

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES, IL
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2015**

1. Opening of Meeting

The meeting was convened by Chairman Stellato at 7:26 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Members Present: Chair. Stellato, Ald. Silkaitis, Payleitner, Lemke, Turner, Bancroft, Krieger, Gaugel and Bessner

Absent: Ald. Lewis

3. Omnibus Vote

Budget Revisions – May 2015
Funds Transfer Resolutions (3)

Motion by Ald. Bancroft, second by Bessner to approve the omnibus vote.

Voice Vote: Unanimous; Nays: None. Chrmn. Turner did not vote as Chairman. **Motion carried.**

Chair. Stellato: We'll get right into the City Administration Office. One quick comment, we are going to see this on the agenda next Tuesday night at a special meeting. I'm sure you will talk about that as well.

4. City Administrator's Office

Mark Koenen: We're here to talk about the Strategic Plan. Over the December – January timeframe we held a series of stakeholder meetings as well as focus groups with residents of the community to talk about St. Charles. As you know we retained Sikich to assist us with that. Greg Kuhn and Cristi Musser are here with us tonight. They are the project leaders from Sikich. They were leading those focus groups with the assistance of some of you on City Council. Tonight is really a listening session for you to hear what the consultants heard from the community. What are people saying about St. Charles today? That's the background information for our next two meetings. Alderman Stellato referred to next Tuesday night's meeting on the 23rd from 6:00pm – 9:00pm. The second meeting is what I call workshop number 2 and is going to take place on the following Saturday. We will be using this information to help us understand what St. Charles should look like in the next 5 years.

Greg Kuhn: Mr. Chair, members of the Council. My name is Greg Kuhn and as the City Administrator pointed out I am joined by my colleague Cristi Musser who is a Senior Consultant on our Government Management Team. Our goal for this evening is to share with you what the

community has shared with us in preparation for the Strategic Planning Workshops that will be taking place in a couple of weeks. The Council and the City has been provided with a Summary Report and we wanted to highlight the results of those findings this evening. Given the circumstances of the rising river and other activities in the Metro area we will try to do this with dispatch Mr. Chairman.

First we have a quick description of our Strategic Planning Process. This describes various ways the City and any organization would seek input. This is an exercise we call scanning the environment and what we want to review tonight is the stakeholders that we have encountered and interacted with during the course of this listening phase. Stakeholder input, John Bryson, is a well know author on Strategic Planning particularly in non-for-profit and government. Simply put a stakeholder is any person, group or organization that can place a claim on your attention, your resources and things that you produce. Whether you are a citizen, business or someone who visits St. Charles, everyone that's part of the community or passes through the community is a stakeholder. Why gather stakeholder input? The primary reason is to gain perspective. Every council member, every staff member, citizen, etc. that are here all have different views, interactions and experiences in the City. Some have been here for a long time, we heard tonight about a person who has been here their entire lifetime, that may also apply to many of you on the Dias. This is a way to get various input, opinions and perspective on the City.

The way we gather the information allows us to summarize and analyze it in a structured format. The things we focused on were perspectives on the City's needs, services, what's the future of the City look like, what are the goals and priorities that they might pass along for you to consider as part of your exercise? Our two methods for doing stakeholder input, because the City does already undertake a Citizen Survey, we used two other techniques. We conducted a series of exploratory interviews. I will cover the results of those interviews and we used those interviews as a precursor to holding the focus groups. Those help shape and form the questions we use in the focus group process. Cristi is going to walk through the results of the focus group process; she has been working most closely with that data for several weeks.

On the exploratory interviews we worked with City staff to identify a variety of opinions and perspectives from the community. There were 18 structured interviews that included current and former elected officials, business, community and institutional leaders across the City. Everyone interviewed was asked the same set of seven questions and we covered to broad topics. 1. What is the current environment? 2. What might you see in the future? The interviewers, Cristi and myself, took notes and from there we summarized the results of those interviews. We wanted to cover some of the key themes that immerged, in terms of the environment, one of the things that was frequently talked about in the interviews: how did the City survive the fiscal downturn of 2008 and 2009? We wanted to share some telling and primarily positive feedback. Most people said the City handled the fallout from the financial crisis very well. They felt the City's response was proactive, thorough and carefully approached. Staff was professional in managing operations and finances in some tough conditions. Several participants mentioned the impact of the business climate in the City. Things are relatively visible and, in other cases, businesses that are primarily in the service industry may not see the impact as readily as seeing a vacant

storefront, but we were given several points of view and opinions on how the business environment impacted the City in the loss of some businesses.

