

GASTONIA CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT- SESSION 1
JANUARY 19, 2024 – 12:00 NOON

CENTRALINA REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT OFFICES,
10735 DAVID TAYLOR DR., SUITE 250, CHARLOTTE, NC

Mayor Richard Franks called the Strategic Planning Retreat to order at 12:00 Noon on Friday, January 19, 2024, at the Centralina Regional Council of Government Offices, 10735 David Taylor Drive, Suite 250, Charlotte, North Carolina. Ms. Suzanne Gibbs, City Clerk, recorded the minutes.

PRESENT: Mayor Richard Franks
Council Members: Robert Kellogg
Dave Kirlin
James Gallagher
Charles Odom
Jennifer Stepp
Donyel Barber

City Manager: Michael C. Peoples
City Attorney: L. Ashley Smith
Assistant City Manager: Adrian Miller
Assistant City Manager: Melody B. Reagan

Ms. Geraldine Gardner, Executive Director, Centralina Council of Governments
Mr. John Holmes, GAME Specialist, Centralina Council of Governments

ABSENT: Assistant City Manager Quentin McPhatter

WELCOME, OPENING COMMENTS, AND
MEETING GUIDELINES

Mayor Richard Franks welcomed everyone and turned the meeting over to City Manager Michael Peoples. Mr. Peoples spoke about the meeting objectives for today which include discussion on Vision, Mission, Core Values and Goals, Accomplishments, and looking at new Objectives.

Mr. Peoples turned the meeting over to Ms. Geraldine Gardner, Executive Director of Centralina Regional Council of Governments.

Ms. Geraldine Gardner, Executive Director of Centralina Regional Council of Governments, provided meeting objectives, ground rules for the meeting, and facilitation approaches for the meeting. She asked that everyone introduce themselves.

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Ms. Gardner spoke about the objectives for the meeting. She said conversation today would include the City's Mission Statement, the City's Strategic Plan and Goals, and conversation about Core Values.

Keys to Highly Effective Public Service-Oriented Teams

Mayor, Councilmembers, and City Management Team engaged in a series of activities to explore how their individual strengths can contribute to effective and successful teamwork and discussed results of the activities.

Strategic Planning Foundations

The Centralina team provided a brief presentation on strategic planning in the local government context to establish a common language and definition of key terms. A Strategic Plan foundation includes: Vision (for the future), Mission (why we exist), and Cores Values (how you act and treat each other).

City Goals: Reflections and Discussion

Mayor, Council, and City Management Team reflected on the City's current goals and engaged in interactive discussion regarding key opportunities for FY25 and beyond.

Strategic Planning Foundations: Focus on Vision & Mission

Mayor, Council, and City Management Team engaged in a series of interactive discussions and activities designed to determine if changes or enhancements to the current vision and mission are needed.

Strategic Planning Foundations: Core Values

Mayor, Council, and City Management Team reviewed the current core values and discussed opportunities to incorporate and utilize the values as a highly effective team.

RECAP/WRAP UP

Ms. Geraldine Gardner said her team will report back with all of the input from exercises performed during the meeting today and will include recommendations for moving forward.

City Manager Michael Peoples asked Ms. Melody Reagan to provide highlights of the 2023 Accomplishments. A copy of the 2023 Accomplishments is included in the exhibits.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 17)

City Manager Michael Peoples provided the 2023-2025 Goals and Objectives for review by Council. A copy of the Goals and Objectives is included in the exhibits.

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(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 18)

Ms. Gardner thanked everyone for the great teamwork today.

Mayor Franks adjourned the meeting at 5:11 p.m.

Richard Franks, Mayor

L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney

Suzanne J. Gibbs, City Clerk

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GASTONIA CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT- SESSION 2

JANUARY 20, 2024 – 8:30 a.m.

MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS CENTER (MOC), TRAINING ROOM

1300 N. BROAD ST., GASTONIA, NC

Mayor Richard Franks called the Strategic Planning Retreat to order at 8:33 a.m. on Saturday, January 20, 2024, at the Municipal Operations Center (MOC) Training Room, 1300 N. Broad St., Gastonia, North Carolina. Ms. Suzanne Gibbs, City Clerk, recorded the minutes.

