

**City of Aberdeen Council Retreat
Abingdon Elks Lodge
600 Harford Boat Club Road
Abingdon, Maryland 21009**

March 14, 2014, 4:30 – 8:45 p.m.

Present: Mayor Bennett, Councilwoman Landbeck, Councilman Garner, and Councilwoman Young

Absent: Councilwoman Elliott

Moderator: Catherine Tuck Parrish, Executive Search Practice Leader,
The Novak Consulting Group

Also Present: Douglas Miller, City Manager
Monica Correll, City Clerk
Felicia Bledsoe, Administrative Assistant

March 15, 2014, 8:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Present: Mayor Bennett, Councilwoman Landbeck, Councilman Garner, and Councilwoman Young

Absent: Councilwoman Elliott

Moderator: Catherine Tuck Parrish, Executive Search Practice Leader,
The Novak Consulting Group

Also Present: Douglas Miller, City Manager
Felicia Bledsoe, Administrative Assistant

Attached is the Strategic Planning Retreat Report prepared by Catherine Tuck Parrish.

City of Aberdeen, Maryland

Strategic Planning Retreat

March 14-15, 2014



Strategic Planning Framework

Vision

Aberdeen is a safe, progressive community with a revitalized downtown, full of locally-owned restaurants, unique shops, and entertainment choices that visitors and residents can reach by walking or convenient parking. The City manages its growth with excellent planning while maintaining a small town atmosphere where people want to live, meet friends, relax and adopt as their hometown.

Critical Success Factors and Mayor and Council Priorities for 2014-2015

- Vital Downtown
 - Station Square/TOD
 - Economic Development
 - Downtown Association
 - Core Incentives (CSX to Station Square)
- Engaged Citizens
 - Input Through Surveys
 - Sustainable Maryland
- Visionary Leadership
 - Disaster Planning/Recovery
- Safe and Reliable City Services
- Financial Security
- Desirable Development along Transportation Corridors

Welcome and Introduction

On March 14 and 15, the City of Aberdeen convened a two-day strategic planning retreat with the Mayor and City Councilmembers. In attendance were Mayor Michael Bennett, Councilmembers Bruce Garner, Sandra Landbeck, and Ruth Ann Young. City Manager Doug Miller, City Clerk Monica Correll, and Felicia Bledsoe, Administrative Assistant, were also in attendance. Catherine Tuck Parrish of the Novak Consulting Group facilitated the session. The purpose of the retreat was to:

- Strengthen the working relationships between and among members of the governing body
- Develop a Vision and Critical Success Factors for the City of Aberdeen
- Identify goals for 2014-2016 to move the City closer to its vision

The retreat began with several introductory comments by the facilitator, including a review of the agenda. Participants were then asked to introduce themselves and share their expectations for the retreat:

- Council priorities that will translate to staff work
- Hear from others on issues, build bridges with Council and staff, what are stumbling blocks to success
- Talk, interact with Council, understand staff's role, customer-focused
- Look at what we've accomplished, opportunities and pitfalls ahead, action plan, solidify what's best for Aberdeen's people
- What Mayor and Council want to do in the next few years to guide staff's work
- Continue vision and strong leadership, seize opportunities
- Use these questions to guide our work: Is it good for the City? Is it good for the citizens? Is it morally right?
- Be open, Council interaction in a relaxed environment, plan for vision

The Council agreed to adhere to the following ground rules throughout the retreat:

- Listen with respect:
 - Let others finish before you start talking
 - Be attentive to the speaker
 - Disagree agreeably
- Be:
 - Positive and realistic
 - Candid and honest
 - Patient and respectful
 - Engaged and fully present
- Look for opportunities to agree
- Strive for consensus
- Practice "yes, and" rather than "yes/no, but"
- Have fun!

