

A special meeting of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 10:00 am.

Councilors Present: Nemlowill, Herzig, Warr, Price, Mayor LaMear

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Police Chief Johnston, Community Development Director Cronin, Parks and Recreation Director Cosby, Finance Director Brooks, Library Director Tucker, Public Works Director Cook, and City Attorney Henningsgaard. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

STRATEGIC PLAN DISCUSSION

City Manager Estes explained that during the City Council work session on January 12, 2016, the City Council goal of initiating a City of Astoria Strategic Plan was discussed. He had provided Council with a copy of Marty Jaecksch's resume, his methodology for strategic planning processes, and a framework for strategic planning processes that could work for the City of Astoria. A contract for work done this fiscal year would be within his spending authority, but he wanted to make sure City Council was comfortable with this approach since this was one of their goals. At the work session, Council expressed interest in meeting Mr. Jaecksch. He had given Council copies of the materials presented at the work session and invited Council to ask questions.

Marty Jaecksch thanked City Council for inviting him to discuss strategic planning. He said he was retired after working as a manager for Weyerhaeuser for 25 years, mostly in the North Pacific Paper Mill in Longview, WA. He managed most of the departments not directly related to operations because he was not a chemical or civil engineer. Most of his background is in social sciences. He started out as a trainer interested in improving the organizational side of the company through education. However, he learned that most of the barriers to improving organizational performance had nothing to do with training or knowledge. The organization's will and structure was more important. As a result, he spent his entire career working on organizational development and effectiveness in a variety of roles and departments. After 25 years, he loves trying to figure out how to bring people together in the organization to get their goals accomplished. Most organizations find it relatively easy to establish goals. However, executing and implementing those goals seems to be the biggest barrier. Over the last five or six years, he has focused on ways an organization can position itself, usually through strategic planning, to execute the goals. He can help organize, plan, and is good at facilitating large groups. It is empowering for communities and organizations to come together to express their opinions and see those opinions come together in a statement.

Mayor LaMear thanked Mr. Jaecksch for attending. Councilor Warr added he was impressed by Mr. Jaecksch perspective on what City Council wanted to do.

Councilor Nemlowill asked Mr. Jaecksch to describe the strategic planning process that he would recommend.

Mr. Jaecksch explained that creating a strategic plan begins with City Council's mission. City Council would agree on a mission as a City and as a Council, and then a vision would be established. The vision would be a statement about where the community wants to go. After the mission and vision had been established, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis would be completed to determine the current environment. The analysis sets the scene for accomplishing goals. The description of what the community wants would become the basis for selecting the top priorities that City Council would want to achieve over the next three to five years. After the high-level focus areas and goals are set, the plan must be refined to include operations that will allow the plan to be implemented. Many departments will have to execute the work in the plan, so another level of planning would be completed next. Communication is extremely important because once the plan is set, communicating the plan becomes the most important job of leadership. Once the plan is at the operational level, it will need to be reviewed periodically and adjusted as needed. The strategic planning process will take as long as City Council wants. The timeline depends on how much public participation is included in the process and how much consensus City Council needs before moving forward. He described the recent strategic planning process completed by the school district, which included a lot of public process during

the vision and mission phase because they believed this was the part of the process that had the most disagreement. Once the school district established values, they made it very clear that the rest of the planning process would move forward with the vision and mission guiding the process. This phase of the strategic planning took about 15 meetings. However, later in the process during budget discussions, those established values cleared up many arguments.

City Manager Estes added that City Staff would also be involved with the planning process so that Staff has ownership in the implementation of the plan. With the school district, many of the meetings about the vision and mission were internal.

Mr. Jaecksch said participation equals commitment. People who are involved in creating a plan are more likely to be committed to achieving the plan's goals. This costs money and time, so City Council would have to decide how many people should be involved. However, involving Staff is very powerful because Staff will have a clear understanding of the vision, mission, and values when it is time to implement the plan.

Councilor Herzig asked if Staff would feel free to express their opinions in the presence of their employers. Mr. Jaecksch said it depends on the culture of the organization. Some organizations are very open and feel free to express their opinions while others are more closed. As he facilitated input sessions, he would try to build trust and be clear about how their input would be used. People are more concerned about their daily work life rather than the high-level aspects of the mission, vision and values, so there is less threat during discussions at this level. Once adopted, the mission, vision, and values guide the process later on.

Mayor LaMear believed it was very important for City Council to be in sync with Staff because some of City Council's goals have been difficult for Staff to implement. Mr. Jaecksch said the SWOT analysis was an excellent opportunity for Staff to participate because it would allow Council to tap in to Staff's knowledge about the organization's strengths and weaknesses. He explained how threats from outside the organization could put constraints on the City's freedom of action, noting that Staff deals with these threats all the time.

Councilor Nemlowill asked how much experience Mr. Jaecksch had with municipal government. Mr. Jaecksch said he worked with Cowlitz County Council of Governments to redefine the values of the association. He worked with the cities of Kelso and Longview when they were discussing consolidating their services. He also worked with the Cowlitz County Commission to create a mission, vision, and value statement, as well as a strategic plan.

