

Special Meeting - Council Retreat

The City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids held a retreat on **March 15, 2018 at 9:00 a.m.** in the President's Conference Room on the campus of Halifax Community College, Weldon, North Carolina.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor
Carl Ferebee, Mayor Pro Tem
Suetta S. Scarbrough)
Ernest C. Bobbitt)
Wayne Smith)

Council Members

Joseph Scherer, MPA, MS, City Manager
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Lydian Altman, Director Strategic Public Leadership Initiative with the
UNC School of Government

Absent: Carol Cowen, Council Member

Mayor Doughtie welcomed and thanked Ms. Lydian Altman for coming to facilitate the Council's retreat. He also thanked Council for taking their day to attend the retreat; he felt they had a lot to talk about. He stated he hopes the City is getting to a place where they will have more flexibility in what they do and not be tied down to debt. That debt is what has kept them in a situation where they could not do much planning so he wants to hear from Council and Ms. Altman about what other towns were doing that they may not have heard about.

Mayor Doughtie gave an invocation to begin the meeting.

Ms. Lydian Altman, Director Strategic Public Leadership Initiative with the UNC School of Government and Retreat Facilitator, stated she received the planning call last year to schedule the retreat. She said she thought the Mayor put it nicely, now City Council has the ability to vision and think forward in a new way and reimagine what Roanoke Rapids could be. She said strategic planning is about taking the city forward for future generations. There is not a pot of money coming from the federal government, it is coming from the state so more and more responsibilities are being shifted down to the local level. It is really going to be up to them to drive their future and figure out how to do that.

She said in the retreat today, they would recognize some of the successes they have had so they know what they have to build on, but then think forward. She said they would ask what are some of the things that would be happening around Roanoke

Rapids and what are the implications for them. They would be talking about the changes and really thinking about their preferred vision. They will need to think about what they value now that they would want to bring forward into their vision. What is the vision they want to have of their community 30 years from now? And what would be some of the things they would need to do at this point to achieve that vision. They will be thinking about near-term and long-term priorities. They will end the day with discussion on working relationships and how to work together effectively to get things done.

She asked each Council member to state something in the last year or so that makes them most proud:

- Movement on the Theatre
- Recreation for all (facilitation of Hwy. 158 plan)
- Being a part of a group that makes a difference
- Employees and department heads that work well together
- City Manager – Professional, action oriented
- Hiring of the City Clerk
- Persistence - theatre, good rate on financing, state highway projects, infrastructure
- Quality and effective law enforcement and fire department
- Financial stewardship
- No tax increase since 2009

Ms. Altman asked council members to write down changes that the City could face or that would impact Roanoke Rapids and place them in one of the following three timelines:

Less than 18 Months
<i>Sale of Theatre</i>
<i>New Housing – Retirement Apartment Complex</i>
<i>Facilitate Economic Growth</i>
<i>Hwy. 125 Project & Connection of Exits 171/173 (Premier Blvd Extension)</i>
<i>Paving Roanoke Avenue</i>
<i>Implementing some of the Streetscape Project on Roanoke Avenue (Beautify downtown)</i>
<i>Phase I of Wayfinding Signage Project</i>
<i>Chaloner Splash Park (Pull community together)</i>
<i>Population Declining</i>
<i>Possible Retirement of Fire Chief</i>
<i>How people shop (online)</i>
<i>County - Opening of lumber company in Enfield</i>

18 – 36 Months
<i>Recreation – Refurbish Park on Oak Street and Baseball/Softball Tournaments (Tourism)</i>
<i>Complete Elements of Hwy. 158 Master Plan (3 new recreation areas)</i>
<i>Completion of Wayfinding Signage Project</i>
<i>Theatre District Development/Improve Economic Development</i>
<i>New Roanoke Avenue Streetscape Improvements (Benches, lighting, landscaping etc.)</i>
<i>Possible Retirement of Police Chief</i>