PRESENT: Mayor Richard Franks

Council Members: Robert Kellogg
Dave Kirlin
James Gallagher
Charles Odom
Jennifer Stepp
Donyel Barber

City Manager: Michael C. Peoples

City Attorney: L. Ashley Smith

Assistant City Manager: Adrian Miller

Assistant City Manager: Melody B. Reagan

Assistant City Manager: Quentin McPhatter

Director of Financial Services: Crystal Certain

Assistant Director of Financial Services: Jessie Williams

Director of Human Resources: Judy Smith

Director of Economic Development: Kristy Crisp

ABSENT: None

WELCOME, OPENING COMMENTS, AND

MEETING GUIDELINES

Mayor Richard Franks welcomed everyone and recognized City Manager Michael Peoples.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The Retail Coach Update
- Update from Gaston County EDC
- Existing Incentive Agreements Update
and Review of Current Incentive Grant Policies

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- New Development Round Up

Ms. Kristy Crisp, Director of Economic Development, introduced Mr. Charles Parker, The Retail Coach, a national recruitment and development firm. Mr. Parker provided an update on The Retail Coach including information on cell phone data which allows for mapping where consumers shop on a regular basis. He said the trade area can be determined by mobile location data. Mr. Parker said 177,000 people make up the main shoppers in Gastonia.

Mr. Parker provided information on local retail businesses and food establishments as relates to their other locations nationwide and statewide.

Mr. Parker said Retail Coach stays in constant contact with all of their targets. He requested feedback from Council on businesses they would like to see come to Gastonia.

Mr. Parker responded to questions.

A copy of Mr. Parker's presentation is included in the exhibits.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 19)

Ms. Kristy Crisp, Director of Economic Development, introduced Mr. Donny Hicks, Director, Gaston County Economic Development Commission; and Ms. Alicia Summey, Assistant Director, Gaston County Economic Development Commission.

Mr. Donny Hicks provided information on commercial projects within Gastonia and Gaston County including Gateway 85, Trinity Partners, WestEnd Logistics Center, NorthWest Gateway Logistics, Gaston Commerce Center, Applecreek Corporate Center, and upcoming development.

Ms. Kristy Crisp spoke about Economic Development Grants and Incentives.

Ms. Alicia Summey provided on overview of Economic Indicators related to Labor Force, Unemployment, and Average Annual Wages for Gaston County and Gastonia.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 20)

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

- Review of Budget Calendar & Process
- December 2023 Monthly Financial Statement
- FY 2024 Revenue Forecast
- Fund Balance Update and Policy Review
- Debt Analysis
- Capital Planning Modeling

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- Growth Data from Building Permits
- Tourism Development Authority/Hotel Occupancy Tax Update

Ms. Crystal Certain, Director of Financial Services, presented an update on the Financial Overview. She provided information on the General Fund Fund Balance History, the Annual Debt Payments, General Obligation Debt, FUSE Debt, Conference Center Debt, Water & Sewer Debt.

Ms. Certain introduced Ms. Amy Vitner of First Tryon Advisors. Mr. Brandon Decoste from First Tryon Advisors accompanied Ms. Vitner. Ms. Vitner provided additional information related to debt supported from the General Fund and presented debt comparison scenarios for future anticipated needs using the Capital Planning Model. Ms. Vitner responded to questions.

Ms. Crystal Certain spoke about the Budget Calendar. She said the hope is to have a balanced budget by April 15. Ms. Certain responded to questions.

Ms. Certain provided an update on the December Monthly Financial Report. She said 50% of the year has been completed and 42.87% of the budget has been expended. Ms. Certain reported specifics on each fund including the General Fund, Electric Fund, Water & Sewer Fund, Stormwater Utility Fund, Solid Waste Fund, Transit Fund, and Powell Bill. She reported on Sales Tax Revenues, Total Property Tax Values, Ad Valorem Revenues and provided a breakdown of Taxable Property Values. She provided information on Real Property Tax Values and General Fund Fund Balance History.

