

**Ann Arbor, Michigan**

**City Council Planning Session**

**December 2012**



## Ann Arbor, Michigan – Planning Session Summary

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The Ann Arbor City Council met in the Jury Assembly Room of the Ann Arbor Municipal Center on December 10, 2012 to conduct a planning session for the upcoming two years. The planning session was facilitated by Julia Novak from The Novak Consulting Group. The stated purpose of the retreat was to improve the working relationship of the governing body and identify important issues for the City to pursue in the coming two years.

### Welcome/Introductions and Expectations

Each member of the governing body had an opportunity to share their expectations for the retreat. Those expectations included:

- John: Been to a number of these, hope to come up with some basic items to work on in the coming year
- Chuck: First retreat, expect to get a better sense of the priorities of my colleagues and identify Council priorities
- Stephen: Open ended – priorities are always public safety, health and welfare
- Jane: better understanding of the priorities of others – first retreat this time around – help us get to understand why priorities are priorities; tend to look at things with consistent priorities, public safety is key and just efficient ways to provide services to residents; more intergovernmental cooperation
- Sally: High expectations – agree about the desire to understand priorities – where things are aligned, and not aligned – want to leave with a sense of camaraderie?
- Marcia: Hope to leave tonight with having dialogued with one another and to really hear what others are saying – understand that we all agree on our group priorities – find consensus
- Sumi: Want to represent a new set of priorities – there is a sense of the City failing in terms of core services, want to get an understanding of the Councils desire to have a common understanding of these issues
- Christopher: Full conversation
- Sabra: Inevitably view opportunities like this as a challenge to learn something new, my goal is to have an understanding of the Councils agenda; want to develop a sense of priorities
- Margie: Find these sessions to be helpful. Bring out the priorities of the body, the City and I value hearing staff perspectives an understanding our limitations
- Mike: We are all responsive, and as we respond we get things “right” in the City – otherwise we have course corrections from the community; knowing priorities help us respond to the entire community.

### This I Believe

Each Council member was given five to seven minutes to share "what they believe" about the future of the City. This exercise is loosely based on the "This I Believe" Essay format made popular on National Public Radio. Councilors were invited to share what they personally believe to be true about the future of the City.

Mike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moved to AA in the early 1990's, began to observe the difference in how the community operated then where I lived before; got pulled into joining various</li></ul>
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	<p>organizations – community has a high level of involvement. Community has so many strengths; community is accepting of all kinds of people – because of that a lot of good things happen. More people you involve the better the results you get. Joined the Kiwanis – admire the long-term commitment people make to causes; appreciate the sacrifices people make to serve; respect commitment of others on Council and the staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ran for office – very community centered – community is an important piece of strength;</li> <li>• Respect people, move forward, being patient; have respect for those who serve</li> </ul>
Marcia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe in Democracy, and democracy is hard – it requires communication between those that govern and the community – takes me back to girl scouts organization, making decisions for those in the field, needed to stay connected to not have an “us v. them” mentality</li> <li>• How do we make sure that we are looking for different ideas and viewpoints – when we are comfortable listening to different viewpoints, we make different decisions</li> <li>• This is hard work, nothing easy about it, if you don’t put effort in, you won’t get anything out of it – wont always agree, but you can find common themes</li> <li>• It is our differences that make us unique, but it is the plurality of our commonalities that make us strong – this gives us a perspective for making decisions</li> </ul>
Chuck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe in an AA that works for everyone – grateful for jobs being brought in to the community, grateful for expanding tax base, but I also know not everyone can work for “Google” so we also need jobs for pipe fitters and brewers and baristas – I believe in an AA that works for everyone</li> <li>• Having a social safety net – people in need have a place in our community</li> <li>• Life event made me realize how close we are all to living on that donor/recipient line</li> <li>• Unusual weather year this year...no winter, lost crops, drought, heat wave, wild fires, then super storms...an AA that works for everyone means a City that works for the future too – how do we care for the community for the people who will live here when we are gone.</li> <li>• Our decisions do matter, we can make a difference, we can make an AA that works for everyone</li> </ul>
Sabra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is AA still a “small town” – I grew up in a small town – even in small towns it is hard to capture that small town feel – good and bad about small town, nosey neighbors, new people don’t fit in – every community is a small town at heart – strangers will smile, neighbors will help, always find that as humans we want to connect and build community</li> <li>• We want to make life better – community is work by those who are willing to engage</li> <li>• Governments role is to do for us what is too expensive, complex, rarely needed, to do for ourselves; government helps level playing fields; our pooled resources allow us to contribute to that which benefits all of us</li> <li>• Many residents are student – that is a reality – about 70,000 people see AA as their permanent home – AA was a small town when I moved here – small town is not defined by numbers of people – it is limited by the connection we have with our neighbors and the investment we make in the success of our community.</li> <li>• My challenge and goal is to keep the small town feeling while being open to new ideas</li> </ul>

