



DATE: March 10, 2020

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Greg Humora, City Manager

SUBJECT: Strategic Goals Interactive Workshop Report

At City Council direction, staff developed a new meeting format this year where the City Council could interact with the public in a less formal setting than a City Council meeting or a typical Town Hall meeting. The City's Strategic Goals were used as suggested discussion topics for the meeting. The workshop was held at the Community Center on Saturday, February 8th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. In addition to staff and the Council, there were twenty-four people in attendance.

The format was a set-up of five tables, one for each of the Councilmembers. At each table were staff and either one or two of the City's goals for discussion topics. Two tables had two similar goals so that the seven goals could be split among five tables.

The workshop attendees were asked to start at one table, spend twenty minutes discussing the goal and then rotate to the next table. The Councilmember and staff remained at the same table throughout the workshop.

Discussion at each table varied sometimes discussing the goals and other times just discussing other City topics. A summary of the discussion at each table is attached to this memo.

Following a review of the comments at the workshop, the staff recommendation is not to modify any of the Strategic Goals at this time.

Staff will be prepared to review the workshop results at the Council meeting and to accept direction as appropriate.

Attachment: Strategic Goals Interactive Workshop Feedback Summary



DATE: March 10, 2020
TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council
FROM: Greg Humora, City Manager
SUBJECT: Strategic Goals Interactive Workshop Feedback Summary

The following is a summary of the feedback received at each table during the workshop.

Table 1: Goal - Safe community
Police Department & Fire Department

- The citizens shared their opinion about wanting more sidewalks throughout the city.
- One citizen recommended we move the homeless issues into the Safe Community category.
- We should consider sending out more social media posts on personal safety (walking at night, elderly drivers, reflectors, etc.).
- Increase the posting of bicycle safety via social media. Include courtesy suggestions for drivers and cyclists.
- Find ways to reduce traffic congestion around schools.
- Enjoyed some of the community outreach by the PD (Life on the beat).
- They have noticed an increase in red light violators in the city.
- Wants more police officers, higher community presence, and supports hiring more cops.

Table 2: Goal – Maintain a financially sound and affordable city government
Continue to improve high quality municipal services
Finance Department

(Q. = question A. = answer C. = comment)

Q. Of the services provided have there been any identified that have not been properly spent and/or regretted spending on a specific project or initiative?

A. Based on the budget, there isn't enough funds to pay for needed projects.

- No need to alter existing goals/plans

- "Achieve" instead of maintain since we are exceeding resources currently

- Long term effects of our pension liability were discussed as well as potential revenue with the Cannabis Business Tax

Q. What happens if we don't meet the goal?

A. Penalties and staffing issues. Needs are changing and we need to adjust our staffing to accommodate those needs.

- Part of the population is aging and will need more services.

C. Climate Action Plan (CAP) was brought up: not focusing on budgeting but expectations

Increasing our resources – reallocating sources and that issues with the CAP affect every department. Citywide program that needs resources and new program in place requires us to reallocate resources.

Q. Where are we in the process?

A. We are at the start of the process, purpose of this workshop.

C. Add goal for the city to fully resource and fulfill CAP Implementations

Q. How much annual costs for raises in Fire Department & Police Department and how do they affect the unfunded liability?

A. Full Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) funding discussion at the financial forecast study session on 3/10

Q. Where are the revenues going to come from to fund these new CAP Implementations?

A. Prop 13 homes selling on the market, new development, cannabis tax

Q. Do we have the ability/capacity to use a Bond to complete new facility projects (MacArthur Park/Library/New City Hall)?

A. Approximately 75% of revenues go towards staff, what's left over goes towards other things. Proposition D (2004), Funded Fire Station 11, Fire Station 13, and Police Station were paid by assessment on La Mesa resident's property tax. We do have the ability to bond.

- Grants are used to improve portions of the parks and facilities.

Q. What are the top 3 shifts in terms of reallocation of funds that the city has done or will do?

A. Cannabis program, CAP, and increase in Fire Department and Police Department costs.

- Pension, PERS discussion/explanation of PERS funding sources and Great Recession

- Looking for way to stretch resources, and difficult to implement new programs with limited resources.

