



Carl Vinson Institute of Government

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City of Hampton Retreat

City of Madison Public Safety Building

April 5-6, 2022

In attendance:

Mayor Ann Tarpley, Mayor Pro Tem Marty Weeks; Councilwoman Shelia L. Barlow; Councilman Henry Byrd; Councilman Devlin Cleveland; Councilwoman Mary Ann Mitcham; Councilman Willie Turner; Alex Cohilas, City Manager; Andrea Atwater, Director of Human Resources; Shelby Bentley, Executive Assistant to the City Manager; John Burdin, Assistant Director of Public Works; David Corn, Director of Public Works; Lenox Forsyth, Director of Finance; Wanda Moore, Director of Community Development; Bo Turner, Chief of Police; L'Erin Wiggins, City Attorney; and Ed Wall, Financial Advisor

Facilitator: M. Chrissy Marlowe, Carl Vinson Institute of Government

Vision Tree Visions:

- Live, Work, Play, and Grow City
- Healthy, Safe, Vibrant, and Diverse: Small Town Values with Big Town Dreams
- A Cohesive Community: Pride and Progress
- Hometown Feel with Economic Health: Live, Work, Play, and Age-in-Place
- Safe and Thriving City
- Fun, Safe, and Active: Positive and Healthy Growth
- Safe, Fun Place to Live: Prosperous, Beautiful City with Diverse Community
- Community Growth and Development
- Right people and leadership to make vision happen
- Jobs and opportunities
- Better public works infrastructure

- Similarities:
 - Seem to be on same page with visions
 - **Need financial resources**
 - **Need to identify stakeholders, engage to build relationships and buy-in**
 - Some citizens want change; others do not; must determine how to navigate dichotomy

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- Need plans and action
- Need 5-year capital plan
- Need training
- Leadership: trustworthy; know your role, do your role; good communication; how are we going to lead
- Communication: share more, communicate and promote successes; more citizen-friendly

Strategic Pillars Discussion: *After discussion of each of the four Strategic Pillars developed previously, there was consensus that these still stand as the City's guiding strategic direction.*

1. Competent, Fair, Open, and Receptive Government

- A little vague for implementation; edit suggestion: "maintain transparent government to attract and maintain diverse community"
- Edit suggestion: use "inclusive" instead of "diverse"
- What does "small town feel" look like/mean?
 - Aesthetics, architecture, layout of downtown
 - Railroad tracks
 - Common features to everyone
 - Walkability: sidewalks, front porches, trails
 - Events like Porch-fest
 - Welcoming those new to town
 - Jobs in town
 - Accessibility of council and staff
 - Leadership create and convey this feel
- Ways to accomplish: retaining and recruiting quality staff, downtown businesses, and citizens; equipment for efficiency
- Access to same information
- Fairness and consistency in service delivery: follow processes
- Openness
- Listen to citizens, be receptive to their input
- Set expectations

2. Invest in Economic Development

- Mainstreet Program does not focus on whole city
- Need to consider structure of economic development efforts in City
- Need economic development director and media specialist
- Make city a destination with arts, entertainment, shopping
- Expand downtown district to I-20
- Revisit at budget time to address need for additional staff
- Play is missing in city

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3. Invest in Infrastructure: *as a plan is in place and being implemented, there was consensus that no additional discussion of this item was necessary.*
4. Grow Quality of Life
 - Connectivity is key component (LCI project)
 - Need to development in brownfields and grayfields in and around downtown
 - Need art in unusual places
 - Dedicated electric transit downtown
 - Need a CVB as arm of chamber
 - Art bears throughout city, reflecting first name of City, Bear Creek
 - Recreation center, grocery store: focus on what the City needs and focus efforts towards those

Economic Development/Downtown Discussion:

- **Need broader outreach into community**; reach out to HOAs; parks; suggestion boxes in community; “meeting in a box”
- Important aspects for downtown:
 - Street trees have economic impact; art
 - Regional identity and assets (Atlanta Motor Speedway)
 - Tourism
 - Businesses that meet local needs
 - Businesses that drive foot traffic regularly
 - Code enforcement in blighted areas

Stormwater Discussion:

- **Council needs to establish a stormwater utility program setting fee and administration model by June 1.** This revenue stream will enable leveraging funds bond projects to fix current problems.
- Falcon will develop a recommendation for fee in 30-45 days, depending on phasing of projects. Will work with staff for three recommendations, based on audit outcomes.
- **Current ordinance doesn't regulate fencing/require fencing permit causing problems with fences in right of way causing access issues.**
- **Road standards are necessary.**
- Maintenance has been done only upon customer complaints, no regular maintenance.
- Need a stormwater analysis and comprehensive plan: what the current problems are, what will need maintenance and repair in the future, what would qualify for bond funding.
- Doing things on the cheap is costing money- had we had more staff to do maintenance, wouldn't have these problems.
- Currently, City has inadequate manpower and equipment to maintain stormwater and other infrastructure.

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City Charter/Code of Ordinances

- Need changes to charter and code of ordinances to correct conflicting language and clarify processes in several areas.
- Potential areas for charter and code of ordinances amendments:
 - Councilmembers will let Mayor and Ms. Wiggins know which articles of charter and aspects of code they would like addressed.
 - Mayor will gather consensus on what Council will act on, asking staff to put together recommendations.

Financial Policies and Planning

- Need work session on debt management, general fund, and investment policies.
- Need work session on LOST, establishment and rollback of millage.
- Financial policies are important to achieve GFOA certificate on audit and a high credit rating.
- SPLOST-letter to Henry Co. from all cities' mayors to collect appropriate funds; meeting with cities in near future.
- Financial vulnerabilities for city include reliance on building permits/development fees and LOST; no property taxes, and a likely upcoming recession.
 - Reason city was able to roll back property taxes is because staffing is inadequate, no investment back into infrastructure maintenance and projects.
 - Recommendation is to add 5 mills on current tax digest, which is slated to grow exponentially in next 5 years (especially based on annexations).
 - LOST negotiations by an expert on all 9 categories.

Next Steps:

- Request recommendations from staff and consultants.
- Schedule necessary work sessions.
- Communicate with stakeholders and public about important issues and decisions.
- Follow through on implementation of decisions.

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