner
Lionel Laratte, Commissioner
Dee Merriam, Commissioner

Staff Present: Patrick Bryant, City Manager
Paul Hanebuth, Asst. City Manager
Shannon Powell, Asst. City Manager
Rebecca Long, Communications Manager
Gina Hill, City Clerk
Stephen Quinn, City Attorney

Guest: Bill Floyd, Facilitator

Meeting Called to Order/Adoption of Agenda

Commissioner Laratte motioned to adopt agenda. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher seconded. All ayes.

8:30-9:30

COVID Impacts

Bill Floyd started the conversation about how the coronavirus has changed local governments. City Manager Bryant talked about how covid affected the city's finances through fewer fines and forfeitures and fewer businesses paying their taxes. Money from The CARES Act helped shore up some of those deficits. Mr. Bryant added how changes in public works staffing during the pandemic prevented them from doing a lot of work they would normally be able to complete. Assistant Manager Hanebuth relayed that work is not as efficient with everyone working remotely. He also voiced concern about selecting certain businesses to give aid to. Assistant City Manager Powell talked about some of the differences with having meetings in person versus remotely. She thought having all of these meetings of the past year in person would not have been sustainable. She wondered how the pandemic will change the demand for office space. Commissioner Shortell shared that she hopes there will still a remote option for attending meetings after in-person meetings return. She added the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) attorney warned against loaning money to businesses. She also hoped city employees can get vaccinated soon. Mr. Bryant mentioned the state rules for who can currently be vaccinated. Commissioner Merriam also

wanted to see a mix of in-person and remote meetings. She also wished it was possible to tell who was calling into the Zoom meetings. City Attorney Quinn talked about legal issues surrounding calling in to in-person meetings. Commissioner Laratte praised city staff for effective communication during the pandemic. He shared concern that some small businesses would close because of covid but he has heard that residents are supportive of them. Mr. Laratte also said that he's also concerned about the staff being overworked. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher said a long-term solution needed to be found to relieve some of the workload on staff in terms of evening meetings. He missed the public engagement of in-person meetings. He also praised city staff for their performance during the pandemic. Mr. Fisher added his economic predictions going forward. Ms. Powell added to those predictions for local businesses. Assistant City Manager Hanebuth explained how participants can see who else is on a Zoom call. Mr. Laratte suggested looking into using Microsoft Teams instead of Zoom. Mr. Bryant turned the conversation to public participation and commented that they get the best feedback when doing surveys as opposed to relying on meeting attendees. He explained a diminished rate of return with subsequent meetings on the same topic. Mr. Bryant cited obstacles to hiring more staff at the moment. Ms. Powell described how the number of boards and committees in the city is a drain on city resources. Mayor Elmore suggested the group consider daytime meetings. Moving the discussion back to the pandemic, Mr. Floyd said the BOMC needs to figure out how to help small businesses. Ms. Powell responded that the DDA is making great efforts to help the local businesses. Ms. Merriam was supportive of public participation and thought many projects get too far along before that happens. Ms. Shortell praised the commissioner chat format for engaging the public.

9:30-10:30

Annexation of Key Areas

City Manager Bryant started by saying any annexations should be beneficial economically. He felt there might be ways to get businesses of the Laredo Drive corridor to request annexation into the city. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher thought it was important to start talking to those property owners. He also mentioned starting to look at the old Avondale High School and the adjacent property as well as the Avondale Station apartments. City Attorney Quinn mentioned that there were incentives the city could give certain businesses to entice them to be annexed. Mayor Elmore said annexation should be framed as an opportunity to get better services. There was discussion about coming up with a strategy for approaching annexation and certain areas to look at. Commissioner Shortell shared her concern about the fact that Avondale Station apartments was not part of the city. The group talked about the differences in taxes for a property if it was annexed into the city as well as the county's response when faced with certain annexations, especially as it relates to police jurisdiction. Assistant City Manager Hanebuth did some tax calculations and shared them on his screen while Mr. Quinn shared some legal information surrounding tax breaks and incentives. Talk was focused on the Avondale Station apartments. There was

discussion about whether or not staff and the BOMC had the time to work on annexation. Ms. Shortell clarified that reasons for annexation are not only to diversify the tax base but also to have a say in what is built on these properties.

