Strategic Plan Comments
From Gary Osterhout
11/29/15

What seems to be missing from this meeting is a focus on what in the November 4 meeting was supposed to be discussed as “Operationalization of Strategic Planning Priorities.” A definition of “Operationalization” is the process of strictly defining variables into measurable factors. The process defines fuzzy concepts and allows them to be measured, empirically and quantitatively.

As a result, the current effort again seems to be only a large laundry list of items that in no way provides any real accountability or guidance. There seems nothing “strategic” in the list.

For instance:

Governance: Total lack of quantification. Should be some reference to evaluating trust in the government and how that might be evaluated. Need reference to meetings that are “meaningful” and “significant” and produce “actionable” results that reflect consensus agreement instead of “everyone is equally displeased.”

Engagement: How is this measured? Where is the reference to “meaningful” or “significant?” Is any “success” going to be evaluated by quantity (variety of mediums—many not used) and not quality (e.g., professional written, objective and informationally useful staff reports)? What is a “City-sponsored organization and civic group?” What is meant by “communication tactics”—sounds pretty government-controlling.

Workforce: What is “world-class customer service?” Are there cost trade-offs or efficiencies recognized (the more one pursues excellence, each incremental improvement become exponentially expensive)? How will “competively compensated” be determined--if it is based on the private sector most managers will need to take a pay cut. Same if turnover is used as a evaluative determinant. And as long as you provide huge budgets and compensation, I expect most employees will “enjoy working for the city.” Again—what is the tradeoff? And what city doesn’t “assess employee compensation”—without more definition, this is pretty weak tea.

Financial Stability: Nice self-congratulations on our success being a product of “good oversight, financial stewardship, and cost management.” I would ascribe the success to a wealthy constituency, great schools, and proximity to the ocean. As well as neglecting the City’s responsibility to provide recreational facilities and parks commensurate with our standard of living. There is nothing in the Governance Activities that reflects any measurement. Real measurement activities would be to quantify the annual savings by having a AAA rating as opposed to an AA rating. It would include an assessment of replacement costs of infrastructure against annual funding. It would include a discussion of how and when you would seek a tax increase to normalize the lighting/stormwater fund and when you might seek a bond issue for “amenity” construction. It might include a quantitative reference improving the poll results relative to residents supporting an increase in taxes, or a poll on residents’ impressions of your financial stewardship. It might include a direct reference to increasing TOT. If a new hotel is needed for revenue, that should be articulated. Someone at the first meeting was bewildered that residents think you have a bundle of money—it is because your financial decisions, lack of budget discipline and paucity of hard decision-making all imply you have a bundle of money.

Environment: This category needs a lot more work. What is meant by “bikeable?” I agree with making the healthy lifestyle “convenient and accessible,” but you folks seem to want to overly promote as well. Why should a Policy Objective have as a component to be “recognized”—unless the objective behind that is something different. Can’t we make a governance activity stronger than “regularly review?”

Community Planning.: I frankly do not get any of the Policy Objectives. And there is nothing about enforcing your municipal codes (an area I believe is sorely lacking). The Governance Activities are bland. This whole section needs rethought. A Policy Objective is for “Police, Fire and Public Works to work together?”—are there cities out there that have a policy objective that says they shouldn’t?

Physical Asset Management: The first paragraph needs completed. The first two bullet points in Policy Objective” seem the same. What is a “hiddent asset?” There should be a separation between those items with their own revenue stream and those typically funded by the General Fund. Need to call for quality quantification of infrastructure (i.e., keep streets to a “C” level; water pipes to a “Category 1” level). How about a governance activity that actually requires assignment of an approximate time WHEN certain construction of amenities will occur. What stops you and staff from just kicking projects down the alley?

Conclusion – make this all significant, meaningful and measurable. Currently any conclusion anyone wants can be drawn from the draft text. Make this an accountable document that any resident can pick up and understand where we are headed and how we are going to get there. Tie specific activities and safeguards that will produce the results articulated at the community meetings beyond the bland “review/monitory/evaluate” bromides.