



Strategic Planning Staff Workshop Summary



City of Albany

3/5/2013

INTRODUCTION

On February 4, 2013, the City Council authorized retaining the services of Dr. Frank Benest to assist the City in conducting a strategic planning process to outline goals and create “a better story” for the City of Albany.

In anticipation of and preparation for a City Council Strategic Planning Workshop, Dr. Benest conducted a staff-level workshop on March 5, 2013. A total of 35 employees attended the workshop including line staff from each of the City’s Departments as well as the City’s Management Team (department heads and management staff). The following report summarizes challenges, competencies and common themes identified during the staff-level strategic planning workshop.

The report consists of the following sections:

- Big Challenges
- Drivers
- Recent Efforts
- Emerging Model of Local Government in a Disruptive World
- Key Competencies
- Council Interview Themes and Reactions
- Opportunities amidst Disruption

“Brilliant strategy is the best route to desirable ends with available means.” Max McKeown

BIG CHALLENGES

What are 2-3 critical challenges facing the city government & community of Albany in the next 5 years?

The most fundamental challenge is:

The City of Albany needs more staff and technology than it currently has if it is to maintain its high quality and quantity of services

Components of this summary statement are:

Need more staff:

Since 2007-2008, the City has reduced the number of city employees from 105.5 to 92.25, while trying to deliver the same and increased level and breadth of services. Employees have stepped up to the challenge by taking on additional duties, finding ways to get the most out of the work day and beyond, and being flexible about new approaches across jobs and departments.

Examples include: Shared Fire Chief and now the restructuring of the Battalion Chief position; police officers performing dispatch duties; time sharing between staff of Community Development and City Clerk, as well as between Teen Services and KALB; and the Recreation & Community Services Director picking up Assistant City Manager duties and responsibilities. The consequences stretching staff time include, but are not limited to risk of error, compromise on quality and quantity, minimal time for new projects to meet changing conditions, increased costs for overtime and lower-skilled tasks are being performed by managers or supervisors that otherwise could be performed at less cost, lack of depth in ranks, short-shrifting small town ambience.

Technology

City workers need the technology tools of the trade to efficiently and effectively perform tasks, fulfill responsibilities, and to be connected and credible with the community. The City is making progress on implementing its Technology Master Plan, but even more significant and continued commitment and investment are needed to catch up and keep pace. For example, the city is lacking in areas such as on-line permitting, digital records, training, and acceptance of credit card and online payments.

High level of services

City employees take pride in providing consistently professional services. The City makes a concerted effort to hire employees who are genuinely committed to serving the public and who value excellence in their work. If Albany does not provide an environment that supports their ability to have sufficient time and technology to deliver a high level of service, the city not only loses out on outcomes, it risks losing this talent to other agencies.

The top three subject matter areas of challenge identified by staff were:

1. Attracting appropriate development that promotes a vital economy, serves the community's housing and commerce needs, and provides fiscal support for city services.
2. Finding solutions to address homelessness in Albany
3. Replacing the City's aging infrastructure to meet health, safety, and other regulatory standards

Other challenges include:

- Training current employees to grow into Albany job opportunities, and attracting a next generation of employees
- Responding to Federal / State funding actions, regulations, and mandates that take funds from Albany or impose new costs
- Developing affordable housing within current parking and zoning standards and community concern about impacts
- Funding the cost to attract and retain employees
- Communicating with the members of the community both efficiently and effectively
- Preventing and adapting to Climate Change

DRIVERS

“What are the forces of change that are threatening the traditional model of local government?”

A number of forces are disrupting the traditional models of local government:

- Old structures, processes and rules oriented toward a static world
- Technology that is changing all service delivery
- Public fears of development
- Lowered public trust and increased demands for transparency and information
- A loud and vocal minority
- Unsustainable cost structures
- Out-of-whack tax system (tax revenues for local government are not directly generated by service and knowledge economy)
- Economic uncertainty
- Increase in civil liability and litigation
- Increase in unfunded government mandates
- Voter restrictions on raising revenues
- Growing community and Council expectations of staff
- Difficulties in recruiting into the public sector

RECENT EFFORTS

“What have been recent efforts to adapt to disruptive change by city government in Albany?”