Area's where the City excelled during the crisis included maintaining service levels. The City took early action, and the existing financial reserves helped the City weather the storm well. When people identify in their own views how they felt the City was able to accomplish these things they mentioned postponed projects, primarily capitol items, which again was a strategy employed by a lot of local governments. They also mentioned the idea of your First Street project as something that was likely impacted.

The next items we wanted to point out this evening from the interviews are, what did people see in terms of initiatives, possible paradigm shifts, significant changes that might be on the forefront. We asked people if you came back ten or fifteen years from now what might you see or what would you like to see? Initiatives: What people saw was Economic Development in the downtown and Charlestowne Mall. They also felt that the City should maximize the Fox River as an asset. Possible paradigm shifts: A lot of people talked about demographic diversity being on the forefront. Not only the City of St. Charles, but the region, the Fox Valley, they also talked about other parts of the demographic of the City aging and the needs should be adjusted according to an aging population. People talked about more housing alternatives, the desire to have a good mix of housing inventory available for people both at the starting, middle and end of their active years. They talked about maintaining one of the identifying features of St. Charles, which is the architectural heritage. There was also a uniform emphasis on secondary modes of transportation, which included bikes and pedestrian friendliness. Lastly, the vision for the future: When we asked people what might you like to see, what do you think you'll see in the future? Primarily, one of the things was maintaining the City's heritage, charm, and all the things that go along with it. We characterize that as quality of life and will go over that a little bit later in the focus group data. Embracing new urbanism, the ideas that going forward the City should be able to adapt and be ready to adapt to what people are seeking for lifestyles, interest in living in urbanized settings. Continue to attract business and manufacturing, providing jobs in the area, maintaining quality schools, again utilizing the river and improving traffic on Main Street. A lot of people saw the future of St. Charles as very positive and very bright. They said we see St. Charles continuing to thrive in the future.

Those are the results of the interviews. We use those results for two purposes, it was our opportunity to listen, and something we use to inform and prepare us to do the focus groups.

We're going to continue to present. When we get to the end we'd be glad to entertain any questions. I'm going to turn it over to Cristi and she's going to review the results of the focus group process.

Cristi Musser: I want to briefly talk about the focus group methodology that we use. We had eight focus groups. The focus groups lasted from one and a half to two hours. The sessions were very participatory and City staff or elected officials attended sessions to thank the participants for attending. We recorded all the participants' comments on flip chart notes, transcribed them and analyzed them with the help of INVEBO 10, which is an analysis software

program that helps us analyze qualitative data. The focus group composition is varied, everything from high school students, which was a great group, to employees, institutions and residents. The first thing we do once we have all this data is that we coded it by major themed categories. Economic, Business and Housing was one theme category, Community, City Government, City Services and City Leadership and then the final category was City Character. You can see the numerical frequencies in each of those major categories. I think the most interesting information comes when you break those categories down into sub themes. That was our next step, to look at sub themes according to each one of those categories. We used ENVEBO to do a numerical frequency count of sub-themes for each of those areas. You can see starting with downtown, Main Street and First Street, those were all put together and that was numerically the largest themed area. I'm going to talk about each of the theme areas briefly, but before I do, I want to mention that we put the data in the PowerPoint and in the report in a variety of different ways. That way you can see the data cut in different ways and go as deep as you'd like to with the data. You can look at the data by question and by focus group.

Going through each of the sub-themes, starting with Downtown, the vision for Downtown that was frequently cited was that the Downtown area would be thriving, diverse, livable, a mix of uses. That there would be retail stores, restaurants, housing, pedestrian friendly and the center of festivals and activities. Overwhelmingly, participants supported the completion of the First Street project that was reflected both in the interviews as well as the focus groups. I picked a couple of the comments from the data, these included, a desire for a unified lighting scheme, public restrooms, public water fountains. I can't say that any of those were overwhelming themes, but they were interesting suggestions.

