Minutes

Strategic Planning Retreat

Aberdeen Town Board

October 11, 2014 Robert N. Page Municipal Building

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. Aberdeen, North Carolina

The Aberdeen Town Board met Saturday, October 11, 2014 at 9:00 a.m. for the Strategic Planning Retreat. Members present were Mayor Robert A. Farrell, Mayor Pro-tem Jim Thomas, and Commissioners Pat Ann McMurray, Joe Dannelley, and Elease Goodwin. Commissioner Buck Mims was not in attendance for the meeting. Staff members in attendance were Planning Director Pam Graham, Well Superintendent Joe Wood, Parks & Recreation Director Adam Crocker, Fire Chief Phillip Richardson, Finance Officer Beth Wentland, Police Chief Tim Wenzel, Town Manager Bill Zell, and Town Clerk Regina Rosy. Planning Board Chairman Johnny Ransdell, Reporter for the Pilot Ted Natt, Mollie Wilson, Richard Gergle, Professor Lydian Altman, and Maia Landey were also in attendance for the meeting.

Mayor Farrell called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Mayor Farrell thanked everyone for coming and thanked Commissioner Dannelley for developing the idea for a Strategic Planning Retreat.

Professor Lydian Altman, with the UNC School of Government, stated this type of session is very common among organizations. Professor Altman stated she has seen a lot of changes in this area over the past 15 years, and she expects it will look even more different as years continue. Professor Altman stated she will lay some groundwork this morning, and then determine anticipated changes to come both internally and externally, discuss future orientation, and discuss vision for the Town of Aberdeen, and actions and decisions to make now in order to achieve that vision.

Professor Altman stated today's objectives are to recognize successes, identify local assets, implication of changes, and determine how to use that information to move forward.

Each of the attendees introduced themselves, their tenure and position with the Town of Aberdeen, and their expectations for today. After introductions, Professor Altman reviewed discussion guidelines for today's session which include: be specific, stay focused,

share all relevant information, define important words, focus on interests not positions, and check your assumptions.

Professor Altman asked participants to discuss one thing that has made them proud over the past year. Ideas discussed include Citizen's Academy Program, Police Department, visual appearance of the Town, renovation of Aberdeen Railroad building, personnel hiring decisions in Planning Department, buy in from staff and implementing change within the Parks & Recreation Department, 4th of July festivities, infrastructure improvements (new well, related water main, increased water capacity), the way Aberdeen's government works (no contention), tremendous staff, building improvements, community engagement, active approach to looking towards the future, Land Use Plan, openness of current Board to consider new ideas, and implementation of electronic agenda packets.

After a 15 minute break, Professor Altman asked participants to work in groups to discuss anticipated changes for the next 5 years and categorize those changes as short-term (next 18 months), medium-term (18-36 months), long-term (3-5 years), or continuous (ongoing). Changes could be related to the economy, Town's financial picture, demographic changes, local, state and federal policy, organizational changes and resource allocations, growth pressures and infrastructure needs, environmental implications, working relationships, and key partnerships. Participants spent a few minutes coming up with ideas for changes anticipated in the next 5 years. Ideas shared include younger population in part due to Fort Bragg, new school facilities, increases in crime which could have cost implications, employee growth considerations, and growth in traffic (currently involved in a comprehensive transportation plan). Commissioner Dannelley questioned if managed growth might be a consideration. Professor Altman discussed best building practices, quality growth, environmental building practices, and building the tax base to counteract some of the mandates coming down from the State. Other ideas expressed were the Town becoming more transparent and wildlife displacement. Pam Graham discussed the Green Growth Toolbox and how it considers environmental issues and wildlife habitats.

Professor Altman split the group into pairs for interviews, which included one staff person and one Board member in each pair. The paired interview team reviewed a list of questions relating to what the future of Aberdeen will look like. Professor Altman then asked the large group to split into smaller groups to discuss a list of values, and a vision for the future based on highlights and themes developed during the paired interviews. It was determined that key partners that could help with the vision include schools, developers,

residents, business community, Fort Bragg, other Moore County jurisdictions, etc. Partners that could block the vision include State Legislature, business partners, etc. Johnny Ransdell stated he believes all of the Town's plans need to coordinate and reflect each other in the overall vision of the Town.