Councilor Nemlowill explained the City's hierarchy starting at the top with the citizens, then the elected officials, and then City Staff. In order for people to support what they create and in order for the Council to receive appropriate feedback to inform their decisions about the strategic plan, she believed intense public involvement would be important. She also agreed it would be appropriate to get feedback from Staff in the form of a focus group. In order to engage the most people, a variety of tactics must be provided. She asked Mr. Jaecksch to describe his experience with public input sessions and offer suggestions for various ways to get public input. Mr. Jaecksch said communications and public relations has always been part of his planning process, but not something he has ever executed. He has participated in planning community events, but not the execution of these events. City Manager Estes noted that when City Council first discussed a strategic plan, Council expressed interest in vetting the plan to the public after it was developed instead of beginning the planning process with public involvement.

Councilor Warr believed City Council should decide what the strategic plan should accomplish. Should the plan fulfill the dreams and wishes of Council's constituents or make the City work better? He understood a strategic plan was designed to make the City work better and more efficiently, which means Council would develop the plan and then take it to the public for approval or feedback. City Manager Estes added that the benefit of the framework described by Mr. Jaecksch allows Council to reach out to the public whenever Council believes it is appropriate to do so. The framework is flexible so that Staff can lead the public involvement processes. During the school districts planning process, there were times when training was provided to school district staff so they could lead the public input sessions. Utilizing City Staff to conduct some of the public processes keeps the overall costs down. City Council could establish milestones within the planning process to check in with the public.

Mayor LaMear said during previous discussions about strategic planning, Council has looked at plans online to see what other cities have done. Some members of Council would like to adapt an existing plan, but this is not Mr. Jaecksch strategy. City Council needs a framework before asking for input from the community. She wanted Council to develop a mission and vision and agreed with Mr. Jaecksch' plan for moving forward. The citizens will need something to base their input on. Mr. Jaecksch said it is very difficult to bring a blank piece of paper to a large group and get anything accomplished. Most of the processes he designs for participation involve an initial sub-group of knowledgeable people who make a statement. That group presents their statement to a larger group and invites feedback.

Councilor Herzig said Council has been establishing annual goals and strategic planning was new to City Council. The Council must learn how to formulate goals and state the goals before presenting them to the public. Mr. Jaecksch agreed and said Councilors should understand one another's thinking. The process outlined in the packet was developed without speaking to Council first. It was difficult for him to recommend a process without knowing what kind of culture the City had. He needed to know what City Council wanted from a strategic plan so that he could help the City craft a plan. The Cowlitz County Commission had originally said they wanted a plan for the county. However, the mission, vision, and values indicated the Commission wanted a plan for themselves. Then, the plan was opened up to the entire county. It is important for the Councilors to be clear with each other about what the plan will accomplish because he cannot design a plan without a consensus from City Council.

Councilor Price said she was impressed by the plan Mr. Jaecksch submitted without knowing anything about City Council and she believed he would be a good fit. She was not satisfied with Astoria's goal setting process because some of the goals are carried over for several years and they are not integrated into the work of the City. A good strategic plan will be a good communication tool when it is complete because a plan will make it easy for her to explain to people why the City is doing what it does.

Mr. Jaecksch understood City Council's goals were a list of specific projects. He explained that his recommended model for a planning process would include the specific projects at the third level of planning. The plan would demonstrate why projects would fit into the City's goals. A lot of the strategic planning energy for each individual will be deciding which projects should not be done over the next three to five years. Setting priorities is key because it forces focus. The projects that Council focuses on are more likely to get done, so those projects need to be the right projects. Council will have to give up some important projects in order to implement the most important projects.

Mayor LaMear said goal setting allows Council to plan from year to year, but Council agrees it should be making longer term plans. A strategic plan will allow Council to create a path for achieving five-year goals. Mr. Jaecksch noted that a strategic plan sets goals to be accomplished within three to five years.

Councilor Nemlowill said she wanted to create a vision for Astoria for 50 years from now to preserve Astoria's character. The policy decisions that City Council makes over the next three to five years will impact Astoria 50 years from now. The city will not see large impacts from vacation rentals in the next three to five years, but depending on the City's policies, vacation rentals could drastically impact how Astoria is 50 years from now. She understood the short term needs of a strategic plan, but she believed the vision statement to preserve Astoria's character is the most important. All of the short term strategic planning should be based around the vision. She wanted people who work in Astoria to be able to afford to live in Astoria. She did not want Astoria to be overrun with second homes.

Mr. Jaecksch asked if there was a common agreement with Councilor Nemlowill's statements. City Manager Estes explained that City Council had adopted a housing study that analyzed housing issues and the City is working towards changing the Development Code. Councilor Nemlowill added that housing is part of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Jaecksch believed housing would be worth discussing during the SWOT analysis. A first step towards a vision is to choose three to five top priorities. Therefore, if City Council's model is to consider how today's decisions will impact their 50 year goals for Astoria, Council must decide which priorities must be implemented today. He believed Councilor Nemlowill made some very specific policy statements and he would want to test them to make sure her vision was the common vision of everyone.