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Vision and Critical Success Factors

The building blocks of Strategic Planning include a vision for the future, a clear mission for the organization that is executed with common values, and an understanding of the "Critical Success Factors" - those things that "must go well" in order to achieve the vision. The vision is best articulated by the governing body, the mission statement (who we are, what we do and how we do it) works best when owned by the organization and values are often a shared statement between the governing body and the organization. We will be focusing on vision and critical success factors.

"This I Believe..."

In order to develop an understanding of the various perspectives of individual members of the City Council, the group was invited to participate in the 'This I Believe' exercise, loosely based on the essay format made popular on National Public Radio. The Mayor and each Councilmember were given five to seven minutes to share "what they believe" about the future of the City of Aberdeen, generally using the following guidelines.

- Tell a story: Be specific. Take your belief from the events of your life that have shaped how you look at and experience "community."
- Name your belief: Focus on a core belief and talk about why it is true.
- Be positive: This is what you DO believe, not what you DON'T believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial "we," and make sure this is about what you believe. Speak in first person.

The following is an abbreviated summary of some of the comments from each participant.

Mayor Mike Bennett – hometown, get back home, community service organizations, what community means, safe, great place, bright future ahead, TOD, revitalize, committed to vision, let's start, better place, 1000 reasons to smile, journey of 1000 miles begins with one step.

Councilmember Bruce Garner – respect and responsibility, all leaders, learned from examples, simple measure of respect, heroes, father as a model, can make a difference, faith and family, bring people together, look forward to coming home, importance of community, guidance, children should feel safe, work hard - play hard later, stand up and speak for seniors, service and respect, make me a better person, earn respect, vision for future, move forward.

Councilmember Ruth Ann Young – [stated as if waking from a dream...] Aberdeen is awesome. I see a marvelous entrance, green gardens and rain barrels, thriving businesses, revitalized areas, garages and museum, gorgeous city park, new library with a coffee shop, lowest crime rate in the state, Route 40 has trains, cabs, bike racks, shuttle to APG, parking behind shops, planning, County/state/federal cooperation. Route 22 is the new state highway, kids can cross the street safely, wide roads..., well-maintained storm water pond, newly improved areas, new hotel with an outside pool..., "All American City", expanded architectural review for compatibility, green team for new ideas..., build bridges with other levels of government, outreach to constituents, upscale restaurants, update wellhead protections.

Councilmember Sandy Landbeck –Pioneer heritage, pioneers who built a town, Girl Scout lesson, put the tent stakes in tight, some push and some pull, strong values, learned from Covey, set values, prioritize, work as a team, strongest team isn't biggest or best-looking but the team that pulled together, everyone does the work, prioritize and test against our values.

The Council discussed that there are a number of themes throughout all the statements and these included home, respect, values, opportunity, working together as a team with Council, staff, and residents.

Strategic Planning: Where is Aberdeen?

The City Manager reviewed the accomplishments from the goals set in 2012. The following observations were made about the accomplishments:

- Most of the goals were either accomplished or they are ongoing items
- The one item that has been worked on but not successful yet is the Hotel Motel Tax which rests with the state legislature. (completed May 2014)
- Accomplishments – these are impressive and should be put in the newsletter
- City also has a new ENR plant
- Turned around the Police Department
- Made transparency improvements – televising meetings
- Updated policies including dealing with boat trailers
- Utilized survey monkey with success
- Improved customer service – significantly reduced complaints
- Office management has improved with additional staffing capacity

The Mayor and Council reviewed the results of the staff's input on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and the opportunities and threats for the City of Aberdeen. In addition, the staff recommended initiatives for City Council to consider. This input was gathered from a survey of department heads and the City Manager and is included at the end of this report on page 13.