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Christopher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am humbled by complexity – AA is a complex place – on balance I believe the future of AA is bright – accentuate the positive – we are growing, have talent in the community; municipal government is efficient</li> <li>• U of M is a steady employer and contributor to our cultural offerings</li> <li>• Residents, human capital – comprise great resources – engaged population, vital neighbors, belief in social justice and decency – this base means we will start companies, drive innovation, and provide leadership in the future</li> <li>• Municipal organization is run by deeply qualified staff, and led by visionary political leaders who are interested in a flexible, sustainable service driven enterprise</li> <li>• Important to acknowledge that our ability to exploit our advantages is limited by things outside our control – Michigan political culture – under resources many government initiatives; hurt by decline in Detroit, within AA our history of civic success is limited by our ability to change – have to be prepared to change in the future</li> <li>• Cannot allow disadvantages to neutralize our advantages – there are so many positives that will create a quality of life.</li> <li>• The future is bright.</li> </ul>
Sumi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Themes that resonate with me – democracy – incorporating dissent; economic theory shows light of democracy in examining famines of China and India, where people did not perish in India like they did in China – lesson I take with me, this is not China or India, but it is a democracy</li> <li>• Must listen to people who disagree - easy to listen to people who agree with you</li> <li>• Economic growth – grew up in a small village, often without electricity, went everywhere by bicycle, then moved to Manhattan and Boston – seen a very broad spectrum before coming to AA 16 years ago – I question capitalist view of growth, growth, growth. Stasis is okay too – there are limited resources – we cannot grow like China at 8 and 9 % - we must preserve quality of life also</li> <li>• Priority – our residents choose to live here – people live here for quality of life; cannot be preoccupied with growth, our preoccupation should be to make quality of life good for our residents.</li> <li>• Sustainability is fiscal and environmental – those are the two legs I stand on – fiscal responsibility and environmental sustainability</li> </ul>
Sally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are all created equally but wired differently</li> <li>• Teambuilding, sportsmanship, work ethic, discipline, customer is right, think local, five fire stations, recreation; paper not plastic;</li> <li>• I believe in the Wolverines</li> <li>• I believe life is a continuum and where and how we end up is a result of the choices we make along the way.</li> </ul>
Jane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe in the Golden Rule – treat others was you would like to be treated – respect for differences is part and parcel of the golden rule – core belief that hopefully guides how I do things</li> <li>• Also came from a small town – my father had the local grocery store – watched my Dad help people who needed basic things – quietly helping those when they needed it – learned from watching; See the interest in helping others – guided by my basic core small town values</li> <li>• Ancestry and roots mean something to me – your past influences your present – we</li> </ul>

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	<p>are all here because we love this community; serve on nonprofits and participate in other ways – great way to get to know the community – want to take those experiences and be sensitive to needs of residents and incorporate into my thinking as we consider priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taxes and fees are significant but basic services are dwindling</li> <li>• Disconnect between City Hall priorities and resident priorities</li> <li>• Be efficient</li> </ul>
Margie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe our City is growing and this is healthy for our City; learned this when I went on an IDA trip to Boulder and Denver – hearing needs of our small businesses and their dependence on growth – particularly when state revenue sharing is dwindling – change is necessary part of growth</li> <li>• Role of government is good – to provide for people who choose to live in a given area that which they couldn't do themselves, how we define the role of caring for health and welfare is subjective</li> <li>• Elected to become educated and make difficult decisions for the good of the whole.</li> <li>• Believe in representative democracy – we will hear MORE from those who are unhappy, and we rarely hear from those who think we are on a good track</li> <li>• Every person who contacts us has good intentions and should be treated with respect and humility by council members – true for how we treat one another also</li> <li>• Ace staff upon whom I will always rely</li> </ul>
Stephen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Townie...one of a few left – believe in the future of AA because I am a product of its past – community has changed and grown but still has the foundation of a community respected for social change – am the son of hippies – social change instilled in me the purpose of public service – product of AA public schools and U of M –</li> <li>• Steward of the past, carry on the benefits that have been provided to me, my family and my kids – stewardship that we take with passion –</li> <li>• Would like some things from the past to be present – Recreation programs in our parks – that interaction – diversity of socio-economic status makes us distinct</li> <li>• We have lost population and we cannot count on the U of M to bring in Federal Dollars – we are a company town...but funding for those research initiatives is drying up</li> <li>• Future will be a time of static growth – lucky to hold on to what we have – provide basic services, keeps our golf courses and ice rinks open – maintain our infrastructure – encourage people to move into them – there are still foreclosures, little infill development, etc. there is still a sense on the edges of AA that we are not all beneficiary of the great economic change happening downtown – need to distribute wealth in our neighborhoods</li> <li>• Love AA, so I'll talk about the past</li> </ul>
John	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents bought a house here with a VA loan – lived here since 9mos old – diverse City but at one time it was a conservative City – this City voted for Nixon.</li> <li>• Recall a mayor dropping by my house on a Sunday afternoon when I was playing in the front yard as a kid – this is the kind of City where you can still talk to the people who are in charge –</li> <li>• City has changed...and in some ways hasn't – only 40% of downtown will ever change, the rest is historic district or U of M</li> </ul>

