

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dave Callister and Maria Solano
FROM: Chad Weinstein
DATE: March 18, 2023
RE: Summary of Council Study Session on Strategy and Team Dynamics

This memorandum is respectfully submitted as a project deliverable, summarizing council input from the council study session of March 14, 2023. It documents the strategic directions that were originally generated in the recent leadership retreat, revised based on staff input, and further amended in light of council input from the study session. It also documents the two sets of shared commitments, intended to guide interactions among elected officials and between elected officials and staff, respectively. These shared commitments were discussed in the study session and came through that discussion unchanged.

Strategic Themes

Council and staff have worked together to generate four strategic directions that the City should pursue alongside regular operations over the next 1-3 years. The four themes are:

- City Center 2.0
- Redevelopment Vision
- Environmental Stewardship
- City of Choice

The most recent study session included support for the first three strategic directions as written, and guidance to significantly revise the fourth, City of Choice. Each of these directions is described in more detail below, with refinements made to the first three and the more substantive revisions made to City of Choice.

City Center 2.0

This strategic direction involves reimagining and transforming the central region of Plymouth over a decade or more, with implications for the City as a whole. Reimagining a city center that contributes to the vitality and quality of life in Plymouth and documenting a vision in the Comprehensive Plan are the first major steps, to be followed by an extensive process of identifying multiple partners to realize various aspects of that vision, while making the necessary investments and policy changes. The result will be a transformation of key spaces in Plymouth into places that support commerce, art, recreation, and inclusive community vitality. Following is a summary of guidance provided by the council and staff members who worked on this theme in the retreat.

- Have a concept plan to review at future study session.
- Go through visioning exercises– think big, and consider:
 - The implications of density, and what our concept of “density” means,
 - How to incentivize development,
 - Strategies such as increasing residential density on the corners of city lots to fund project.

- There is a need for critical density to support restaurants and other activities, which will require more parking.
- Look at State bonding bills for infrastructure.
- Consider comprehensive plan amendment and code changes in all aspects of the vision.

Redevelopment Vision

The primary objective of this theme is to consider how Plymouth can articulate its vision for long-range redevelopment city-wide, and to support the realization of that vision in various ways. This may include establishing clear expectations for development partners. This vision can also contribute to the City's capacity to learn from projects through reflection on experience, and with the intention of improving as a development partner. Retreat participants offered the following guidance.

- Balance the relative benefits of consistency and flexibility in setting policy and in work with development partners.
- Consider the potential impact of development on all systems, especially transportation, public safety, and parks.
- Provide for the right mix of housing options to promote community vitality.
- Transit and transportation are critical factors for livability and commerce.

Environment

The City's environmental impact and commitment to stewardship are very broad topics that merit further definition. An important first step will be documenting the work that is already completed and underway, followed by identifying, evaluating, and selecting future projects based on cost/benefit analysis. At each stage, it will be important to define the appropriate role(s) of the City in practicing and promoting environmental stewardship.

1. A future study session should provide background on what we are already doing.
2. The inventory of what we're doing should be the start of benchmarking.
3. Council alignment discussions will be necessary to address the directions, actions, and costs of future actions.
4. One likely step will be the systematic identification of existing code/policy provisions which restrict sustainability.
5. Propose policies that proactively support sound environmental stewardship.
6. Environmental impact must be considered in terms of communication, cost, planning, priority, etc.

City of Choice

Plymouth should continue to be a city of choice for residents, businesses, organizations, visitors, and events. The City must build on its strengths through strategic investments and partnerships, including investments in its workforce to attract and retain the best staff. Plymouth City policy and operations will continue to reflect strong commitments to equity and inclusion, and to high quality and cost-effective services. Following are examples of measures that could contribute to maintaining or enhancing Plymouth's status as a City of Choice.