The next major theme with 124 comments was business attraction and business diversity (business balance). That was mentioned by a number of people. General comments centered on economic, health and vibrancy and how important that is to attracting new businesses. There was also a desire for a proactive approach to development. If you look in the report there is a number of additional comments under that general theme of business attraction/diversity. It's important to those who attended the focus groups.

The next theme is quality of life. The comments were overwhelmingly positive. People love living in St. Charles. One very typical comment was St. Charles is a wonderful community in which to live and raise a family. Other adjectives, included, it's beautiful, friendly, family friendly, wonderful community. These responses were mainly in response to the question asked of focus group members: How would you describe St. Charles to a stranger? I would say that it's a bit unusual to have so many positive comments; sometimes there are more of a mix of comments. That's an important take away from the focus groups that people were so positive about their community.

The next theme had to do with City services, leadership and city staff. Again, participants were very pleased with the services and the leadership of the City. They frequently described city services as outstanding, including public safety and leadership as responsive, professional, fiscally responsible; those were the kinds of adjectives that were used.

The next theme had to do with the river and the river front. Participants viewed the Fox River as an important asset and one that could be more fully utilized. They had a variety of suggestions and I would suggest that you look at more of the data. They had suggestions for fully utilizing the riverfront, everything from more festivals, more recreational use, implementing the River Corridor Plan, that kind of thing. Some community, activities, and events were cited with a fair number of frequency. Participants seem to place a high value on your existing community activities as well as expanding event offerings. Students were interested in more activities that were fun for youth and teens. Some suggestions included evening concerts in the park, sand volleyball leagues, expanded offerings at Cougar Stadium and movie night on the lawn by the river. Some people were very specific in their comments other people stated that they appreciate the amount of activities and events that St. Charles has.

The next most frequently cited sub-theme was schools, youth and students. Many of these comments came under economic development so there was an important tie that people saw between good schools and good economic development. People overwhelmingly saw the schools as top quality, an important asset both now and in the future, there was expression that the schools must continue to stay strong in order for St. Charles to thrive.

The next most frequently cited sub-theme was the Charlestowne Mall/The Quad. The participants citing this theme mainly said we want that Mall revitalized, re-purposed, re-opened. People had a variety of suggestions that they'd like to see in the Mall, but I think people wanted that mall to be revitalized and be an active part of the City again. One typical comment was looking towards the future, I hope to see the Charlestowne Mall redevelopment completed and it's viable, vibrant and functioning.

The next most common cited theme was demographics, population and diversity. This fell into three basic categories. One was demographic diversity, the City should embrace cultural diversity and create and expand existing programs that are welcoming to everyone. Another part of that theme was the aging population and that the community needs to plan for an aging population and activities to serve that population. The third area surrounding demographics and population, people said it's important that the City encourage and attract younger people to come to St. Charles.

Community organizations and services were mentioned with some frequency. People said that St. Charles has a lot of service organizations that many in the community might not even be aware of. They did mention them and cited that there was a need to publicize the ability of those organizations and their value to the community.

The next sub-theme was vacant land and buildings. I'd like to mention that this sub-theme did not include the Charlestowne Mall/The Quad. They mentioned that these vacancies hurt the City's tax base. They also saw that as an opportunity for the future. They can be used as an opportunity to develop those into something that can be of great benefit to the citizens. A typical future vision in this sub-theme was that all key commercial areas were full, revitalized and maximized, especially the old St. Charles Mall.

The next theme was green space and parks. Green space and parks were seen as an asset to participants. This response was cited again with question 2, describe St. Charles. A lot of people said the parks are really important and there are a lot of great parks. There were other comments about the parks and things they would like to see done. If you look through the focus group notes and data you'll see a variety of suggestions along those lines.

Traffic was an important theme. The focus of all the traffic was the impact of truck traffic on Route 64. That was an overwhelming concern, volume, congestion, time of day and people had a variety of comments on how to address that, including widening the road, a pedestrian overpass, left turn lanes, re-routing traffic, there was a whole range of suggestions. It was a concern.