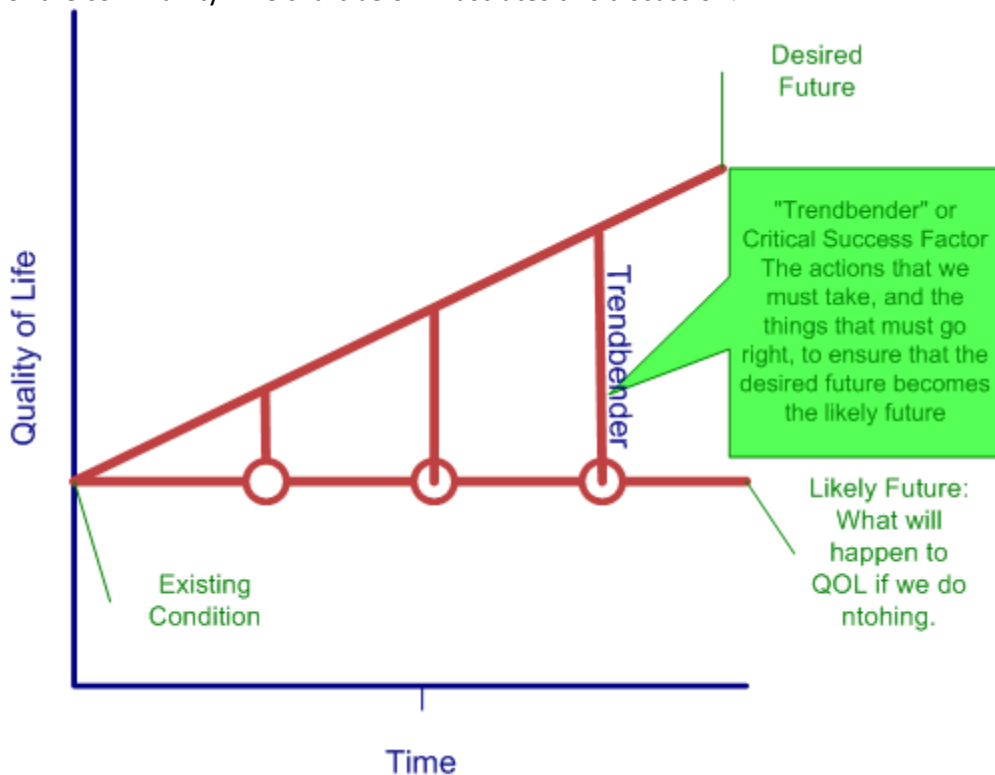
Say Do Think Feel

To help with articulating critical success factors, the Council reflected on what people in the community Say, Do, Think, and Feel.

Say	Do	Think	Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want a “small town” atmosphere • Want a tax reduction • More parking downtown and at Festival Park • More shopping and restaurants • Less taxes and more services • Ideas: Name for TOD area: Station Square, Olde Town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in activities and volunteer • Turn out for many events • Attend meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are not giving enough services for the taxes they pay • Sometimes there are too many regulations • City is moving forward positively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City on track financially • We keep them safe • City is great! • They have seen change for the better

Critical Success Factors

The Mayor and Council envisioned where the City was currently in terms of the quality of life and imagined what would happen if the City were to do nothing. They also considered the trend line of what their desired future would be. Then they identified things that had to go well in order to bend the trend toward their desired vision for the community. The chart below illustrates this discussion:



The Mayor and Council were asked to reflect on the broad categories of “things that must go well” in order to achieve the vision they were articulating through their “I Believe...” statements and other discussion throughout the retreat. Critical Success Factors were determined after brainstorming and grouping like ideas into themes. The initial list is below. Later the final success factor was deemed to be within several others and was eliminated.

- Safe and Reliable City Services
- Vital Downtown
- Financial Security
- Healthy Transportation Corridors
- Visionary Leadership
- Engaged Citizens
- Adaptive and Productive City Workforce

Brainstorming Potential Initiatives

Council then brainstormed potential initiatives within each of the Critical Success Factors that would move the City towards its desired future.