- Continue to seek and use public input to inform strategic decision-making and policy development.
- Cultivate strategic and stakeholder relationships that promote community vitality in all respects.
- Assure that Plymouth continues to attract and retain excellent employees with appropriate investments in employee compensation and working conditions, workplace culture, and professional development opportunities consistent with being a municipal employer of choice.
- Note that people choose Plymouth for its services and amenities (including parks, recreational amenities, public works and public safety services) and for access to excellent schools.

Shared Commitments

Following are the shared principles generated by elected officials, and a shared set of commitments to guide council-staff interaction that was developed based on input from both groups. Interviews and group discussions underscored that, while these principles are clear and valuable, they will only be effective if they are consistently upheld. Therefore, both elected officials and staff must be willing to abide by them and must hold themselves and one another accountable for doing so in respectful, constructive, and appropriate ways.

Principles to Guide Interactions Among Elected Officials

- Trust among elected officials is critical for us to have good conversations about issues.
- Listen fully to one another.
- Demonstrate respect for one another, especially when we disagree.
- Assume positive intent in our colleagues and in staff.
- In council chambers, our goals include good discussion that is accessible to the public.
 - Speakers will be recognized by the mayor.
 - Seek recognition on topics, and all will be heard.
 - Mayor will give council members an opportunity for final comments on a topic.
 - Ask questions for understanding.
 - Do not engage in “side conversations.” Bring those comments or questions to the main conversation.
- We place a high value on taking timely action, based on thoughtful deliberation.
- As leaders, we build confidence over time. Everyone can and should participate in discussions. We must also share information and learn with one another.
- Be mindful of open meeting law at all times.

These principles will only be effective if all council members and the mayor agree to be guided by them, and if they are willing to uphold these standards, including respectfully reminding colleagues of them when necessary.

Principles to Guide Council/Staff Interaction

- We are committed to teamwork, mutual respect, and shared success.
 - Council and staff are on the same team with the goal of shared success for the community.
 - Council will be respectful of staff and help staff to be successful.
 - Staff will be respectful of council and help them to be successful.
 - Whenever possible, council will advise staff in advance of questions to be asked in meetings. Don't assume that they are ready for a question.
 - We must all be open to feedback to improve ideas and make good policy decisions.
 - Praise in public; be mindful of public challenges or criticism of ideas. Do not criticize people in public.
- Council depends on staff for sound information and recommendations.
 - Staff should provide as much background as reasonable to support sound decision-making.
 - Recommendations should be well-supported, and alternatives or other views should also be represented.
 - Council needs even-handed information along with any recommendations.
- Council provides governance and sets policy; staff provides management and executes.
 - Council recognizes that staff members are professionals and experts who work hard to do thorough work.
 - Staff recognizes that council represents the people of Plymouth and governs the City.
 - Council is responsible for high-level oversight of operations.
 - Staff seeks clear direction from council on values, priorities, and relevant parameters to guide execution.
- Council acts as a body.
 - Staff can answer individual council members' questions, and council members are asked to be judicious in making time-consuming requests.
 - Council members should not direct staff individually.
- Council and staff work together to inform and serve the public.
 - Council members can work directly with directors and copy the city manager.
 - Make sure emails are addressed to the right groups.
 - Council members are asked not to jump to conclusions based on public input. Stay calm, get the facts from staff leaders.

Staff will make every effort to inform elected officials of events in the city that may lead to public comments.

Conclusion: Next Steps

The above content represents my best effort to improve the previous version of this memorandum based on input from the most recent council study session. If senior staff leaders see an opportunity to further improve the strategic direction descriptions, I would be happy to help do so. Alternatively, staff leaders may simply modify that content as they see fit before submitting it to council.

Council should review this document or an improved version of it, and may take action at a future meeting to adopt the principles for interaction and strategic directions, and to direct staff to propose actions and initiatives consistent with the strategic directions.

ELA's last phase of work under this project is a senior staff working session aimed at team development. I look forward to scheduling that session at our earliest mutual convenience and will provide a specific agenda to participant based on our most recent staff working session.