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- Students come in and hold a place for the next student that comes along
- City is gentrified, less affordable now and we cannot forget that we need to make it possible for everyone to live here
- Apartments used to be filled with working people who walked to downtown shops – students have pushed the working class out because they have more affluence than our residents
- Have to keep growing jobs
- AA is more exciting now than it ever was – more to do than ever – City is performing at a high level – on many “best of” lists –
- Lost our biggest employer and still survived this economic downturn – bounced back, jobs replaced, downsized City government – it is more efficient, QOL is still high; infrastructure being maintained
- Believe we can’t look at past, but have to look to future to take care of a generation that grew up with technology – this is a significant change
- Economic sustainability, and environmental sustainability – look to a different future for a new generation

At the completion of the “This I Believe” statements – the group discussed what they heard from their colleagues that was the same (where there was agreement), where there was potential disagreement, and anything that was truly unique.

### Same:

- Respect for differences
- Listen to those with whom you disagree
- Respect for staff, citizens and that they are motivated by good
- Passion for the City – community
- Didn’t hear any disagreement
- City needs to accommodate diverse capabilities
- Community
- Democracy
- Positive outlook – optimism
- Cautions – listen to constituents, be sustainable
- QOL
- We need for economic vitality beyond U of M
- Role of U of M

### Different:

- Growth – perhaps
- Looking to the past and what it may tell us

### Unique:

- Jobs for people at all skill levels – pipe fitters, machinists, brewers and baristas...
- Challenge of responding to those who participate in representative democracy

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## Fiscal Context

The CFO provided an overview of the fiscal context for the coming two-year budget cycle.

The Council was asked to share their key takeaway:

- Going into the FY discussions with a surplus and we need to watch how we manage it because the surplus will disappear on the operating side in a few years as expenses outpace revenue growth
- Not as gloomy as the past
- Downer from “This I Believe”
- Good to see the General Fund Reserve level
- Gap in projections scenarios was small
- Should we reconsider how we build the budget?
- Changes in “other” Revenue category – not significant
- State government is an adverse party – shouldn’t they be a partner?
- Property tax is critical
- Little control on Major revenue categories

## What do we hear?

When we hear from our constituents; what do we hear we do well? What do we believe we do well?  
What do we hear we could do better? What do we believe we could do better?

What do we do well?	What could we do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Excellent customer service – engagement with staff and public, especially for projects, group activities and in the parks</li><li>• Responsiveness</li><li>• Amenities – especially parks</li><li>• Vibrant Main Street</li><li>• Whole downtown doing well</li><li>• Maintain street lights</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Those on the edge of needing social services – concern about keeping the City affordable</li><li>• Not proactive – avoiding problems, not noticing problems</li><li>• Balance of development and activities</li><li>• Intergovernmental cooperation – dispatch, regional fire</li><li>• Shopping outside downtown doesn’t get positive attention</li><li>• Communicate – print and web</li><li>• Engage the public proactively</li><li>• Enforce off leash dogs</li><li>• Enforce nuisance ordinances</li><li>• Some nuisance ordinances too rigorously enforced</li><li>• Customer service at the “counter”</li><li>• Measurement and Metrics</li><li>• Permit process obstacles</li></ul>

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- Flexibility in funding potential to repurpose funds
- Pedestrian safety hot spots
- Housing Commission repairs to City owned housing

### Open Issues

Based on the survey completed in advance, the following items were identified as issues that the governing body has energy around:

- City Budget – Fiscal Discipline
- Public Safety
  - Staffing
  - Fire Stations
  - Ambulance/EMS
- Infrastructure Needs
  - Roads
  - Pedestrian Safety
  - Stormwater
- Economic Development
  - Downtown
- Regional Transportation
- Leaf Pick-up

The Council then had an opportunity to identify additional issues:

- Public Art
- Public Process – having and using public process
- Park Vision and feasibility – what do we want? What can we afford?
- University of Michigan Relations
- Affordable Housing – replacing the 100 units
- Customer Services
- Under Infrastructure, the following thoughts were added: ever growing traffic congestion and local transportation
- Under public safety, the following idea was added: more regional approach to fire services
- Under City Budget – Fiscal Discipline the following ideas were added: Cost effective delivery of services and efficient use of resources; prioritize the budget; DDA TIF – capture and reserve some realistic revenue; restructure the pension plan to a defined contribution plan for new employees