Critical Success Factor	Potential Initiative
Safe and reliable City services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer service standards and training of employees continued (2) • Wellhead protection plan – update and expand it
Vital downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Station Square/TOD – (3) (shared with healthy transportation corridors) • Economic Development – employee, new position to help with economic development, tourism/events person (3) • Downtown association – develop downtown business/landlord association (2) • Incentives for core downtown (2)
Financial Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AA bond rating maintenance (1) • More options for grants and receiving money (0)
Healthy transportation corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning for hot spot areas refined (1)
Visionary Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaster Planning - disaster recovery – supplemental operation (4)

Engaged Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys – use survey monkey to get citizen input, survey people on various topics to assist in meeting their needs, reach out to citizens for ideas to improve quality of life, reach out the community via the internet for ideas to improve downtown (3) • Need a Public Information Officer (1) • Utilize website and newspapers to generate activity (1) • Ongoing outreach to citizens for input (0) • Find ways to involve millennials (0) • Stay engaged with citizens regarding complaints and compliments (1)
Adaptive and productive City workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become more sustainable – Sustainable MD certification (3) • Partner with schools – set up a partnership with schools to solve problems, start a community relationship between schools/parents/citizens

Code of Conduct

The Mayor and council reviewed the existing Code of Conduct. The Council indicated that they all remained committed to this Code and also added these items:

- Mayor will continue to engage with each Councilmember weekly at pre-arranged times for one-on-one meetings
- Continue to talk out areas of disagreement to work well together
- Commitment to move forward and continue to compromise
- Engage with fellow Councilmembers at meetings to work through issues at meetings
- Placement on a future Council agenda

Day Two Check-in

At the beginning of the second day, each person reflected on the prior evening.

What Went Well:

- 30,000 ft. view
- Helps with priorities
- Everyone engaged
- Energizing
- Hear everyone's thoughts
- Interaction was great – not able to do this
- SWOC was helpful
- Important to start with this/part of nature
- Need vision and longer term goals
- Helps to have informal interaction
- Great to see how far we've come
- Great consensus – know what needs to be done

Review of Vision and Critical Success Factors

The Mayor and Council reviewed their work from the night before and refined the Vision statement and Critical Success Factors to the following:

Vision

Aberdeen is a safe, progressive community with a revitalized downtown, full of locally-owned restaurants, unique shops, and entertainment choices that visitors and residents can reach by walking or convenient parking. The City manages its growth with excellent planning while maintaining a small town atmosphere where people want to live, meet friends, relax and adopt as their hometown.

Critical Success Factors

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Identify and Define Key Priorities

The Mayor and Council spent time further defining their top priorities. They articulated the problem they were trying to solve or the opportunity they were trying to seize. They also wrote what success for each key priority area would look like.

Vital Downtown – Station Square/TOD

What problem are we trying to solve?

- Old train station
- Doesn't capture inter and intrastate travel

What opportunity can we seize?

- Route 40 corridor not realizing its potential
- Route 40/downtown/rail station
- 2 blocks from Festival Park area

What does success look like?

- Rezoning underway
- Multiple owners/stakeholders
- Easy to see and get from train station to downtown

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- There are many events, entertainment
- Connected to Festival Park
- Easy to get on/off train
- Can walk/bike to train station
- Attracts people to come to Aberdeen
- Shuttle/cars to Ripken Stadium
- Self-propelled side car train on rail to APG

Vital Downtown – Economic Development

What problem are we trying to solve?

- No source of revenue
- No attraction/no reason to go there
- APG gate could be opened up/additional gate so businesses can take advantage of that traffic

What opportunity can we seize?

- Downtown citizenship
- Economic developer position
- Tourism and events person or committee
- Get citizen input as to what they want downtown
- Get citizen input as to what people would like to do for City (volunteer)
- Shorter leases
- Improved market over time
- Adaptability

What does success look like?

- Having a “vision” again
- Volunteers in place
- Balance of uses in businesses downtown
- Define role of economic development commission and vision team

Vital Downtown – Downtown Association

What problem are we trying to solve?

- Stagnant downtown
- Parking
- Route 40 stigma
- Post office
- Facades stuck in 40's
- Not welcoming
- No gathering place
- Not uses we want

What opportunity can we seize?

