

LAKEWOOD CITY COUNCIL RETREAT
Lakewood Cultural Center - February 6, 2016
Meeting Summary

ATTENDANCE

Council members: Charley Abel, Barb Franks, Dana Gutwein, Karen Harrison, Ramey Johnson, Scott Koop, Mayor Adam Paul, Pete Roybal, Shakti, Sharon Vincent, David Wiechman

City Staff: Kathy Hodgson, Nanette Neelan, and Mary Ruther

Facilitation: Heather Bergman and Katie Waller

ACTION ITEMS FOR STAFF (Organized by discussion theme.)

Transparency, Public Engagement, and the Function of Council

- Continue to work on the Policies and Procedures, being sure to include the decision process for how Council members engage in training and travel opportunities.
- Organize a workshop on public engagement at both staff and City Council levels, while looking at possible changes to hearings, public comment, and outreach to involve new participants and make good use of public investment of time to participate.
- Create a proposal for improved document retention and provide to Council.
- Identify clear avenues of communication for members of the Advisory Commission for an Inclusive Community (ACIC) to ask clarifying questions and gather information after they present their annual report.
- Work with the Mayor to come up with a proposal for how to go about presenting the City Manager's Report to Council in a timely fashion without overloading Council.
- Prepare a preliminary work plan for priority topics in 2016 and 2017.

Housing, Density, and Quality of Life

- In upcoming meeting with the Planning Director for "Planning 101," include the roles of staff and the Planning Commission, impacts of zoning regulations, and City Council options to enact changes.
- Organize a study session, workshop, or panel regarding the proposed housing study, including a discussion of housing types, density, similar communities' efforts, and developer incentives; consider allowing public comment and inviting someone from the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) and/or Metro West Housing Solutions to speak.
- Review the fire pit and dumpster policies and enforcement to develop next steps.
- Organize an education session for Council with the Police Department to cover enforcement issues, particularly code enforcement.

Economic Development, Revitalization, and Sustainability

- Organize a City Council discussion regarding possible options regarding Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) refunds.

Sensitive Populations

- Provide Council members with contact information for Dave Appel so they can follow up with questions about senior services.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the retreat is to identify Council members' goals for the community and discuss how to reach them. Mayor Adam Paul explained that in 2016 Council will focus on health, including healthy communication internally between Council members and externally with citizens, as well as general community health. Council members were asked to share their visions for the City, identify and prioritize the necessary work to realize this vision, and define success for future Council collaboration.

VISIONS FOR THE CITY

Council members shared their respective visions for the community. Vision concepts and proposals are listed below. Items are organized by discussion themes.

Transparency, Public Engagement, and the Function of Council

- Council members should not just go along with actions because they offer the path of least resistance, but rather serve as critical thinkers who make changes when necessary, are transparent with citizens, and fully weigh all public and staff input.
- Public engagement should be encouraged and received in a manner that it is actually able to influence Council members' decisions. This may result in increasing the length of planning or other community processes.
- Document provided to City Council must remain fact-based and so that Council can make their own decisions.
- City Council should continue to provide a safe environment for public comment in which citizens are encouraged to express their opinions. The Charitable Giving Program public engagement is a good example of this.
- City Council should focus on high-level issues to make sure that the trajectory of the City is desirable in the long run.
- Constituents should have their voices heard even when Council is focused on high-level policies.
- Council members should enforce proper checks and balances by completing independent research on important issues to remain unbiased.
- Council members should have trust in one another and respect everyone's ideas.
- Retention of government documents should be improved on the website as a matter of transparency.
- Communication with citizens and voters should remain clear, open, and honest.
- The government should be transparent to allow citizens to get real answers and fully understand what is happening in their community.
- City Council must abide by the policies and processes approved by voters. If there is something that must be changed, it should be approved by the citizens.
- The Policy and Procedures document should be revised and be made accessible by citizens.
- City Council members and staff must continue to build relationships with each other, particularly the newly elected members.
- The City Charter should be rewritten so if a City Council member has served a half term, they are allowed to complete two full terms.
- Citizen-based programs are useful in empowering citizens. It could be beneficial to develop a neighborhood watch program.