10:30-11:30

Process and Committees

Assistant City Manager Powell expressed frustration at some of the committees asking for more meetings when staff asks to combine topics instead. City Manager Bryant agreed and felt that a precedent had been set in which some of the committees want to direct staff. It's hard to say no in these situations, he adds. Commissioner Merriam saw redundancy in the committees. She also mentioned agenda creation and having to report back to the BOMC for these committees. Mayor Elmore said they need to ask if certain committees bring value and purpose. He knew it was difficult because residents want to be involved and added that these groups need to get more direction. Assistant City Manager Hanebuth gave an example of ways the Tree Board could be more effective. Commissioner Shortell said committee structure definitely be overhauled and could be designed in a way to get more volunteers for certain events, etc. City Attorney Quinn suggested having the committees report to the BOMC in a public meeting once or twice a year. Bill Floyd recommended hiring an outside consultant to help the BOMC overhaul the boards and committee structure. He added this is a serious problem and it's up to the BOMC to correct it. Commissioner Laratte remarked that staff should consider how to leverage the committees to help them Accomplish goals. Mr. Bryant said that overall, the organization is trying to become more proactive instead of reactive. Mr. Elmore did not want to give staff more to do and he felt it was the BOMC's responsibility. He supported hiring an outside consultant. Mr. Hanebuth suggested having each BOMC member take a committee or two under their wing and let them know how they can help the BOMC achieve goals. Ms. Shortell said they need to know first what the city needs from the committee. Ms. Powell felt consolidating boards would help. She would also like the committees to be more action driven. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher endorsed having meetings during the day. Mayor Elmore pointed out that evening meetings are difficult for those with children still at home. He believed that lunchtime meetings might get more attendees. They discussed having a time limit on those meetings. Ms. Merriam thought that staff should take an inventory of the committees and weigh in where there is overlap. She also supported engaging a third party and time limits on meetings. There is a large segment of residents that do not have a voice because it's the same people who attend meetings, said Mr. Bryant. Daytime meetings may help, he believed. Ms. Powell offered that there are possibly too many meetings for individual projects. For example, she believed she held about twelve meetings for the zoning code rewrite. Ms. Shortell said the BOMC can push back against residents who push for a slower process. Mr. Hanebuth explained how more meetings creates a diminished rate of return and at a cost. Ms. Merriam agreed with everything said but she believed that it takes a while for residents to grasp larger projects and form questions and opinions. Mr. Floyd

concluded by saying a inventory is a good idea and he believed that each committee being assigned a BOMC member is a good idea.

12:30-2:00

Board and Staff Expectations

Mayor Elmore started by thanking staff for their honesty and thought the group needed to talk about who does what. City Manager Bryant saw two issues and one was a coordinated response to public inquiry. He also touched on the flow of information to the BOMC from staff. Bill Floyd asked if staff can see the BOMC's emails and was told no. Commissioner Shortell shared that a consistent, repeated message is important but she wants to respond to her own emails. Commissioner Laratte wanted his email to remain private and he enjoys the exchanges with residents. Mr. Elmore agreed but said that if an email is addressed to the entire BOMC he is the spokesperson of the city and probably be the one to respond. Mayor Pro Tem Fisher thought each member of the BOMC may have a different opinion and should be able to share it with residents. He did feel, however, that the Mayor should be the spokesperson for outside sources, such as the media. Mr. Fisher did not have any problem if others had access to his email but he would like to keep the ability to respond individually to resident emails. Commissioner Merriam said she has struggled with this and asked City Attorney Quinn to share his recommendations. Mr. Quinn advised that if an email is addressed to the whole board, the group could wait 24 hours to achieve a consensus and then the mayor could respond for the group. If anyone disagrees, they could respond to the response with their individual opinion. He advised against a race to respond. Ms. Shortell felt that was reaching a consensus outside of a public meeting was wrong. She admitted she responds quickly but would not respond for the rest of the board. She added that she does not share any decisions. Mr. Quinn clarified his initial response to say responses should be polite but noncommittal for the reasons Ms. Shortell stated. Mr. Elmore felt there had to be some standard, consistent language to avoid confusion. Mr. Quinn let the group know there has been a change in the law that allows boards to reach a consensus via email. Mr. Laratte shared his standard language when he responds to emails. Mr. Elmore asked if the group should copy each other on their responses. The group shared their various opinions on the topic. Mr. Bryant explained that it would help if he or other staffers were copied on these email responses. He also reminded the BOMC that staff answers to them. So staff should not be responding to these emails unless it has to do with city operations and services. Mr. Quinn suggested using the forward button on email more often. They can forward their response to someone else without copying them. Mr. Elmore and Ms. Merriam summarized the conversation. Talk turned to the fine line between commissioners asking questions of staff and giving direction. Mr. Quinn gave some legal guidance. Mayor Elmore explained how the group needed to figure out how to talk through complex issues like the zoning code. Mr. Laratte said that for him, he sees city staff the same as outside consultants – give direction and then get out of their way. He said he trusts them until he's given a reason not to. Mr. Fisher had a suggestion for deciding what will be discussed in meetings. Ms.

Powell felt part of the problem is that people ask questions over and over because they don't like the answer they're given. Mr. Bryant agreed. The conversation continued about how best to discuss the draft zoning code. Mr. Bryant reminded the group that suggestions should be brought up in a public forum and not posed to individual staffers. Mr. Quinn recommended specific sub-topics to the zoning code be on each agenda for discussion. He added those sub-topics can be agreed upon through email. Mr. Fisher believed this method could work on other large projects as well. Mr. Hanebuth also weighed in on choosing sub-topics. Mr. Floyd advised that the BOMC choose a deadline date to end zoning discussions. He added the code could always be adjusted after the fact.

Mr. Bryant concluded the retreat by saying he thought this was very productive. He thanked Mr. Floyd for facilitating. Mr. Floyd offered a brief summary.

Adjournment

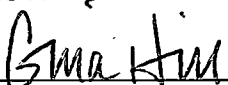
Commissioner Shortell motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Laratte seconded. All ayes.

APPROVED THIS 24th DAY OF MARCH 2021



Jonathan Elmore, Mayor

ATTEST:



Gina Hill, City Clerk