Councilor Nemlowill believed City Council did not want Astoria to become like Cannon Beach. Mr. Jaecksch recommended a more specific vision statement. Councilors have a picture in their minds that must be translated into words and a consensus must be built.

Councilor Price agreed with Councilor Nemlowill that retaining Astoria's character should be part of the vision or mission and next steps should be to ensure that people who work in Astoria could afford to live in Astoria, with final steps being much more targeted to specific projects.

Councilor Herzig said previous presentations explained the differences between a vision, a mission, and a value. He understood Mr. Jaecksch was offering a little bit of each and structuring the three so that a three to five year plan would point the City in the right direction. Part of this process is for City Council to define its role. He wanted to know how proactive City Council should be about the Comprehensive Plan and City documents as opposed to simply waiting for Staff to present recommendations. He hoped the strategic plan would allow Council to be engaged with larger issues and fit in with short and long term planning processes.

Mr. Jaecksch noted that Astoria's charter does not mention leadership. He was interested to know what Council believed its role was as a leadership position and how the leadership role was executed. He also wanted to know how Councilors supported each other. As a facilitator of the planning process, he would be committed to City Council and would help the Council achieve its goals as a group. If there were issues that jeopardized the Council's ability to achieve its goals, he would temporarily change his process to deal with the issues. Barriers that pop up along the way can interrupt the process and the process will be subject to time limitations. He would like City Council to get to the end of the process together, united, and supportive of each other. Therefore, if Council believes the vision should be a very strong 50 year statement while someone else wanted two or three sentences, he would stop to discuss values. He said he is very good at designing processes ad hoc and in the moment to resolve differences. Once an agreement was made, the process would move on with the goal of getting to the end together.

Councilor Nemlowill understood Mr. Jaecksch wanted the Council to get along after the process is complete; however, she wanted the public to feel good about the process as well. The City needs a facilitator to advise Council on a good public outreach strategy so that the public can be involved. She confirmed for Mr. Jaecksch that Astoria does not have an outreach or communications department. City Manager Estes explained that each department is in charge of their own communications. Mr. Jaecksch confirmed that City Council did not have its own communications department either. Councilor Nemlowill said she believed Mr. Jaecksch would fill this role as a facilitator. She hoped he could recommend ways for City Council and Staff to communicate with each other and with the public.

Mr. Jaecksch said he had experience with this situation working with unions and manufacturing, but not governments. This issue was very significant as he tried to change the socio-technical system in the paper mill. When newsprint became a dying industry, one company had to make some significant changes very quickly. While other newsprint companies went out of business, the company he worked with was still in business and was still profitable. He recognized that manufacturing and the public sector were not the same, but noted there were some similarities to the outreach process.

Councilor Herzig explained there was no consensus among Council on the current year's City Council goals. It is a lot easier to get public feedback when Council can agree on goals and values. He believed it would be more challenging than Mr. Jaecksch expected to get a consensus from City Council. Mr. Jaecksch said at this point in his career, he would welcome additional complexities because he enjoys the challenges.

Councilor Price was impressed with Mr. Jaecksch thoughtfulness and his level of involvement in this process. She was glad he was able to meet with Council.

Councilor Warr agreed and said Council needed Mr. Jaecksch to get them through the planning process as a group. He confirmed for Mr. Jaecksch that he had looked at some other strategic plans online and was not completely sold on the value of strategic plans. However, if Council can create a plan that works for the group, he would support it. He believed that City Council has five strong individuals who are going in five different directions.

Councilor Nemlowill disagreed, noting that there were many instances when Council did not go five different directions. Councilor Warr said he was impressed with what Mr. Jaecksch had to say and how he has handled things.

City Manager Estes reminded that a contract with Mr. Jaecksch would be within his spending authority for this fiscal year, but he wanted Council's support before moving forward.

Mayor LaMear believed Staff should move forward with a scope of work and contract with Mr. Jaecksch, adding that the community should be involved in the planning process.

Councilor Warr recommended casual conversations at a table during the planning process, instead of sitting at the dais. Mr. Jaecksch confirmed that a public meeting had to be announced anytime three or more Councilors wanted to speak and that work sessions to develop a vision, mission, and values would be public meetings. Mayor LaMear explained that the public does not always have the right to interact, but they always have the right to attend meetings.

Councilor Herzig added that work sessions give Council more flexibility to engage in dialogue. It is very valuable to have the public present because the mayor can invite public comments if she chooses to do so. Mr. Jaecksch agreed a less formal discussion would be best. He suggested a round table with the public sitting around those at the table. City Manager Estes confirmed the meeting could be formatted in a less formal manner.


Councilor Nemlowill believed Mr. Jaecksch was a great candidate, but she preferred to choose from a pool of applicants.

City Manager Estes confirmed he would work with Mr. Jaecksch on a scope of work, which would be vetted to City Council.

ADJOURNMENT

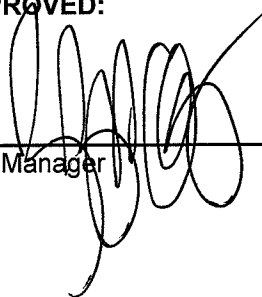
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:58 am.

ATTEST:



Finance Director

APPROVED:



City Manager