Housing, Density, and Quality of Life

- People choose to live in Lakewood because of the character and personality. They should be able to enjoy these benefits while taking advantage of different lifestyle and housing options.
- While growth is inevitable, the interests of current citizens should not be ignored to solely focus on growth.
- The City should do a housing study to assess the current state of the market, opportunities for growth, and possible solutions.
- The housing market is not diverse enough for the people who live in Lakewood; the local market lacks starter homes for the younger population as well as transitional housing for seniors who are not yet ready to move into assisted living.
- High-density development should be approached in a manner that encourages high-quality construction and good neighbors. It should be scattered throughout the City.
- High-density developments can increase crime and traffic, so zoning regulations should be carefully examined and revised if necessary so adjacent neighborhoods are not negatively impacted.
- Housing density should be added to neighborhoods where it is appropriate and will not negatively impact the surrounding areas.
- New developments must be required to provide enough parking for all residents and visitors to lessen the development's impact on neighbors.
- Code and law enforcement should help to protect the quality of the community by making sure that dog owners are responsible and that all streets are safe for pedestrians, drivers, and bikers.
- Citizens should be more united in their vision for the City. It is a more productive discussion to think about the greater good rather than concentrating development in one area or neighborhood.
- Connectivity issues are an issue throughout the City, characterized by lack of lighting next to public transportation stops, sidewalk gaps, or narrow sidewalks that cannot accommodate wheelchairs.
- Citizens generally enjoy what Lakewood has to offer in terms of quality of life, indicating that drastic changes may not be needed.
- City staff should use the sustainability plan to ensure monetary and physical resources are being used as efficiently and responsibly as possible.
- Pilot programs can be an effective tool when working with concepts new to the community.
- The Planning Commission has some powers that should be reserved for City Council.
- Open space should be protected, particularly wildlife corridors.
- Historical preservation should be enhanced. The City already has good policies on paper but they must be put into action.
- Traffic is an issue, especially entering or leaving the City. While an analysis could be costly, it is necessary to increase access.

Economic Development, Revitalization, and Sustainability

- Economic development is paramount to Lakewood. It would be beneficial to create incentives for local businesses to improve their facades.
- The Sheridan corridor should be redeveloped. The business community and neighborhoods east of the area must be involved in this effort. Developing this area could help define an identity for Lakewood.
- Lakewood must develop a clear image so businesses are proud to be located in this community as opposed to associating with Denver.

- The Colfax corridor holds a lot of promise for economic development and revitalization in Lakewood. Lakewood should work with partner communities to develop a plan or vision for this important area.
- The Sustainability Plan and all its different aspects needs to be implemented, particularly working with businesses to encourage energy efficiency, increasing resiliency, and preparing for future changes in city services and operations if the climate is going to change.
- The City has started to see a Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) refund and may eventually have to ask the voters what should be done with the money.

Sensitive Populations

- Homelessness is an issue, particularly homeless veterans. The City could look into partnering with regional organizations to tackle this problem.
- Gangs are sometimes a problem in the area. Cleaning up graffiti has helped, but it would be beneficial to construct an outdoor pool so kids have something to do during the day in the summer.
- As the senior population grows, they need more resources. The City should look into Lakewood Rides to make sure the waitlist is kept as short as possible.
- Senior needs should be considered just as much as schools' and children's needs.
- Any tax increase impacts the senior population, as many are on a fixed income.
- The City should look at the periphery around schools and day care providers for sexual predators.

While there were many topics on which Council members did not see eye-to-eye on all solutions, there was much agreement around the problems, especially increasing recycling, better understanding the housing market, addressing growing senior needs, anticipating and planning for growth, diversifying housing types and locations, and encouraging small-business development through incentives.

DISCUSSION OF PRIORITY TOPICS

Council members engaged in the following discussion on several topics that emerged as common themes and/or high-priority topics. The goal of this discussion was to increase Council members' understanding of one another's perspectives and to hear from staff whether and how each issue is being address or could be addressed in the future. Not all vision items were raised during this clarifying discussion.

Transparency, Public Engagement, and the Function of Council

Public Engagement Strategies

- Not all citizens know about certain local government processes until it is past a point in time when their feedback can be incorporated. This is frustrating for citizens as well as staff and Council members.
- The number of outreach channels has increased over the years, but there are still some citizens who say they did not know about certain projects.
- Regarding some housing developments, some developers are required to complete a certain amount of outreach. There are instances when this has not been done properly.
- Traditional media is not always a reliable way to deliver outreach messages, as some editorialize the story instead of delivering the facts.
- Doing more outreach earlier in the process and to a broader swath of citizens may alleviate some of the problems associated with late feedback. Some Council members thought that it

could be beneficial to extend public processes when there is a large amount of late feedback, so all citizens are able to voice their opinions. Others thought that this would be disrespectful toward staff and committees who have worked hard to prepare the issue for discussion, as well as toward citizens who had already invested time to participate on the original timeline.