- Sharing Parts of Jobs and Duties:
A number of positions have been combined and/or redefined as staff turnover/retirement occurs. For example, the recent retirement of the City’s Battalion Chief has resulted in the City’s Building Inspector now carrying out a portion of fire safety inspections as part of the overall construction inspection visit.
- Doing Less:
Some departments have had to re-prioritize their primary duties due to limited capacity and ongoing demands. For example, the cutback in staffing in the City’s Recreation and Community Services Department meant curtailing volunteer program management.
- Contracting Out Services:
At times, contracting out certain services has proven cost effective. For example, the City’s Public Works Department utilizes contractual services for project management of public works improvement projects such as replacement of lower sewer laterals.
- E-distribution of Information:
All of the City’s Advisory Bodies now receive their agenda materials via email as opposed to mail. In addition, when possible, public records requests are also sent out via email when possible which can save the staff time associated with making copies and sending items via regular mail.
- Seeking More Concessions from Contractors:
Public Works has reduced contract costs through more competition and negotiation.
- Using Technology and Social Media to Enhance Services and Public Engagement
The City’s website provides a number of “at your fingertips” services including streaming and archive of public meetings, online comment tools, and reference material. In addition, the City has launched a number of social media sites to help inform the community of events and upcoming items.
- Recruiting a new generation of staff with different skills and perspectives:
For recent vacant positions that have been filled, staff has aimed to recruit individuals with a high level of capability who may bring in new experiences and demonstrate the willingness for adaptive management.

- Learning from Other Cities:
Staff works closely with colleagues from other jurisdictions with regard to projects/programs/policy as a way to learn from other cities experiences in implementing items, particularly in an effort to avoid “reinventing the wheel”.
- Engaging the Community:
A number of programs and events have been implemented over the last couple of years such as skill share and swap events, neighborhood watch, and the Albany Civics Academy, in an effort to encourage community involvement and ownership. The interest is to encourage an active, resilient and engaged community.
- Setting Achievable Objectives:
In setting the City Council goals and objectives for fiscal year 2012-13, the Council and staff included projects underway, and strove to establish realistic steps on new initiatives.



“The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do.”
Michael Porter

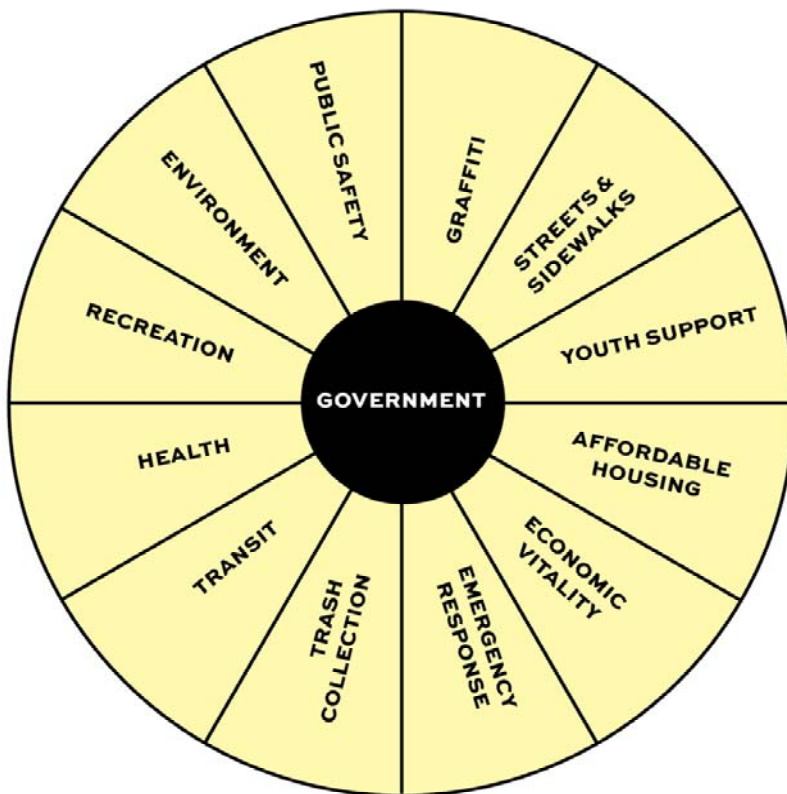
EMERGING MODEL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN A DISRUPTIVE WORLD

Recognizing the forces of change disrupting local government agencies, a new model of local government has begun to emerge, including the following elements:

- More focus on “core” services and a very limited number of strategic priorities
- Integration of technology in all service delivery
- Constantly morphing organizations, systems, and practices requiring flexible and ever-learning employees
- Shared and regionalized services
- Non-government solutions

(For a full description of this emerging model, see the packet for the Alliance for Innovation White Paper entitled “What Is the Future of Local Government?”)