Entertainment, theater and culture were also seen as important to the community. I was surprised how many times the Arcada Theater was mentioned. It was quite frequent which shows you that participants viewed it as an important asset to the community.

Marketing brand and branding was mentioned with some frequency. Marketing and branding is mentioned in many strategic plan focus groups, but I was surprised, in your case, how many people actually said we need more marketing and branding of our corporate identity and we need a marketing plan. There was also a variety of other suggestions surrounding marketing and branding, including St. Charles should develop a St. Charles App. Again, if you'd like to look in the focus group notes you will see a variety of suggestions.

This next chart shows you things by selected question. I would urge you to take a look at that. You can look at the questions in the report then by numerical theme by question. I'll just point out one to you. Under describe the community, the number one answer was the quality of life and that St. Charles is a great place to live. This gives you a different way to view the data.

We'd be happy to answer any questions.

Ald. Stellato: Once again, both of you are here next Tuesday night?

Cristi Musser: Yes.

Ald. Stellato: Any other last minute questions or comments.

Mark Koenen: I would suggest because we have some guests to see if there are any comments.

5. Executive Session

- Personnel
- Pending Litigation
- Probable or Imminent Litigation
- Property Acquisition
- Collective Bargaining
- Review of Minutes of Executive Sessions

6. Additional Items from Mayor, Council, Staff or Citizens.

Ald. Stellato: Is there anyone who would like to come forward? State your name and address for the record?

Richard Escalante: I live at 202 Windsor Circle, St. Charles. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today on the 2015 Strategic Plan which is being developed. Before I do, let me thank you for the fine services you provide each and every day. I moved here in late 2012 there is never a day I regret moving here. I have some very high standards for city services and this community meets or exceeds them with each and every contact I have. I trust that you, the professional staff, the Mayor, continue to think about the citizens in a very positive way and you really deliver each and every time.

I've reviewed the material prepared by Sikich. I believe the comments in the material are excellent. I just really want to add three comments. First, I applaud the Downtown Business Incentive Program. I think it's excellent. I hope you can expand that program. We have an aging downtown, which gives it great historic character, but it really presents some challenges utilizing that leasable space. I think that the program you have underway, the Downtown Business Incentive Program, is a great beginning. I would suggest the Strategic Plan explore additional creative ways to facilitate the occupancy of vacant properties and to improve and update occupied downtown property. It's great to have those continue to be prosperous businesses in our downtown.

Second, there were several comments noted in the Sikich report supporting undertaking efforts to attract new businesses and corporate headquarters. I support those suggestions and suggest the plan also strongly support efforts to support existing businesses. Facilitate a retention and expansion of those businesses. To attract their suppliers and customers to our community and to expand by growing what we already have.

Finally, let me preface by saying when I pay my taxes to the City I really get my money's worth. I'm not suggesting you cut taxes or you need to cut services, not at all. A Strategic Plan will likely find new projects and spending this is all together appropriate, however, there may come a time when the State's financial conditions and potential State legislation could negatively impact the City's revenues and your ability to continue to provide those quality services we are used to. I encourage the City to incorporate a budget element to address the new financial realities and the best means to provide excellent services as well as to address new demands identified by the Strategic Plan.

Those are my three comments. I think the comments you've already received from residents are great. I just want to thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak today and for all that you do for the City.

Mark Koenen: Some of the comments I know you have heard here tonight or have heard in the report really are broader than what the City of St. Charles are involved in. I heard mention of Cougars Stadium and park space. We're going to share those comments, particularly with the

other governmental bodies so they get the value and the benefit of the information. If you have questions or comments, please don't hesitate to call me.

Ald. Lemke: Have the Downtown Partnership and the Chamber been advised of the interest in marketing and branding because I think these two groups have looked at the same thing and this supports what they have initiated.

Mark Koenen: We have shared this with them.

Ald. Stellato: Any other last minute comments?

7. Adjournment

Motion by Ald. Bancroft, second by Bessner to adjourn meeting at 8:04 p.m.

Voice Vote: Unanimous; Nays: None. Chrmn. Stellato did not vote as Chairman. **Motion carried.**

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