- Technology could play a large part in reaching a more diverse and broad audience.
- Some public processes should be extended to accommodate for more engagement and feedback, especially zoning processes.
- It is necessary to cut off feedback at some point; otherwise a process will never be able to come to a conclusion.
- It is preferred that City Council meetings be cut off at a certain time at night so they do not go too late and lower quality of the decisions. However, meetings that run late typically do so because of public comment, a part of the process that should not be eliminated or shortened.
- Engagement can be increased and a larger audience can be reached by moving certain meetings into different venues throughout the community.
- Not all demographics are reachable on the same type of media.
- There should be a way for people who are home-bound to be able to give feedback that is equal to feedback provided by those who can attend Council meetings.
- All citizens should be given the same opportunity for public comment, regardless of topic. This should be clarified in the policies and procedures document.
- Volunteer opportunities should be listed in a clear manner and in one location, possibly on the City website.

Housing, Density, and Quality of Life

Quality of Life

- Lakewood has experienced substantial population growth in recent years, a trend that is expected to continue. This growth has impacts on citizens, city services, and policies and regulations.
- Neighborhoods near high-density developments have cited a loss of parking as an issue. Some developers are not required to provide parking for all residents or to accommodate a reasonable number of visitors. Staff indicated that Council will learn about this issue at an educational workshop with Travis Parker, Director of Planning, on February 8, 2016.
- In the past, developers were required to provide a certain amount of open space or cash-in-lieu for the community to offset the impacts of their development. Some members thought that the City should put more emphasis on community benefits in development, perhaps by increasing the cash-in-lieu fee.
- High-density developments are more frequent now than in the past. Council members were concerned that these types of development are not appropriately placed due to the new zoning regulations and that they negatively impact surrounding neighborhoods.
- Past Lakewood ordinances have encouraged developers to pursue high-density options. Any changes cannot be retroactive, but they can encourage appropriate development in the future.
- Low-income services and development tend to be clustered according to census blocks. This is a practice that is not in line with many Council members' visions for diverse and dispersed housing options.
- Changing zoning regulations in Lakewood could impact other cities in the region.

Housing Study

- It could be useful to link a housing study and a transportation study. The City could utilize data on commuting patterns created by Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) to ensure that traffic and development will be complementary.
- The housing study should look into the advantages and disadvantages of mixing affordable, low-income, and regular housing options in the same building or development.
- CHFA and Metro West Housing Solutions will be beneficial in educating Council members and staff about housing challenges to be considered in the housing study.

Planning Commission

- In the past, the Planning Commission made recommendations to City Council. Now, there are some cases where they are able to make decisions on behalf of the City.
- Some members of Council thought that it was improper to have an appointed body make decisions for the City, as they are not held to the same standards by constituents as elected City Council members.

Economic Development, Revitalization, and Sustainability

Sustainability Plan Implementation

- The sustainability plan was recently completed by the City, but has yet to be implemented.
- Some Council members were concerned that implementing some of the recommendations would dictate lifestyle choice for citizens.
- Others stated that they viewed the implementation of the recommendations as a matter of increasing options for those who would like to make certain choices, such as riding a bike to work or recycling.

TABOR Refund

- Lakewood has started to see a revenue level that suggests the need for a TABOR refund and will eventually have to identify options for refunds or determine whether/how to spend it.
- Some members thought that citizens should be able to decide whether they want a refund or whether the City should keep and spend the money. If the City keeps the money, the citizens should have a say in how it is spent.
- Voting on this issue will be complicated and require careful legal wording. However, it could be beneficial to start engaging the community to define their priorities early so that the process is not rushed.

PRIORITIZATION OF COUNCIL WORK

Council and staff indicated the necessity of prioritizing the following items in the work plan for 2016 and 2017.

Transparency, Public Engagement, and the Function of Council

- Public engagement workshop to engage more citizens in an authentic manner
- Proposal for improving document retention
- Enforce current rules properly before making new ones.
- Review the policy and procedures document.
- Augment the Citizen Survey to ask meaningful questions.
- Assess ACIC protocols and procedures, especially to clarify communication with Council and staff and publish agenda topics before meetings.

Housing, Density, and Quality of Life

- Planning education to assess zoning options and a clarification of roles
- Housing study session to better understand the current state of housing
- Housing study to collect data on the current state and provide future options
- Conduct an assessment of fire pit and dumpster policies and enforcement to identify next steps.
- Identify legal options regarding drones.

Economic Development, Revitalization, and Sustainability

- Community discussion for TABOR refund options or debrucing
- Identify incentives for small business façade improvements, possibly included in the Urban Renewal proposal.
- Revisit redevelopment of Colfax on a larger scale to include surrounding neighborhoods and address vacancies.
- Develop next steps for implementing the sustainability plan.
- Continue to work with Denver on redevelopment of the Sheridan Corridor.
- Continue to further the development of a slash facility for the City.