The group considered the entire list and agreed that there was the most energy for the body to focus its attention on the following five areas:



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- City Budget/Fiscal Discipline
- Public Safety
- Infrastructure Maintenance & Transportation in the Urban Core
- Economic Development
- Affordable Housing

For each of these five areas the group was asked to answer two questions:

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

### **City Budget/Fiscal Discipline**

Problem:

- Provide efficient, quality service delivery in the face of the projected gap between revenue and expenses

Success:

- Prioritizing expenditures while matching them with revenues over the long term

### **Public Safety**

Problem:

- Current fire staffing and deployment is not optimized to meet NFPA Standards for Fire Suppression
- Inadequate police staffing resources to do proactive and consistent enforcement and community outreach

Success:

- Fire station locations, number and infrastructure are optimized to meet community needs and industry standards, within City resources.
- Part I Crime Rates are among the safest 20% of communities in the country
- Community perception of safety is high
- Police officers have 25% - 30% of time available for proactive policing

### **Infrastructure Maintenance & Transportation in the Urban Core**

Problem:

- Lack of a coordinated urban core transportation plan that includes roads conditions, pedestrian safety, lighting, signage, buses, and storm water management.

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Success:

- A Transportation System that effectively and efficiently moves people regardless of their transportation mode

### **Economic Development**

Problem:

- Need to expand the tax base
- Need to further increase and diversify private sector employment in the local economy

Success:

- More stable local economic outlook
- Increase in private sector employment levels
- Creating diverse employment opportunities in various fields or industries
- Earned reputation as an attractive place to retain, create and relocate businesses
- Quality of life is maintained and improved

### **Affordable Housing**

Problem:

- Continuing lack of affordable housing units
- Lack of routine and emergency maintenance on existing units, which includes deferred maintenance and lack of systematic capital investment

Success:

- Additional units, public, private and nonprofit are created for a variety of family configurations and across the continuum of care
- All City owned properties are at a good level of maintenance
- A plan for routine maintenance is in place for City owned properties

### **Next Steps**

- Report brought back to Council for formal adoption of the priorities
- Staff develop work plans and incorporate into the City Administrator's budget proposal

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## Debrief

What went well?	What could be better or different?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement extraordinary</li> <li>• No electronics</li> <li>• Facilitator 😊</li> <li>• Kept us focused on outcomes and not solutions</li> <li>• Good distillation of issues</li> <li>• Lower priorities made the cut after further discussion</li> <li>• Flow of the evening with “This I Believe” worked really well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hear from staff</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

## Parting Thoughts

At the conclusion of the retreat, each person was asked to reflect on the retreat: where the City has been, where the City is going, and how they feel about the retreat and where they are headed.

Mike	Helpful for our focus – for us to realize as a group what our overall goals are – will help us deal with issues as they arise because these are our priorities
Margie	Ditto
Sabra	Appreciated the way we talked through our different perceptions of some of the problems; particularly pleased because some of these are problems that have bubbled up from our constituents as much as they have come to us from staff – as we talked through our priorities we can hear one another’s perception of the problem and the desired outcome
Christopher	Substance good – back to process – normally our conversations are very formal, this provides us with a give and take that is useful
Sumi	A little troubled that the word “optimized” high jacked our concern about staffing. If Staffing level is not sufficient, then we need to say we are not satisfied with staffing level
Marcia	Very positive to find that there is so much commonality in what we are trying to achieve; great energy and passion given this groups commitment if we can continue the dialogue
Sally	Like the yes, and thing... Expectation to understand priorities and to see alignment – that was accomplished, wanted a sense of camaraderie – extraordinary engagement was a plus; exceeded my expectation to have something concrete to walk away with – our collective priorities
Jane	Ditto – been longing for this type of interaction with each of the Council. Our formal structure is limited, this has been a fantastic exchange; in addition having something to walk away with is really important – big step forward

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Stephen	Agree with Chris about the dialogue and “butting” in even when we are not supposed to 😊 - good to do at least once a year; this exercise, by having a facilitator, really took the pressure off staff – though I want to hear from staff, this was good; Don’t hear from staff about how the public is treating them – I know that can be hard and not sure when we can hear from staff and get feedback – been useful and having a facilitator makes us more open. Covered a wide range – big picture – that is good.
Chuck	Leaving exhausted – having these five priorities to work through is good; identifying success is good, but what the solutions are may be a source of disagreement – but this tees us up well to have that conflict in a constructive way. Problem and success with public safety having facilitator provides some expertise was invaluable for helping us; how does Council treat staff? Would like to know. I leave glad I was here.
John	Impressed with degree of agreement – no insurmountable issues – will be able to come together on a budget when it comes to us – staff has a sense of what Council is interested in. Turned out well.