Professor Altman discussed next steps to make this plan more real. Manager Zell suggested articulating all the ideas from today into one plan and prioritize. Commissioner Dannelley stated what he is hearing is the next step is to create a vision based on input received today, then Manager Zell would work with his staff on creating mission statements for each department of the Town. Professor Altman stated she would combine the list of successes with notes from today's session (see attachment for notes from Professor Altman – titled "Town of Aberdeen Strategic Planning Retreat"). Professor Altman stated then she could suggest next steps for this process (see additional attachment from Professor Altman – titled "Overview: What's Included in a Plan? Who's Involved?"). Director Graham stated she would want to make sure that the Land Use Plan coordinates with the results from today. Professor Altman asked what the final strategic plan should look like? Commissioner Dannelley stated he would imagine it being a 7 year document that is on a departmental level, and combined into one complete document. Professor Altman stated she would recommend a broad strategic goals meeting first before working on the following steps.

Chief Richardson is going to share his Fire Department Strategic Plan template with other Department Directors so that each department can create their own plan. Professor Altman stated she will work on developing the vision/mission from the discussion held today. Professor Altman recommended another session to further discuss goals. Commissioner Dannelley stated he would like to get some framework for the next budget cycle.

At the conclusion, Professor Altman asked participants to evaluate how the session went and what worked well, and what we might do differently for the next session.

A motion was made by Commissioner Dannelley, seconded by Mayor Pro-tem Thomas, to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously carried.

Regina M. Rosy

Regina M. Rosy, Town Clerk

Minutes were completed in
Draft form on October 11, 2014

Robert A. Farrell

Robert A. Farrell, Mayor

Minutes were approved
on November 17, 2014

Town of Aberdeen Strategic Planning Retreat

Saturday, October 11, 2014

Training Room, Aberdeen Fire Department, 800 Holly Street, Aberdeen, NC 28315

Developing a Vision for the Future

Notes prepared by Facilitator Lydian Altman

Most Proud Of:	
#	Comments
6	• Exceptional staff. Good people who want to do good things • Staff buy-in supports actions. I can see changes happening • Tremendous staff and work ethic • Appreciation of Employees: Positive attitude, willingness to improve • Proud of people in the room (staff, elected, advisory board members) • The way government works; we work well as a group
3	• Citizens academy • Citizens: they show up and participate • Town's efforts to provide civic education and rally residents; citizens academy
3	• Quality growth • Town's willingness to take an active approach to planning for the future • Good investments and railroad building
2	• Infrastructure improvements: well, water main, water capacity • Improvements to town structures (firehouse; rec center)
2	• Police department problems have been taken care of • Police department. Hard-working members and high success rates
1	• Family and community-friendly facilities and programs

[Facilitator's note: You could consider this 'Most Proud' list your organization's strategic advantages, those assets that you have to build on to leverage even greater successes.]

Anticipated Changes - Summary

Continuous/Short-term/Medium-term/Long-term

Short-term (next 18 months)	Medium-term (18-36 months)	Long-term (3-5 years)
Legislative mandates & revenue growth concerns More communication & transparency needed ETJ Development	Infrastructure School capacity and development & Education facilities Health Care Expansion Transportations Needs Business Growth and Economy; Businesses downtown	Government restrictions/ Building/ UDO? Highway Congestion? Stricter regulations on the environment? Facilities & services for seniors Population growth possibly doubling Transportation issues Infrastructure focused on health, walkability, trails, greenway, bike paths
Continuous (ongoing)		
Growth: Younger families, "browning", Ft. Bragg influx Increase in crime, traffic Growing environmental concerns & need for environmental services Wildlife displacement Look towards "Quality Growth"		

A ipated Changes - Details

Continuous/Short-term/Medium-term/Long-term

Continuous (ongoing)

Growth: Younger families, "browning", Ft. Bragg influx

Increase in crime, traffic

Growing environmental concerns & need for environmental services

Wildlife displacement

Look towards "Quality Growth"