Sensitive Populations

- Maximize current resources for seniors by better understanding the roles of regional organizations and fully utilizing current City resources.
- Review current City transportation services to make sure they are being maximized, particularly for seniors.
- Develop a strategy and vision for youth services, specifically focused on health and safety.

Staff will work to create a work plan schedule for 2016 and the beginning of 2017.

OPTIONS FOR ACIC CONSIDERATION

City Council can assign projects to ACIC, a citizens advisory group that provides recommendations to City Council after completing further research. In the past, there have been communication issues between Council members submitting questions to ACIC and the ACIC members who are completing the work. Staff and Council agreed to identify clear communication channels after hearing the annual ACIC report.

Members of Council proposed some tasks that might be a good fit for ACIC. These options are listed below. It was agreed that staff should review these options and determine the current status of each issue, whether ACIC has already discussed it, and how to frame a clear question for ACIC to address. Staff will prepare a summary of this effort to Council.

- Assess possibilities for a community celebration and fireworks show sponsored by the City, preferably on July 4.
- Look at what other cities in the region do to encourage energy efficiency in neighborhoods and private residences, as well as local businesses and report back to City Council on options. Do not consider funding measures, but rather scale of projects and programs.
- Identify community bike education providers, with a special focus on child safety.
- Assess the current state of on-street parking restrictions and possible changes, including enforcement options.
- Consider the feasibility of expanding Little Help to more neighborhoods.
- Reconsider making tree limbs and logs cut by the city available to residents. Work with forestry staff to compile information on this topic.
- Identify incentives for residents to recycle or utilize a proposed slash site.

DEFINING SUCCESS FOR COUNCIL COLLABORATION

Council Protocols

To ensure that internal City Council discussions remain productive, Council identified the following protocols that should guide all future interactions and conversations.

- Be respectful.
- Speak with civility toward others.
- Participate whenever possible and appropriate.
- Challenge ideas, not people.
- Do not attack or assume to understand one another's motives.
- Listen to the Mayor when he directs the group to move on past an issue.
- Do not interrupt.
- Do not have side conversations.
- Say what you mean; don't say it mean.
- Have respect for staff and other Council members.
- Do not encourage the media to pursue a negative and divided depiction of Council.
- Do not undermine past Council actions or decisions.
- Give staff questions ahead of time when possible to encourage a well-informed discussion.
- Continue with the system of pressing buttons to speak.
- Consider bringing in a facilitator for tough discussions.

Council Travel and Committees

Some members of Council stated that selecting committees, trainings, and travel opportunities for Council members has not been transparent. The current process is not written down and can be inconsistent. Staff stated that they will outline the specific process in the Policies and Procedures document that is currently being revised.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Typically, the City Manager shares with Council an annual budget and, as part of her annual evaluation, a “state of the City,” along with a verbal report dealing with more sensitive issues. This report is traditionally provided during the Council retreat at the beginning of each session. Some members of Council thought these reports would be more impactful if new Council members were to first finish getting up to speed on how the City operates and other aspects of onboarding new Council members. Others thought it would be best to continue with the report in typical fashion to remain on schedule. Since the budget report is already complete and the report paired with the City Manager’s evaluation has a specific timeline already, Council discussed how the verbal report should be shared. It is typically public but not televised, since it shares sensitive information. After discussing possible options, Council and staff decided that Mayor Paul and the City Manager will work together to come up with a proposal for how to go about presenting the verbal report.

THE ROLE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Sam Mamet of the Colorado Municipal League (CML) explained the role of municipal government to the Council members and staff. He explained that 268 cities and towns throughout the state are members of CML. Each member city pays dues each year, which are used to fund informational resources for local government officials as well as lobbying efforts. Kathy Hodgson, Lakewood City Manager, is a member of the Board of Directors and Lakewood officials have been very involved in the past.

Mr. Mamet explained that there are many benefits to being involved in local governments, as they are able to affect change in a citizen’s daily life. Municipal governments are in charge of delivering services to their citizens on a daily basis, although it is becoming more and more common to interact with counties and other regional entities to make impactful changes, such as developing the Sheridan Corridor or Colfax. Most municipal elections do not occur in November so that candidates are more likely to remain nonpartisan; however, some fiscal issues must be included on a November ballot. Of the many issues facing municipalities today, Mr. Mamet addressed the importance of streamlining sales tax, understanding the Urban Renewal Tax Increment Financing (TIF), TABOR refunds, and mayor-council municipal government structure.