

Cambridge City Council Roundtable

Topic: Goal Setting Process

September 20, 2010 | 5:30-8PM

Cambridge City Hall

Facilitator: Stacie Smith, CBI

Note taker: Rebecca Economos, CBI

Agenda:

Introductions

Discussion of Goals

Discussion of Accomplishments

Preparation for next Roundtable

Call to order

Mayor Maher called the meeting to order at 5:50PM. He explained that this is a roundtable – an opportunity for city council and ordinance community to map out process by which the city council will work with the admin to develop goals with City Manager and his staff for FY12 and FY13 budgets, and that there is no public comment. He thanked everyone for their attendance, and thanked Councilman Toomey and Councilman Seidel for their preparation. He then introduced the facilitation team, Stacie Smith (facilitation lead from the Consensus Building Institute) and Rebecca Economos (graduate student intern).

Introduction

Stacie Smith provided an overview of the goal setting process and related meetings. She explained that in addition to tonight's meeting, another Council roundtable will be held on October 25th, followed by a World Café to solicit citizen feedback on November 9th. A Council retreat will be held after the Café, date TBD. Stacie explained that she understands the role of the facilitator to be helping the Council and staff manage meetings for the goal setting process. The Roundtables will generate ideas about what is most important for goal setting both by reflecting on last year and also looking forward. The World Café will be similar to last year's World Café, and aims to solicit public input on the goals. The Council retreat will serve to truly formulate the formal goals based on information collected thus far. Stacie then reviewed the agenda.

What makes a good goal?

Stacie asked the group to brainstorm around "what makes a good goal" with the aim of creating a list of criteria to use to help whittle down a future list of goals. There was a lively discussion among several members of the Council and City staff, who brainstormed the following list.

Good goals are:

- Aspirational; give direction and guidance

- Reflect the overarching concerns and priorities of the city
- Motivate city staff and give a sense of inclusion and importance of work; connect all staff work to goals
- Coalesce the Council, Staff, and public
- Are “doable”
- Measurable
- Clear and simple (vs. comprehensive)
- Able to be financed within City budget
- Connected with Council subcommittees’ goals and priorities, as well as overall initiatives, and may provide a filter or rubric for Council activities and decisions
- Define who goals are for
- Set the tone for the City
- Narrow focus; helps prioritize work among competing interests
- Help keep the balance of what should be funded and maintain fiscal responsibility
- Provides direction (mission) and means of evaluation for citizens, Staff, and Council
- Also linked to resources, thereby creating accountability for the Staff, Council, and Council committees
- Inclusive of work of staff and committees (everyone wants to feel their work is important and connected to the goals)

One attendee asked if the goals reflect the perspectives provided in the citizen survey, or are they the Council’s independent goals. Another attendee asked how the City and Council will connect these goals to both the budgetary and committee processes going forward.

While thinking about criteria for a good goal, the group reflected on last year’s goals, with some consideration to implementation, structure, and inclusiveness. Attendees noted that last year’s goals lacked inclusion of public safety, and that the implementation plan for these goals was not always clear. Some city staff noted that the detailed objectives listed in last year’s goals were challenging for city departments to deal with, in that they seemed to point energies into very specific directions that sometimes detracted from meeting the overarching goals. The objectives also did not capture the majority of the work undertaken by City staff day to day.

Two formats for goals were discussed. In one, the goals are aspirational and all encompassing, inclusive of the most important and wide range of programs and services offered by the city. The second format suggested would offer a broad mission statement embodying the important and on-going work the City accomplishes, accompanied by a few key priorities that the Council wanted the city to focus on.

Process around goal setting

Discussion and comments about the process of goal setting were threaded throughout the meeting. Salient points include noting the “messiness” of a complex process, along with concerns that this would be a similar frustrating process as past goal-setting sessions. The different timeframes for goal setting and budget formation vs. Council elections was discussed, and several attendees asked what the role of committees is with regard to the goal setting process and execution. A point was made that the Council did not have sufficient accountability

to work within the framework of their own goals. Another participant suggested that perhaps the goals needed only small changes during these processes, so that more attention could be focused on reflections on implementation. Attendees also identified questions around whether the goals should be comprehensive or specific, and if they should be measurable, though after discussion, the group seemed to generally agree that very detailed measurable framing might not be the most effective.

One attendee proposed that the Council set four overarching goals (pulling together the current seven), and that City department work be categorized and slotted into those goals. Each department would suggest specific objectives and work plans based on the broad goals, in partnership with the appropriate committees, and report back to the Council regularly over the course of the year, providing time and space for feedback and tweaking of objectives. Several attendees noted support of fewer broad, aspirational goals, while one attendee expressed that more goals would be acceptable.

Accomplishments and Achievements: What's great about Cambridge

The group then went through an exercise to talk about the City's accomplishments and achievements, focusing on the great things about Cambridge that the goals might embrace or support. Every attendee provided insight. The list includes:

Fiscal strength and city management

- Controlling taxes
- Well-functioning government
- Maintain programs during fiscal crisis; providing support to the hardest hit residents
- Strong financial position; fiscal stability
- Increase in partnerships to achieve goals
- Political and administrative support for new things
- Inter-departmental cooperation
- High degree of professionalism among staff
- Strong administrative and political leadership
- "Amazing" and "dedicated" City staff
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Quality service and commitment to Cambridge for all residents and businesses alike

- Investment in residents through capital projects (new library, etc.)
- Diverse; energetic; creative place
- Business community is increasing, and city government maintains balance with the neighborhood (business vs. resident debate)
- Job supports for residents
- High quality services for residents
- Provide access to resources for all residents
- Government became more intentional about education (helping kids on the free/reduced lunch program move through school to college to careers)

- Great customer service (from birth to seniors)
- Maintains a strong commitment to affordable housing

Quality of life is high, with engaged citizens

- Great parks
- Desirable, stable place to live
- Citizen activism
- Interesting place to be
- Security to raise children here
- Citizens and businesses like being here
- Center of innovation

Meeting process

At the suggestion of the Government Operations Committee, city department heads each developed a fact-sheet evaluating their department's implementation of the goals over the past two year. This information was not complete in time to send to the Council in advance of the meeting, but could be made available to the Councilors prior to the next meeting.

With regard to the process for tonight's meeting, a few Council members expressed a desire for the facilitator to begin processes with the Council, since it is ultimately their process, rather than City staff. Stacie expressed her interest in talking with Council members one and one, and that she was available and welcomed conversations prior to the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55PM.