

City of Olympia

City Council Mid-Year Retreat Notes

Date: June 18, 2022

Location: Council Chambers, Olympia City Hall

Attendees: Meg Winch, Keith Maier, Jay Burney, Debbie Sullivan, Kellie Braseth, Susan Grisham, Aaron BeMiller, Cheryl Selby, Dani Madrone, Lisa Parshley, Clark Gilman, Dontae Payne, Yến Huynh, Elizabeth Drake, Charlotte Aldrich

Called to Order: 9:00 a.m.

Adjourned: 3:00 p.m.

Long-Term Financial Strategy: Discussion Notes

Flexibility on Cost Recovery

- The City of Olympia uses a multi-tiered approach to cost recovery, created in response to a previous recession. The escalating tiers are options for recovering cost and stabilization that can be mixed and matched based on the situation.
- Council wanted to make sure that when making cost recovery and stabilization decisions, the City works within a climate and equity framework to ensure that the City honors its climate and ESJ goals.
- Council also brought up the idea of a prioritization list for projects and programs to help the City make financial decisions that continue to safeguard the things that the City and community want to preserve.
- Council wished to emphasize that using plain language when speaking to the public increases the level of understanding and should be used whenever possible.
- When talking about the priorities of the City when making cost recovery decisions, the language around protecting staff should emphasize that retaining an appropriate volume of high-quality staff allows the City to continue to provide services to the community.
- Entrepreneurial spirit is a driving force that promotes recession recovery.
- Small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures are what helps communities move through and out of a recession and must be encouraged and fostered even in the event of cost recovery efforts (for example, marketing city parks as opportunities for alternate revenue streams).
- While alternate revenue streams should be explored in times of financial uncertainty, Council acknowledges that not everything supported by the City must pay for itself. There are investments, services, structures, etc. that exist because they make the community better, even if they generate little or no revenue themselves (for example, public restrooms in downtown parks).

Alternate Service Delivery

- The City needs to establish minimum professional standards of service to be applied to all City services. This includes expectations around wages and benefits for staff as well as the quality of the provided service.
- The City has a goal of “Do it well” which is used to determine if the City will continue to offer a current service or begin to offer a new one(s). The City needs to establish metrics for success and a set of standards for all services.
- This standardization of expectations and success metrics will better allow the City to hold itself accountable to its “Do it well” goal in regard to its current and potential services.
- The City needs to establish a lens that considers the City’s values, for example climate or equity. This values lens will be used when making decisions around services, cost recovery, new initiatives, etc., with the goal of making sure the City continues to act and make decisions in accordance with its values.
- There is always risk associated with the implementation of new projects. City staff have reported that the City is largely at capacity relative to new initiatives and projects for the remainder of 2022 and 2023, and any new initiatives will inevitably take resources from other ongoing projects or initiatives. City staff and Council both acknowledge this reality, and will endeavor to discuss trade offs and concessions on current work if new initiatives are added.

How do we communicate our financial strategy to the public and manage community perceptions?

- The City and the Council have access to internal documentation that describes the current financial strategy.
- This documentation, while internal, could be used to explain the City’s financial strategy and rationale to the public.
- Council and the City will discuss how much of the financial strategy document should be made public, what sort of additional explanation and context would be required, and how the financial strategy could be communicated in a way that builds confidence that the City has a sound financial and resiliency strategy.
- More discussion around this topic is required before sharing the City’s financial strategy and resiliency plan with the public.

How do we leverage City resources to respond to the climate crisis?

- In regard to the climate crisis, an evaluation of City resources relative to climate needs to take place, accompanied by success metrics and goals relative to these core values.
- While acknowledging that City resources are largely at capacity, Council would like to analyze current resource allocation and discuss what needs to be done to move more resources towards climate and ESJ initiatives.

Consider Participatory Budgeting Processes

- 2022 was largely dominated by the implementation of the “FROGS” system at the City.
- Post FROGS implementation, Council would like to come up with a referral workplan that explores the City’s current revenue stream.
- Olympia is a regional leader in prioritization and strategies surrounding agreed upon goals and initiatives, such as climate, and would like to find ways to encourage the surrounding municipalities to proportionally invest in these goals and initiatives.
- Council and the City would like to create a way for the public to track funding and achievements relative to City initiatives, especially as it relates to the City’s climate plan and surrounding revenue streams.
- Council would like to create and/or update revenue streams for City climate initiatives.

Work Plan for 2023

In addition to the discussion surrounding current projects, City staff identified a areas where projects would likely either start in 2023 or gain more attention coming out of 2022. The following are some of the key take aways from that conversation:

Resources and Support

- Relative to the economy, the City has a 5-year plan on Bow Waves.
- Many council members have specific legislative priorities, such as implementing a 1% property tax.

Environment

- Relative to the City salmon strategy, staff have been collaborating and coordinating with the local tribes, who have been a great help.
- The City is comfortable looking for outside help when coming up with solutions for salmon and the Salish Sea.

Finance

- There needs to be a closer look at City spending to determine if the City’s spending is in line with its stated values and responsibilities.
- Council wants to try to increase supplier diversity for the City, while acknowledging all the success the City has had in this area.

Project Priorities

- The Hands-on Children’s Museum was identified as a priority project for some members of the council.
- The 108-state Avenue situation was identified as a priority project for some members of council.
- Some members of Council would like to make the Armory project a priority in 2023.

Council Support

- There is a need for a council guidebook refresh and update.
- Council will participate in the City-wide DEI training that mirrors the onboarding training of all new employees.

Sidewalk Funding

- Council wants to further explore funding opportunities for sidewalk maintenance and repair.
- In order to achieve these goals, the City must invest in new policies to support sidewalks and other climate and repair efforts.
- Council wishes these efforts to be in alignment with the City's transit and climate representations.

Sister City Exchange

- Olympia is engaged in a sister city exchange program with a city in Japan.
- This program will require a referral FWD, an \$800 a year membership, and some staff resources to bring to fruition.

Land-use

- There is a desire to activate the City's purchased parkland in coordination with local tribes around parkland projects.
- There is a desire for short-term improvements around land-use, such as urban gardening and other recommendations.

Housing Action Plan

- Council would like to focus on the Housing Action Plan
- Increase access to affordable housing and to continue encampment prevention efforts
- Implement MF tax exemptions, rent stability, and rental home policies
- Using data from the houseless census, create a metrics-based criteria for measuring progress and to manage increases of houselessness in Olympia.

Downtown Improvements

- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) workshops for small business owners.

Conflict Management Tools and Operating Agreements

After the DRC presentation, Council and City staff moved into ratification of the Council's operating agreements. After much deliberation, participants agreed on the following list of agreements:



Operating Agreements

1. We agree to practice generous leadership and share opportunities.
2. We agree to leave space for speaking from lived experience and acknowledge that this is only part of the truth.
3. We agree to respect the decisions of the majority.
4. We agree to assume positive intent.
5. We agree to listen to each other and to be openly curious.
6. We agree to honor the process for advancing the work of the City.
7. We agree to support and celebrate City staff, the community, and ourselves.
8. We agree to have fun and be willing to laugh.
9. We agree to be tough on the issue, tender on the person.