Short-term (next 18 months)

Legislative mandates & revenue growth concerns

- Dealing with decisions made at state level
- Need to expand tax base and find ways to take care of ourselves

More communication & transparency needed

- Need to have a clear rationale for decisions & need to be able to communicate that to citizens
- Figure out how to get information out to people
- Lack data about how gov. communications are used and perceived
- Find ways to support citizen reporting and improve our response to that reporting

ETJ Development

- Already starting
- The only place left to put big projects
- Big opportunity for further development
- Important to look outside town limits
- As development happens, we need to consider how to provide services there
- Potential to partner with County agencies
- Keep in mind sequencing and changes at Ft. Bragg

Medium-term (18-36 months)

Infrastructure

- Increasing build-out; expansion
- Will require increased maintenance, roads, sidewalks, utilities—all of which must be sustained over time
- Will require additional personnel to service
- Think about impact on water-supply: capacity & distribution
- Once the comprehensive plan is presented, we can think about whether it fits without vision

Health Care Expansion

- First-health has expanded to surrounding areas
- More and more demand on healthcare
- Aberdeen needs to be constantly aware of healthcare expansion and impact on citizens
- This has to be part of our strategy

School capacity and development & Education facilities

- State won't let you project too far out
- Both town schools are quite old (50-60 years), we have plenty of seats in our schools, but parents want to take their kids to Southern Pines or elsewhere
- Economic development issues arise because of this; parents want to live in the ideal school districts
- This is mainly because of the way the schools look—not the quality of education
- Crowding in the Pinehurst school because parents are taking them out of Aberdeen
- The school district is not supporting municipal growth—they look at overcrowding but they don't look at the cause.
- Need enhanced ability to influence site decisions
- Possibility that schools will be relocated completely

Transportations Needs

- Growth will evolve around this; integral
- Access for citizens
- People coming here for shopping and entertainment

Business Growth and Economy; Businesses downtown

- We have an opportunity for terrific growth; Have resources to support growth
- Poised for all kinds of growth- small business, manufacturing, residential
- Have very inviting sites—looking for quality businesses
- How does Aberdeen's vision fit with local non-profit economic development vision?
- Need to have re-growth downtown; we are a lot more than just what is off the highway

Might see more people wanting to open businesses down[illegible]wn

- People get tired of cookie-cutter. Value in distinction—can build on our assets
- Promote beauty
- Need to preserve our variety to attract all kinds of people

Long-term (3-5 years)

Government restrictions/ Building/ UDO

Highway Congestion

Stricter regulations on the environment

Facilities & services for seniors

- Lifespans are getting longer
- Need to address quality of life issues
- Public transportation is a piece
- Also think about people with disabilities—both physical and intellectual

Population growth possibly doubling

- Huge implication—need more public safety as growth takes place to makes people feel safe

Transportation issues

- Issues tend to become polarized—ie, bypass conversation
- Keeping an open mind about assets
- We have to find money to fund implementation of plans
- Advocate complete streets policy—pedestrian and bicycle

Infrastructure focused on health, walkability, trails, greenway, bike paths

- Emphasize getting out
- Can help older people stay healthy; will also help attract younger people

Observations:

- Sometimes we look at Aberdeen as two separate areas
  - Need to unify it; need to remember that it's all one town
  - Balanced development
  - Different needs and development plans for different areas, but we can find ways to unite it (like the signs).

Category	Trends and Changes Mentioned
People, relationships, partnerships	• More communication & transparency needed • Health Care Expansion • Facilities & services for seniors • Population growth possibly doubling • Growth: Younger families, "browning", Ft. Bragg influx • Increase in crime, traffic
Policies, practices, philosophies	• Legislative mandates & revenue growth concerns • Government restrictions/ Building/ UDO? • Stricter regulations on the environment? • Growing environmental concerns & need for environmental services • Wildlife displacement • Look towards "Quality Growth"
Physical resources, infrastructure	• ETJ Development • Infrastructure • Transportations Needs • Business Growth and Economy; Businesses downtown • Highway Congestion? • Facilities & services for seniors • Infrastructure focused on health, walkability, trails, greenway, bike paths

[Facilitator's note: As potential goal areas are identified and developed, consider whether there are goal areas that support all three of the categories above.]

