

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Tari Renner
Members of the City Council

From: Lynn Montei

Subject: Briefing on Stakeholder Interviews

Date: November 12, 2013

As reported to you earlier, I conducted stakeholder interviews over the last few weeks to provide the Council with outside perspective on the city organization and governance. I interviewed 6 community leaders, 9 employees (both union and nonunion) and a mix of department directors and members of the administrative team (4 in total.) All interviewees were informed that the content of the interviews would be shared but not for attribution. This document was prepared to brief you on the results of those interviews.

In the summary that follows I've clustered comments by theme and, where possible, used the language of interviewees. The themes are listed by frequency of being raised, and the number to the right indicates how many individuals made reference to the subject.

I will begin with Community Leaders, followed by Employees and then Administrators/Directors. I chose not to provide a composite of all three groups as it would require generalization and, in my opinion, not add substantial value.

Community Leaders

I inquired about their views and perspectives on these subjects.

1. Observations about the City organization and its achievements, direction, focus and performance. Are their expectations being met?
2. Observations or perceptions about Bloomington's political leadership (the Mayor and City Council) relative to strategic leadership, reputation, effectiveness or other areas. Are their expectations being met?
3. 1-3 essential priorities for action required to advance the City's health and success
4. What makes them hopeful about the future of the City of Bloomington
5. Their doubts and reservations
6. Advice for the City Manager and City organization
7. Advice for the Mayor and City Council
8. Anything else they would like to share

Community Leaders

Observations of the City Organization

Experience with the city is very positive, professional and financially responsible; excellent staff; good relationship with Public Works, Police Department, Parks and Recreation; generally moving along better, more efficient; New recruits at the department head level for last few years have been pluses; Department Directors always professional and work well with their counterparts in other units of government; Directors easy to work with	5
Praise for the city's economic turnaround since the recession, providing stability and positive reports-appreciates David Hales' financial expertise, attention to planning	4
In working with development, staff exhibits the proper balance between consistency and compromise ; tries to take the politics out of application of regulations	2
Appreciates City Manager involvement on the EDC; encouraged to see the EDC, the Chamber and City are working together to promote strategic initiatives and have some table ready tax incentives (timed).	2
The Downtown bar scene requires significant careful, thoughtful attention and will take persistence to address what has developed over a long period of time.	1
Could be more open and collaborative in working as intergovernmental partners, and tending to regional responsibilities	1

Observations of Political Leadership

There's less discord and open disdain by and between City Council members and with the City Manager in the last couple of years; the Council is not as divisive and working measurably better together. Over last 10 years City Council has been dysfunctional and Ward-focused, very disappointing. It has gotten better over the last couple of years. The City Council's tone has improved and relationships are better than they used to be.	4
New mayor is very vocal and specific about what he wants to see; a stronger leader; he projects a positive image and works from a more positive environment wherein a lot can be achieved.	3
Would like to see a demonstrated attempt to reach out to other governmental units. With that will come more camaraderie, potential for sharing service delivery, improved reputation and all-around better vibe.	2
Lack of cohesion and appearance of being adversarial; completely dysfunctional; lacking in decorum and professionalism; discussion becomes personal and dislike is obvious	2
Overall good leadership dealing with the demanding issues that have to be prioritized in the face of significant fiscal pressure	1

Community Leaders continued

Like the idea that the City Council will have a retreat-assumes it's for visioning and strategic planning	1
Noteworthy that Council members are not present at major community events and must not grasp the importance of participation in the social and cultural life of the City.	1
Not doing enough to attract younger people and families to the community. School District revenue base beginning to be impacted by the number of senior exemptions.	1
Everyone needs to be better educated on economic conditions.	1
The new mayor has made transparency a big issue and has followed through, attempting to change the perception of a "closed off" culture. We can involve citizens, have open government and agree to disagree.	1
Have not created new revenue which would indicate true stability.	1
Ward competition often gets in the way of what's in the best interest of the City as a whole	1
The City of Bloomington needs the Downtown Plan to provide a rationale, a framework and an ability to move ideas forward.	1
Creating plans like the Bike Plan instills more trust in the City, greater follow-through, and attention being paid to emerging trends.	1