Redevelopment increases, property values increase, equals ongoing resources.

Q. How are the City Reserves?

A. 54% and healthy but budget forecast shows decrease.

Q. Where do our funds come from?

A. ~70% taxes, fees, fines, and other agencies. If property values increase we get more money. La Mesa receives smaller percentage of property taxes than other jurisdictions (Prop 13).

Q. Where does a majority of the money from property taxes go?

A. Schools. Effective taxing agencies, La Mesa get 10-11% of property tax

Q. What is the problem with pension and how did it happen?

A. In 2008, PERS lost 30% of portfolio. This will be a problem for 30 years. PERS is currently earning 7-8% interest.

Q. Are there plans for a new library and who is responsible for our library?

A. There are currently no plans, and the County is responsible for the library, the City of La Mesa owns the building and is responsible for building maintenance.

Q. Deferred maintenance of city property – At which point does it cost more to deal with something later than right now?

A. Long term dependence on revenue sources for streets, public buildings/parks

Q. Should the City have a full time grant writer?

A. Not cost effective to hire a grant writer and departments are responsible for their own grants.

- There are too many places in the city that a grant wouldn't fix the problem

C. Parking should no longer be free in the City to the public and those funds could be used to fix the current road problems. We should be pricing out costs for all traffic maintenance to deter automobile use and decrease greenhouse gas. Drivers should pay for leisurely items.

Q. If we dip into General Fund reserves, what are the long term effects?

A. Built up the reserves for this exact reason and Prop L needs to be extended

Q. What is the council doing to fix the problems?

A. We need to reduce expenses and reallocate funds. The state needs to step in and help.

Table 3: Goal – Revitalize neighborhoods and corridors
Effective and efficient traffic circulation and transportation
Public Works Department

- A common theme was the infrequent service and locations for bus service, that smaller buses making more frequent trips was preferred. “First mile, last mile” was emphasized. A computerized bus system was suggested (Smart City).
- Several commented that sidewalks needed to be prioritized near bus stops.
- Request for class I bike along University Avenue and bike lanes throughout the City was received. A request for a dedicated bus only lane on University was received.
- ADU’s will bring more multi-generational families living together and encouraging well thought out mixed use development was suggested.
- Several comments were received to have more community events and networking opportunities.
- Individual comments: Too much traffic, need more trash cans, staggered work hours, revitalize the west side of El Cajon Boulevard, eliminate parking requirements for projects located adjacent to trolley stops were received.

Table 4: Goal – Enhanced Recreation and Quality of Life
Community Services Department

Key Takeaways:

- Attendees that were asked agreed the interactive workshop is better than having a 2nd Town Hall, and they liked it being on a Saturday
- Suggested hosting and televising future Town Halls from the Community Center
- CAP initiative doesn’t belong solely under the *Enhanced Recreation and Quality of Life Opportunities* goal
- City needs to do a better job at marketing events and services

Enhanced Recreation

Comments about existing parks:

- Briercrest. Like that it’s next to senior housing. Makes sense to have adjacent to developments so people don’t have to cross roads or drive to parks.
- Jackson connection to Murray Manor Elementary fields seems limited. Since 9-11 and for safety reasons, we have lost some access between parks and schools other than for leagues.
- Aztec. Observation that there were sports groups/camps who use the parks without obtaining permits. One solution is to have Park Rangers on patrol checking permits more often, esp. in the summer. If during business hours, concerned residents can call the Recreation Dept. to report.
- One new resident was impressed by quality of dog parks in San Diego area, with praise for Canine Corners at Harry Griffen Park.
- Parks are well used and for folks that have lived in La Mesa since the 1960’s, nice to see growth both in use and vegetation, e.g., Jackson and Aztec Parks.

New Parks:

- Expressed need for more parks/recreation options along mixed-use El Cajon Blvd. and Alvarado corridor, west side of La Mesa, and in or near new developments. Looking for new park locations, to develop parks is part of City’s Park Master Plan. This includes pocket parks.