36 + Months
<i>Pay Off Theatre Debt (Hope to pay off sooner than term of loan)</i>
<i>Public Works Department – Add employees & new equipment (gradually)</i>
<i>WestPoint Stevens Mill Development</i>
<i>Wish List – Shopping Center Development (shopping needs to come back)</i>
<i>Regionally – CSX Intermodal Terminal in Rocky Mt.</i>
<i>Amtrak Depot in Weldon (Tourism)</i>
<i>Roanoke River and Lake (Tourism)</i>

Mayor Doughtie said Roanoke Rapids has lost population like most other small towns as well as professional type jobs. This has increased the number of rental properties over the number of homeowner properties. He said homeowners tend to take more interest in their community. That is a lot of what they are missing now. Absentee landlords are an issue too. Most do not take care of their properties, they become dilapidated and the City has to end up taking it down

Councilman Bobbitt said the Atlantic Coast Pipeline may help the community and bring tax revenue to the City.

Council discussed continuing to improve partnerships with the Halifax County Economic Development Commission and the Halifax County Board of Commissioners.

Ms. Altman stated there were positive and negative changes going on. She encouraged Council to think of the positive changes that are happening when they move along to what their vision is for the City.

Ms. Altman discussed the strategic planning process.

- Create goals and objectives
- Be clear about priorities
- Develop action plans
- Allocate resources (money and people)

- Manage progress
- Evaluate results

Ms. Altman stated plans may not actually be the best part, but rather the planning process. She read a quote from Dwight Eisenhower about planning, “steeped in the character and nature of the problem that you may one day be called upon to solve.” She said if you are thinking strategically about where you want to head and are in conversations amongst yourselves or other people, when opportunities arise you are in a position to take advantage of those things. It’s not just the plan, it’s the conversations that help you get to that.

She reviewed how organizations can use strategic plans.

- Benchmarking
- Performance evaluation
- Budget/Resource allocation
- Internal/External communication
- Citizen engagement and education
- Employee orientation

Council discussed working together with other local government agencies and groups on economic development and strategic planning efforts.

Ms. Altman suggested Council use the following in creating a strategic plan:

- Use discretion
- Incorporate flexibility (just 3 years out)
- Keep it simple
- Link planning to other organizational efforts

Council talked about the City’s Capital Improvement Plan. In recent years, the Council has had to choose operational costs over capital improvements. They do look at it every year and decide what is most important and what they can afford. Council directs the City Manager to spend within its means and try not to borrow any money in order to get debt down.

Ms. Altman asked if the City had any performance measures they use. City Manager Scherer stated the departments have a monthly statistical report that is given to Council. It shows how many people were served, how things were done, etc. but no measures in relation to goals. They just monitor the activities going on and make sure they are doing what they should. Ms. Altman encouraged Council to think of ways they can judge performance and not just activities in terms of making progress towards their goals.

Council participated in an exercise where they “interviewed” each other to discover values they felt the city held and wanted to maintain moving forward. They were also

asked to visualize how they would like the downtown area and other areas of the city to look.

Values

- Small town atmosphere
- Good public safety services
- Clean environment
- Safe place
- Activities for citizens
- School system – Keep RRGSD
- Lifelong residents
- Friendly

Vision

Downtown

- Thriving and varied businesses
- Landscaped, clean, outdoor seating
- Housing/apartments (2nd floor) above stores
- Specialty stores

Other areas

- Unified, aesthetic standards for shopping centers
- Variety of stores/shopping choices
- Opportunity to develop abandoned parcels
- Activity at Premier Blvd.
- Improved housing (more & better)/Single-family occupied
- Market priced apartments
- Development in Theatre District (hotels, shopping)

Ms. Altman asked Council what decisions or actions would need to be taken to accomplish their vision.

Decisions/Actions

- Reach out to other government entities/work together.
- Work on Main Street plan (include 2nd floor apartments).
- Update ordinances to allow for development/smaller lots.
- Work with legal counsel to sell vacant properties for development.
- Focus on Economic Development.
- Contact private developers to invest in area (Theatre area).
- Find funding & explore approaches to upgrade mill village housing and promote home ownership.
- Target recruitment for WestPoint Stevens' area that takes advantage of infrastructure.