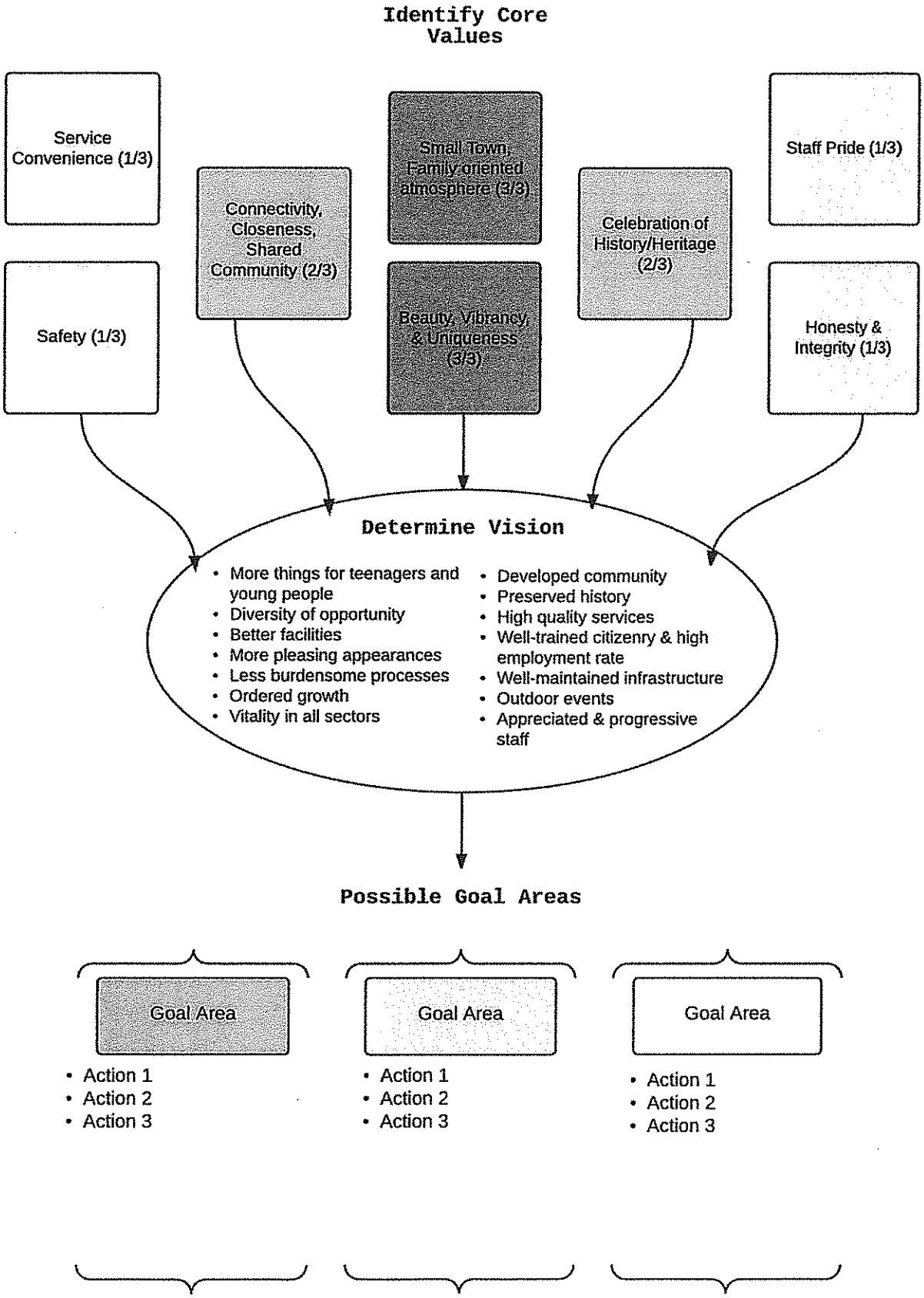
Developing the Path to Action:

The strategic planning group broke off into paired interviews to discuss the following question: "What does the future look like?" Pairs then split up to form three mixed groups in order to share highlights and develop themes from the interviews. Each group was then asked to:

- write down a list of **values**,
- describe a **vision** for the future, and
- fill-in-the-blank important 2014-15 **actions or decisions**.