March 10, 2020

Strategic Goals Interactive Workshop Feedback Summary

Page 4

- One member asked if City considering forthcoming real estate opportunities, i.e. businesses that are closing, to use for recreation centers. Is La Mesa considering pop-up parks. AARP/Livable La Mesa Action Plan recommends pop-up parks (temporary test sites).
- What percentage of developer impact fees go to park construction cost?
- City facilities are very old and ill equipped to handle population growth. Prioritize adding parks and recreation (and library) facilities.
- More than one group noted lack of parks planned within walking distance of new developments (Alvarado) and El Cajon Blvd, west.
- What does the City need in order to meet the goals? Parks need additional funding in order to be developed. MacArthur Park Master Plan will make some funding recommendations and strategies to fund park construction, also need to consider operating costs of new facilities.
- In addition to MacArthur and Collier Park, the property on Waite Drive needs funding resources. Priorities sometimes change based on available funding (grants). Staff pursues grants in attempt to match project priorities.

MacArthur Park

- Wasn't aware of MacArthur Park workshops until saw the flyer here today.
- Mac Arthur Park plan was discussed. Master plan is funded and planning is underway. Next steps are presenting concept designs that include new community and aquatic centers to community (March 25 Workshop), cost estimates and present plan to City Council this summer.
- Update on Community Garden at MacArthur Park. La Mesa Park and Recreation Foundation received a \$5k grant from local landscape architects to get things started. Postcards are available in lobby.

Collier Park

- Phase 2 construction is waiting for Prop. 68 funds, then will know what can be done with funds received. Spring House not part of Phase 2 plan as currently funded.
- Does the City find out the needs of community, in the immediate neighborhood around a site, when researching new park locations? Parks are for families and children, and that neighborhood needs should be reflected in neighborhood parks. Should Collier Park be used as a location for pickle ball if neighbors within walking distance weren't using park for that a feature?
- Park master plans include outreach to and input from the neighbors as well as all citizens and park users.

Recreation

How to increase participation?

- Is the City looking at data to identify social and participation issues? City does needs assessment as part of Master Plans and projects.
- The City doesn't have a full-fledged professional recreation director and staff. City does have recreation staff that contracts out for instructors that are subject matter experts. Upside to contracting is City isn't incurring employee costs such as long-term pension costs. City staff should meet regularly with partner agencies to align services to not duplicate. Align public/private partnerships to meet changing needs of our community.
- La Mesa is experiencing changes to infrastructure and demographics, population. Partnerships need to be solid to help accommodate, and need to communicate their services while we work on longer-term plans. Many current partners used to be City's competition; we don't want to compete by providing same services. Kroc Center while in San Diego, still augments La Mesa's recreation services.
- Time is problem for parents' ability to participate and volunteer. City needs to publicize more about what parks and rec have to offer for residents without children, programs for adults and promotion of community as a whole. There are 3 age groups: kids, middle, seniors; each have different interests and needs. Are there enough facilities to host programs on a regular basis?

March 10, 2020

Strategic Goals Interactive Workshop Feedback Summary

Page 5

Quality of Life

Volunteers

- Comment that instilling volunteering in youth is valuable early in life and is important because it's one they will keep their entire life. Have youth plant trees to instill ownership. Contact students, scout groups, local employers, Oasis, SDSU Osher Institute, and Helix Charter High School.
- One challenge is that City is competing with other local organizations for adult volunteers.
- City could ask companies to bring employees to volunteer at events. This has worked for Park Appreciation Day and Earth Day. City focused is on recruiting older adults.

Safety Concerns

- Cameras and volunteer patrols were suggested to help with safety in parks.
- What is the City doing to outreach to the homeless? City has a Citizen Homeless Task Force.
- How should residents respond to homeless concerns? Can call police department non-emergency number and request a contact from Homeless Outreach Team, unless a crime is being committed.
- All residents can be eyes on the parks for the community. Report graffiti, etc. using the YourGov app.
- Livable La Mesa Action Plan that included areas in addition to parks such as more sidewalks, and walkability.
- Homeless services should be considered quality of life.