Ms. Certain provided information on 5-Year Sales Tax Revenues and responded to questions.

Ms. Certain provided information on Total Property Tax Values, Ad Valorem Revenues – 5 Year Tread, Breakdown of Taxable Property Values (Real, Personal and Public Service Companies), and Real Property Tax Values – 5 Years.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 21)

HUMAN RESOURCES

- FY 2025 Compensation Options and Discussion of Salary Study for FY 2026
- Update on Career Development Program
- State Retirement Contribution Changes
- Comprehensive Insurance Update
- Update on Employee Engagement Activities Including Employee Survey

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Ms. Judy Smith, Director of Human Resources, shared information on Position Summary and vacancies within the City. She reported there are 952 full-time employees and 86 current vacancies. Ms. Smith said the last Compensation Survey was conducted in May 2021 by Stegal. She said the city of Concord and Gaston County are currently conducting compensation studies.

Ms. Smith reported that City of Gastonia employees received a 4% across-the-board increase in July 2023. In January of 2022, employees received a market adjustment based on what Gaston County was doing at that time. The average increase for employees was 10.61% across-the-board. Ms. Smith said another pay study is being proposed for Fall 2024 with a potential implementation date of July 2025.

Ms. Judy Smith provided an update on compensation history for the City of Gastonia from 2019 – 2024. She said staff is currently looking at compensation scenarios of a 3%, 4%, or 5% increase along with continuing the 1% Career Development increase but that nothing has been decided.

Ms. Smith provided information on Retirement history rates which are set by the State Treasurer and which have been steadily increasing year after year.

A history of the insurance program and health insurance claims was provided by Ms. Smith.

Ms. Judy Smith presented information on the Diabetes Program. She said participation in the program is growing and there are currently 75 employees participating in the program.

Ms. Smith presented information on the Health Savings Account (HSA). She said staff recommends increasing the HSA contribution from \$750 to \$1,000 for all eligible employees and retirees. She spoke about the waist incentive which will be paid in April of 2025.

Ms. Smith provided information on the Dental Insurance and spoke about the changes that were made to increase benefits in FY24 for both the Base Plan and the Buy-Up Plan.

Ms. Smith spoke about the Employee Health Clinic and Wellness Program. She proposed extending the CaroMont wellness contract for one year and extending the Atrium clinic contract for one year. She spoke about the new facility for re-locating the Employee Health Clinic.

Ms. Smith spoke about the initiatives created over the last year for the benefit of employees including compensation increases across the board, creation of the voluntary career development program for a 1% salary increase, establishment of the Employee Engagement Committee, increased travel budgets, creation of the supervisory training program, City Talk information presentations by the City Manager, and increased investment in equipment, investment in facility improvements, improved safety programming, and the future expansion of the health care clinic.

Ms. Smith spoke about the Career Development Program and the new Employee Survey. She said results of the new survey will be discussed with department heads in early March.

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(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 22)

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY AGENDA

- Federal
- N.C. General Assembly
- Gaston County
- Legislative Calendar for 2024

City Manager Michael Peoples reviewed information on the Federal Priority Issues, State Priority Issues, and County Priority Issues of the Advocacy Agenda and provided suggestions for possible updates.

Discussion was had on the need for a meeting with the local delegation to discuss pending changes to elections in 2025.

Councilman Kellogg spoke about homelessness and the need for direction, prevention, and education. A copy of a handout Mr. Kellogg provided Council regarding affordable housing/homelessness is included in the exhibits.

Discussion was had on the need for meetings with the Planning Commission and with County Commissioners.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 23)

**AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA),
NC STATE DIRECT GRANTS, AND BRIC PROJECT UPDATE**

City Manager Michael Peoples asked that Council review the information on ARPA projects and said he would present an update at an upcoming City Council meeting.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 6 to Minute Book 113 at Page 24)

RECAP/WRAP UP

- Major Consensus Items
- Take Away/Follow Up

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Mayor Franks adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Richard Franks, Mayor

L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney

Suzanne J. Gibbs, City Clerk

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