The following chart, "A Path to Action" summarizes and compiles these work products, illustrating how values inform vision, and how vision informs goal areas. The numbers placed next to values signify how many groups mentioned that value [i.e., (2/3) = two out of three groups mentioned this value].

The Path to Action



Possible Goal Areas

**Suggested by Facilitator

Manage Growth & Plan for Development

- Identify appropriate siting
- Focus on downtown
- Secure funding

Respond to Citizen & Town Needs

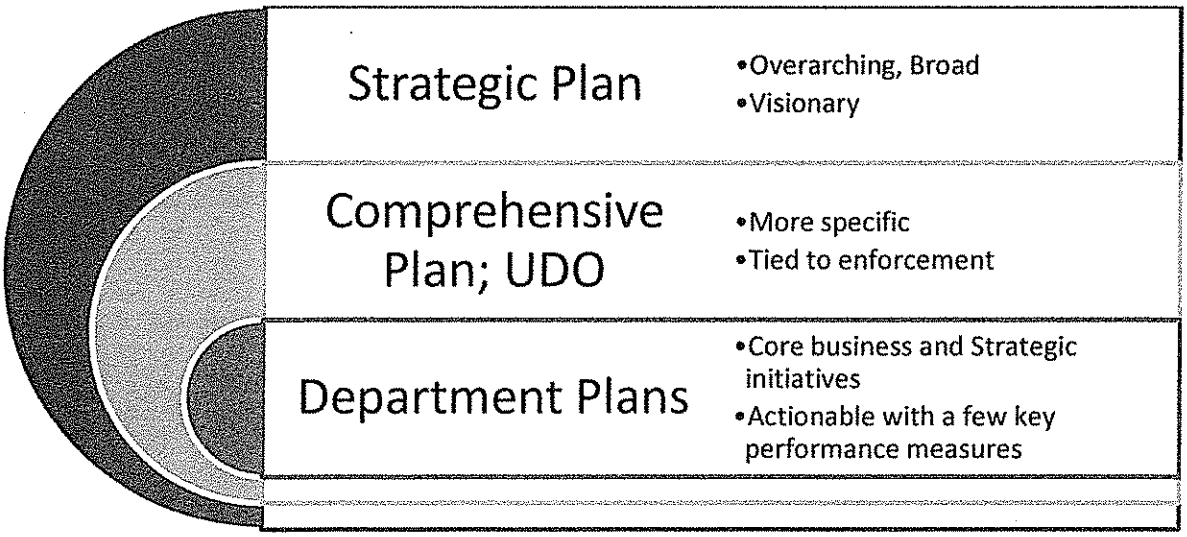
- ** Further develop services for youth & seniors
- ** Focus on workforce development
- ** Make service quality a priority
- **Hire & retain progressive town staff

**Enhance Sense of Community

- ** Improve citizen engagement & communication
- ** Consider ways to introduce aesthetic beauty
- **Promote shared values and town history
- ** Integration of areas into one cohesive unit

This chart was created by the session facilitator as an example of possible goal areas based off of the values and vision communicated by the Aberdeen group. The non-starred items were suggested as goal areas/action items by group members during the retreat.