Traditionally, local governments have relied on a government-centric approach to problem-solving with the government at the center of all solutions. This government-centric approach is depicted below:



Now local governments must use a more issue-centric model with the issue at the center. The issue-centric approach to problem-solving is depicted here:



Under an issue-centric approach, local government leaders can still take an active role in problem-solving by convening stakeholder groups, facilitating problem-solving and mobilizing action. However, no longer can we afford to have local government responsible for solving all community problems.

Under an issue-centric model, key strategies include crossing-boundaries, partnering, engaging other organizations and sectors, and continually learning.

KEY COMPETENCIES

What are the key competencies for City staff and other City leaders as we adapt to a world of disruptive change?

- Learning agility: learn new technology, skills, regulations, etc.
- Openness to new ideas
- Flexibility in performing work differently
- Ability to create meaning and purpose
- Ability to communicate and engage with others
- Adaptability and skill in managing time and energy
- Ability to cross boundaries and develop partnering skills
- Skill in starting conversations and telling stories
- Ability to develop talent and grow more leaders

INTERVIEW THEMES AND REACTIONS

Staff reviewed the summaries of Councilmember interviews and made the following comments:

- It was challenging for Council to identify things to “let go of.”
- Certain ambitions and issues seem more regional in scope & resolution, and cannot be solved solely by the City of Albany.
- There was consensus on some issues, and not on others (e.g. shared/regional services)
- Elected officials and staff operate in differing contexts.
- To move forward and take action when time and resources are tight, some issues may benefit from the “Ready, Fire, Aim” approach; in other words, take a forward step and make adjustments as we learn.

OPPORTUNITIES AMIDST DISRUPTION

What is one thing I can do that will begin to promote adaptive change in my department?

- Restructuring, more focused and shared services:

Determine “core” services and then support staff to meet those services before taking on more.

Reorganize departments and employee responsibilities due to downturn in staff and budget constraints.

Share services with other cities, regionalize services – pool resources and use similar services / materials.

Re-evaluate cross-departmental activities and identify opportunities for cross-training or consolidation (for example – building inspections can be done by one person vs. multiple staff from multiple departments).

Re-evaluate City regulations and modify those that are too cumbersome to administer.

- Community Engagement:

Encourage an actively involved community where neighbors know neighbors, aim to engage residents in solving problems and serving as leaders.

Enlist community non-profits / other active environmental groups to help administer the Climate Action Plan.

Seek assistance from the community to provide creative solutions utilizing their expertise.

Temper vocal minority opinion about moving forward, and promote public education and community involvement in local government.

- Technology:

Embrace emerging technology - use technology to provide more efficient services.

Further encourage the public to use on-line resources to reduce use of staff time to:

1. Gather information
2. Submit reports service requests (for example, requests for maintenance services)
3. Submit applications (for example building permits), etc.
4. Make payments

Improve overall communications via technology (within the city and between the city and residents).

- Streamlining:

Decrease the overall number of City Advisory Bodies.

Sell “our” services to others, share more services or contract out services.

Quietly drop outdated tasks and ways of doing things.

Allow employees to focus on core services and deliver even better service.

- Goals and Performances:

Set practical and realistic goals / objectives with clear direction on how to achieve targets.

- Economic Development:

Actively encourage, attract and support responsible development to support City services and programs.

Lead against minority influences.

Improve cell phone coverage.

- Talent attraction, retention and employee development:

Support and give latitude to staff to take risks and make mistakes.

Cross train employees to cover more situations and responsibilities.

Hire quality employees to fill existing vacancies.

Ensure existing staff is competent and capable.

Encourage retention by ensuring employee compensation on par with surrounding cities.