Climate Action Plan/Transit

- CAP should be its own unique goal, while recognizing it touches all other goals.
- The CAP won't be addressed if someone is not responsible for it or held accountable.
- How are plants selected and trees maintained? Does the City have an arborist and how was City making efforts to remove grass areas? New development has drought tolerant planting palette. Helix Water District offers rebates and has grass removal incentives for residents.
- Need for transit oriented development.
- Need for transit stops in front of parks.
- Would the City would consider having at least one street be pedestrian only? City is working on a complete streets plan for streets to accommodate all transportation modes.

City Communication/Marketing of Programs

- City does not market enough, not just for recreation, but all departments. Communication is key, esp. for those that aren't tech savvy. Communication improvement needed. Consider dedicated marketing person.
- City website has a lot of info but it can be hard to find.
- Most residents don't know about Boards and Commissions.
- City needs to share more information, and put it where residents already go to find information, not just what's convenient for City.
- Use social media, including La Mesa Happenings Facebook Group and Nextdoor
- Use local media: MyCity magazine; La Mesa Courier
- Use physical signs such as the marquee at Community Center
- Use City website
- City website seems to be designed around City structure and for City employees, not for residents
- Some knew about signing up for alerts from City but most did not.
- Website is not user friendly for phones yet.
- Would MTS allow bulletin boards at transit stops?

Table 5: Goal – Safe and Affordable Homes for All Current and Future Residents

Community Development Department

In general, workshop participants recognized a need for more housing, particularly affordable housing, and were knowledgeable about current housing policies and issues. There was interest in the City being more aggressive towards increasing the supply of affordable housing. The policy goal was supported and considered to continue to be appropriate and important.

Participants expressed concerns about the new Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) goals and how the City plans to meet them, including whether rezoning and/or inclusionary housing policies can be expected. Grossmont Shopping Center was suggested as a primary housing opportunity site. There was support for an inclusionary housing requirement, although it was also expressed that incentive policies can be equally successful in yielding affordable units. Fee waivers were suggested as one example of an incentive.

Staff fielded multiple questions about the Old Police Station redevelopment, the Alvarado Specific Plan, and other projects in process and under construction. There was a concern that the Old Police Station should provide higher rates of affordability. There was also interest in requiring the Alvarado Specific Plan site to include affordable units, or possibly single room occupancy (SRO)-type housing.

Concerns about high home prices were raised. La Mesa is relatively affordable now, but need to be concerned with long-term neighborhood investment and viability. It was suggested that there was a need for smaller homes.

While there was some support for reduced parking requirements, multiple residents expressed concerns about whether available transit options justify the reductions. It was stated that “big, bold changes are needed to improve the transportation network” prior to implementing drastic parking reductions. There was discussion about the housing feasibility study for transit oriented development at the Spring and Amaya trolley stations. It was suggested that the City promote the Civic Center parking lot for park-and-ride use.

Long-term community livability and quality-of-life was the most-discussed topic. The consensus was that the City should continue to pursue mixed-use development, particularly services, to ensure walkable, dynamic, and self-reliant neighborhoods, even at the expense of some residential density. Mixed-use means a diverse mix of uses from block to block, not necessarily on the same site, to ensure that residents can walk to jobs and local businesses. In short, too much housing disrupts the economic balance and hurts community vibrancy and walkability.

Other quality of life issues that were raised include the need for adequate green space, open space, and opportunities for the keeping of pets at all housing densities and affordability levels. It was noted that housing development needs to foster multi-generational connections as demographics are changing. Diversity should be encouraged.

It was expressed that the Housing Element should take a holistic planning approach towards housing as one component of a viable and sustainable community. One resident was concerned that the state’s housing policies would undercut the state’s climate policies. It was suggested that the City’s priority should be a balanced, walkable, bikable community, and then implement that vision through housing policy.

Addressing homelessness was raised as a critical need. Homeless at the Civic Center need facilities. The City should expedite development of homeless shelters and the City’s recent interest in addressing East County homelessness was recognized and appreciated.