How to create a plan that is both durable and flexible?
Stay general • Don't get bogged down in details
Utilize simple plan format • Focus on the department level • Should be a short document (Fire Department example to be shared amongst department heads)
Make the plan a fabric of decision-making • Should be a touchstone • Goals & objectives should align • Check back frequently • Use 3-5 year outlook to support big capital purchases
Promote public engagement
Integrate: Don't think of specialized plans as separate islands • i.e., strategic plan, comprehensive plan, UDO



Key Partners

- Investors
- Schools
- Residents
- Ft. Bragg
- Developers
- Business community
- Other jurisdictions
- State legislators

Participants were asked to identify partners that could potentially help or hinder the town in achieving goals

Suggested Next Steps

1. Consider how comprehensive plan fits with values, vision
(Council & staff jointly)

2. Develop and prioritize goal areas
(Council & staff jointly)

3. Action planning & objective development
(Staff development, council approval)

Anytime: Create a vision statement
(Staff development, council approval)

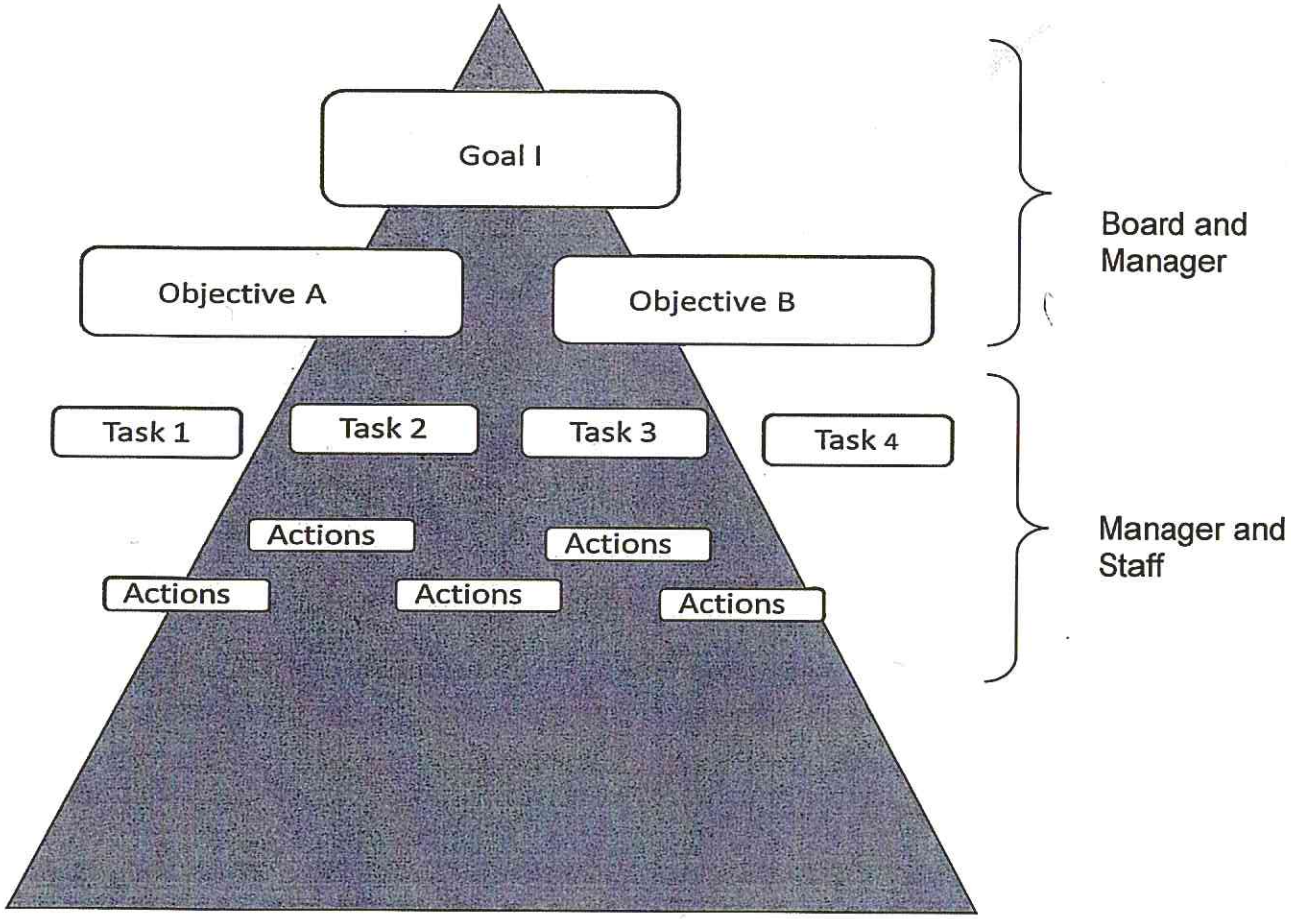
Evaluation of the Day	
What worked well	**What we might do differently**
• Diverse people at the table • Able to see similarities • Awesome—everyone is attentive and reflective • Engagement, energy, and focus • Talking about issues made us think • Facilitator helped us be efficient, stay focused	• Might be easier to drill down within the dept. • Not on a Saturday—Maybe afternoon sessions • Get input from other staff