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- Everything for “sale”/low prices
- Buy and lease? Economic development person to bring in investors at ground floor
- “Old town”/historic feel to downtown

What does success look like?

- Economic development position to form association – connect – events
- Activities centered in downtown
- Learn from other successful models – Havre de Grace – Bel Air
- Community input
- Connections/networking
- Walkable – not large area
- Work with hotels/restaurants on Aberdeen tasting to be ambassadors for all Aberdeen offers

Vital Downtown – Provide Incentives to Develop Core Downtown

What problem are we trying to solve? What does success look like?

- Attracting businesses to downtown (downtown business association)
- Waive/credit new business hookup fee
- Events centered around downtown
- Pilot or short term tax forgiveness
- Reduction in water rates or amount
- Business/startups seminars (how-to classes)
- Fix parking issues
 - Employee parking close by/in rear
 - Directional signage

Keep Engaged Citizens – Input Through Surveys

What problem are we trying to solve?

- Align Council vision with citizens’ vision
- Limited time to have dialogue with citizens in a Council meeting

What opportunity can we seize?

- Facebook
- Web
- Mailer/letter
- Surveys

What does success look like?

- People would be downtown (not parolees)
- Businesses would reflect what citizens want
- “Pay it forward” attitude – “small town,” “you’re welcomed here” feel

Engaged Citizens – Sustainable Maryland

- Become a sustainable Maryland certified community (registered) using the criteria outlined by initiating the requirements of the program

- Establish “Green Team”
 - Involve community
 - Students
 - Staff
 - Business owners

Visionary Leadership – Disaster Planning/Recovery

What opportunity can we seize?

- To have the ability for the City to continue functioning before, during and after a disaster.

What does success look like?

- Create emergency plans
- Develop backup for needed services
- Create backup operations center
- Train staff and citizens with handouts
- Constant reminders/everyday use of response

The Mayor and Council spent time articulating their vision for the area near Ripken Stadium.

Area near Ripken Stadium

What problem are we trying to solve?

- Other parts of development didn’t materialize
- 3 property owners
- A lot of vacant property – pressure to develop
- No new vision for area
- Needs new name/identity

What opportunity can we seize?

- Redevelop prime real estate in a thoughtful way
- Retail/restaurant/entertainment area
- Fed by one million people traveling along I-95 and 27,000 people at APG, visibility, train station shuttle to area

What does success look like?

- Restaurant park/horseshoe
- People who are attracted also come to downtown
- Retail like The Avenue
- Campus for post-technical education
- Travel center with restaurants
- Continuing care facility

What steps do we need to take to get there?

- Articulate appropriate uses through zoning
- Clarify City interested in continuing care facility – but no tax subsidy

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- Economic development position to advocate for development of area
- Work with County economic developer in 2015

Next Steps

- Adopt and announce results, vision, critical success factors at public meeting (press release #1)
- Mayor and City Manager meet with senior staff to review in detail – give Council feedback if any (Mayor will alert Council)
- Staff to develop work plan with key staff
 - Major milestones
 - Timeline
 - Resources needed
- July work session with action plan back to Council
- Press release #2 about process going forward
- One year status report (mini retreat)

Parting Thoughts/Adjourn

As the retreat came to a close, each participant was asked to share a parting thought on how they feel about the work done during the retreat.

- Cathedral thinking (share with staff)
- Hearing what elected want – accomplished
- Helpful to be part of give and take on ideas
- Enthused about downtown Bel Air Ave. particularly
- More understanding of staff and Council – enlightening
- Respectful, supportive group
- Great to have interaction with the whole body, more input, consideration
- More solidified list and next steps, broader perspective
- All discussions were about City and citizens
- Focuses on very long-term thinking
- Cathedral thinking – what we are doing
- Liked the process
- Great interaction, great partnership
- Mutual appreciation – Mayor and Council
- Encouraging to do great work
- We've taken multiple steps on 1000 mile journey