City Council took a break for lunch (12:30 p.m. – 1 p.m.)

After lunch, Ms. Altman narrowed their Decisions/Actions into four (4) focus areas and Council prioritized them 1-4.

Economic Development (City/Area/Region/State)

- 1) Annexation of new portion of Premier Blvd./Hwy. 125.
- 2) Take more direct roll with Halifax County Economic Development Director (Focus on Roanoke Rapids plan of work).
- 3) Contact private developers to come look and invest in Theatre District area.
- 4) Targeted recruitment for WestPoint Stevens' area that takes advantage of infrastructure.

Housing

- Finding funds to upgrade quality of mill house area.
- Promote home ownership in mill house area.
- Explore approaches to redoing properties (City buys/sells with stipulation to bring up to code).

Downtown Activity

- Ensure Main Street plans – focus on 2nd floor apartments.
- Update ordinances to allow development of 2nd floor apartments, lot size adjustment.
- Work with legal counsel to sell abandoned properties.

Working Relationships/Partners

- Coordinate with area local governments (other municipalities and Halifax County) to work together on recruitment for economic development and advocate as a unit on local issues with NC General Assembly.

Council discussed sharing information and collaborating with HCIA group for the betterment of the area/region.

Ms. Altman asked Council to prioritize their focus areas even more, preferably down to two (2) goals to focus on in the next 18 months.

It was the consensus of Council to focus on Economic Development and Housing in the next 18 months. Council believes all four (4) things were important, but those two were the priority they wanted the City Manager to focus on. All agreed that they can build on relationships and conversations with other governments in the course of their work.

Council talked about investigating the possible annexation and the annexation process for the new portion of Premier Boulevard and Hwy. 125.

City Manager Scherer stated he would like to work more with Cathy Scott and work on developing an Economic Development Plan for the City. He said housing was more long-term such as trying to put grants in place and finding developers. By housing, he was thinking not only about cleaning up the mill village, but getting new housing like the apartments built. There are not any short-term actions for housing. Council agreed they could work on ordinances changes in the short-term.

Operating Principals (How they work together)

Ms. Altman asked City Council if they overheard people talking positively about the Roanoke Rapids City Council, what would they like to hear them say.

- Gets results that please or represent the community.
- May not have gotten what I wanted, but they listened to me.
- Treated fairly.
- Responsive/gives appropriate referrals.
- City delivers great service.
- Cooperate and respect one another.
- Thoughtful, deliberate, consider options that are beneficial to all.
- Practice civility.
- Rely on professional staff for advice or counsel.

Ms. Altman asked Council how they felt they did in getting work done and if they need to make in changes. Council agreed they work well together and did not see in changes that needed to be made at this time in how they communicate and the way they prepare and hold/conduct meetings.

Next steps

- City Clerk to complete minutes/notes of retreat.
- Ms. Altman to submit notes from retreat within 2 weeks.
- City Manager to work on Economic Development (top 3 priorities) for the next 18 months.
- Summation of discussion from retreat.
- Action steps resulting from retreat.
- Annual work plan with estimated time frames for goals.

Evaluation

City Council evaluated the usefulness of the retreat. They gave the following positive feedback:

- Questions were relevant
- Design fit the need
- Food
- Local location
- Getting away from office setting

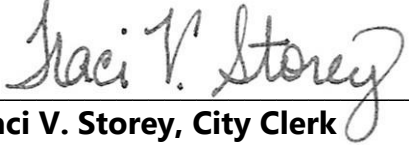
- Created focus/stayed focused
- Facilitator (allowed participation of the City Manager, developed format and agenda)

City Council gave the following suggested changes for a future retreat:

- Narrow topic
- Consider budget
- Guidelines/topic

Council discussed revisiting the priorities to build on the work and do a six (6) month check up or progress report.

The retreat adjourned at 3 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council on: April 3, 2018