Overview: What's Included in a Plan? Who's Involved?

The Basic Elements of a Strategic Plan

Strategic Goal: The Desired Situation
Objective: Conditions we want to create to move toward achieving the Goal
Task: A method or approach taken to accomplish an objective
Actions: A set of related actions to carry out a set of tasks

Strategy: The total path or plan linking actions, tasks, objectives, and goals.



Five Strategies for Succeeding with Strategic Planning

The public sector's success is defined by social impact – the improvement that we expect to see as a result of an investment in a program, initiative, or organization. Strategy is the pathway to the desired change. Yet communities struggle with creating and achieving effective strategies.

Here are five guiding points to enable strategic success:

1. **Ground your strategic plan in a realistic assessment of the current situation.** Strategy occurs at several levels – programmatic, organizational, community-wide, sectoral, and systemic – that are at once distinct and interrelated. Take the Big Picture into account. This should include opportunities to coordinate goals and plans with others.

2. **Involve everyone who has or might potentially have a stake.** The best strategies usually result from a participatory process that incorporates the perspective of multiple stakeholders—including those who can challenge assumptions, stretch conventional thinking, speak up for overlooked populations, and advocate for new approaches that might be more beneficial.

3. **Learn from others' experience.** Other communities and similar organizations have likely had similar experiences. Chances are research also exists that can inform local strategies. Building on the lessons of others enables leaders to efficiently learn about current trends in their fields of interest, gaps, the latest thinking related to effective practice, program or service quality, and outcomes.

4. **Choose to do what is important, and clarify why you value it.** Understanding and communicating why a decision is important is particularly important when making difficult decisions about resource allocation. Be candid about the existing challenges, assets, and limitations. Be clear about who makes which decisions.

5. **Build action, assessment, and revision capabilities into your strategy.** Too often, leaders celebrate adoption of a new strategy or plan without sufficiently realizing that the hard work is really just starting. In other words, they put too much effort into "ready, set," and not enough for "go." Implementation requires accountability, perseverance, and adjustment.

Adapted from "Five Ways to Ensure That Your Strategy Falls Short," Stanford Social Innovation Review
http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/five_ways_to_ensure_that_your_strategy_falls_short

Our principles for Strategic Thinking:

a) We encourage significant, meaningful **Engagement** by those in the organization and others who are clearly affected by the goals and anticipated changes.

b) We model **Facilitative Leadership.**

c) We encourage **Shared Learning** – a co-equal approach to framing the questions to help the organization improve, and to apply to broader public administration interests.

d) We practice **Flexibility** in responding to emerging needs or unexpected opportunities.

e) We discuss and demonstrate **Accountability and Transparency** and expect the client is committed to practicing the same.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

You are invited to provide your insights into the state of the organization and how it can best position itself to meet the ever-changing environment in which it operates.

Please take 15-20 minutes to review the questions on the following page. Spend a few moments in reflection before you start. Then make notes to yourself about your responses. Please write legibly as you will be asked to leave your notes to be incorporated into a master list.

As you think about the current times and environment and what's changed recently, consider:

- Demographic changes
- Local, State, Federal policy changes
- Growth pressures
- Infrastructure needs
- Key Partnerships
- Organizational Implications
- Resource allocations
- Environmental Implications

You're asked for your thoughts in these six keys areas of focus.

People and culture	Processes, ways of doing business	Capital/ Infrastructure	Technology	Stewardship of resources	Communication

Feel free to make notes about others areas you feel strongly about, too. All of your comments will be considered.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN						
	People and culture	Processes, ways of doing business	Capital/ Infrastructure	Technology	Stewardship of resources	Communication
What specific aspects of the organization are working particularly well?						
What specific aspects of the organization might need strengthening?						
Given the current times and environment, what opportunities present themselves?						
Given the current times and environment, what challenges lie ahead?						

Goal Development Exercise: From Goals to Objectives (pp. 2-5):

After establishing the desired goals, the next tasks are these:

1. **Brainstorm. Clarify what progress toward a given goal would look like.**
   a. What new results or conditions would you like to begin to see (fewer of these bad results or more of these good ones)?
   b. What would be happening if those new results or conditions were occurring?
   c. How would things be different if those new conditions were in place or those new results were happening?
2. **Of all the possible new conditions or results, identify a few that seem the most *compelling* – however that might be defined - and draft objective statements for them.**
3. **Let the ideas simmer.** Reflect. Refine. Reorganize.
4. **At a later date, review all the proposed objectives and select the ones that are likely to have the most positive impact in helping the organization meet the desired goal.**
   - Focus on a few strategic objectives rather than many comprehensive objectives.

One possible sentence structure to use for developing objectives:

To [change]	[what]	By [#]	By [when]
• Increase • Decrease • Find a solution	• The desired result or condition • Might have to add "where" or "who" to be specific	• % change • # count • Might have to use best available proxy indicator	• Some future date

How to draft the sentence:

- Identify the "what" you want to change, the desired result or condition you want to achieve.
- Specify how you want to change it:
  - ⇒ Increase the "good" things that happen OR
  - ⇒ Decrease the "bad" things that happen.
  - ⇒ Try to express the change positively, if that is possible.
- Define a desired numeric change.
- Set a date.

Example

Goal:
To adapt the organization's services to reflect the needs or interests of the changing population in our community.

Brainstorm ideas:

The conditions we want to achieve are these…

- We want to serve our new residents as well as we serve our traditional residents
- We want to be able to communicate successfully with anyone who comes in our doors
- We want to…

To do this, we need to work on strategies such as….

- reducing language barriers…
- learning more about each other…
- understanding each other's cultures and expectations…
- understanding how our work applies to their lives…
- identifying the physical, intellectual, or logistical gaps between us

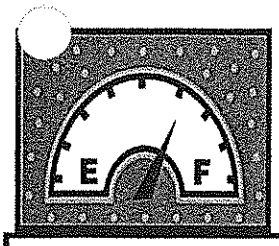
Draft Objective 1: To increase **[the change]** the percentage of Spanish-speaking clients who successfully complete the application process for Service X **[what]** by 30% **[how much]** per year for the next three years **[when].**

OBJECTIVE:

To [change]	[what]	By [#]	By [when]
• Increase • Decrease • Find a solution	• The desired result or condition • Might have to add "where" or "who" to be specific	• % change • # count • Might have to use best available proxy indicator	• Some future date

GOAL: The result or condition we want to achieve is ...

To do this, we need to work on strategies such as....



How can you move the needle on this goal?

(Complete for each objective)

OBJECTIVE:

Test Your Logic: How is your objective going to make a difference? What is your "Theory of Change?"

Once you have this conversation, the details on the next page should quickly fall into place.

The Current Condition		**Why do I believe this to be true?** (data, experience, stories, etc.)
If we changed this		*Double-check your logic about how the proposed change might bring about the desired condition.*
This result would happen, which causes...		
New Condition		
Which changes...		*Repeat as many iterations of* **Change > Result > New Condition** *as you need to achieve the goal.*
Which changes...		
The Condition We Want to Create....		

The Finishing Details: Holding Yourselves Accountable

INDICATOR(S): ***Implementation:*** **How will we know we've done what we said we would do?** ***Results:*** **How will we know we've moved conditions toward our desired goal?**	**TRACKING:** **What data is already available? Where is it? Who collects it?**
MEASURE: **How will you know when resources are in place and tasks have been completed?**	**INVOLVEMENT:** **Who else needs to be involved to make or track progress?**