Essential Priorities

Economic Development: Need to continue solid, healthy economic growth; Bloomington has great local, major employers who should never be taken for granted; be prepared for new development opportunities with reasonable economic incentives; retain, expand and attract new business, not necessarily retail jobs-in this economy local government units can play a leading role; what kind of workforce do we have/want and what kind of community do we want? (Younger workforce appears to prefer more density, renting versus owning and not owning a car but using transit.)	5
Downtown Bloomington: Need to focus on that; would love to see some strategic things in the Downtown area -could be thriving, bring families back; need a stronger long-term plan for revitalization; currently being driven by the squeaky wheel. Want vitality downtown, provide housing options in the core. Do we need mechanisms to promote development downtown such as incentives for infill development? Main Street development is critical.	5
Vision/Goals/Priorities: What is your ultimate vision? Without a strategic plan the City is only responsive and reactive rather than proactive; Have to come together and agree on their goals, set priorities shaped by urgency and/or assets, skills, preparedness; narrow the focus; the Mayor and City Council should jointly create a consolidated vision.	4

Community Leaders continued

Quality of Life: A safe and healthy environment includes public safety services, parks, Constitution Trail, schools, streets, infrastructure, care and aesthetics (e.g., if bond debt is necessary to fund street resurfacing, so be it)	2
Fiscal Responsibility and Integrity: Most people understand the difficult job elected officials face and that there are many judgment calls. They also understand that there may not always be agreement.	1
West Side: Revitalize the west side	1
Communication: Make sure there are open, transparent, convenient channels of clear communication, in addition to a quality web site.	1
Role of Elected Officials: Once priorities are set, establish metrics and step away-look to staff to lay out the implementation.	1
Infrastructure: Streets and sewers	1
Openness: So that people feel they can voice opinions and get information	1
Regional Planning: Be more engaged in proactive in long-term regional planning issues, especially around transportation; helped to pay for, support and stand by it.	1
Pension Issue: find a way to solve that; will require political courage and Council members must be part of the solution. Put the City on a path of solutions.	1

Hopefulness

The Mayor comes in with a lot of energy. There is a new attitude and the environment is more positive; good cheerleader; new excitement.	4
There continues to be great promise and opportunity in Bloomington based on its location, employers, quality of life and willingness to do business when opportunities arise. This is true both in Bloomington and Normal, as most people see it as one community. The economy is recovering.	3
The City is working more closely with other units of government and they are liking each other; appreciates the stability David Hales provides; Partnerships, relationships and communication between the School District and the City are better than ever; good people on City Council and in management working together well and in a coordinated fashion.	3
The City Council has its heart in the right place and overtime optimistic that greater understanding can occur.	1

Doubts and Reservations

Not sure of the mix and whether the group has the capacity to lead; some on the Council are not strategic thinkers, without vision and seem to be there to be watchdogs.	2
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Community Leaders continued

A few elected officials enjoy playing the "gotcha" game with each other or with staff, which puts staff and everyone on edge. 1

Relates to history and cynicism-can they put in place a true strategic plan that is measurable? That message has to be out in front of people. 1

Advice for the City Manager and City Organization

Maintain fiscal balance. 3

Appreciate our City's enviable, strategic position- don't take it for granted. 1

Encourage the staff to be more engaged with other governmental unit practitioners. It's not unusual for Bloomington staff to be the only ones not present, and they are missed. 1

Value and become engaged in cultural and community enrichment activities in the wider community. Be consistent in your participation. 1

Do a lot of work with the City Council between meetings to educate so they are grounded in understanding. 1

Don't be oversensitive to media coverage on unpopular past decisions like the Coliseum because current taxpayers continue to have a stake in the facility and related issues. 1

Keep your head up; remember you have a lot of friends who can be helpful-let them, and be straight with them. Be less guarded and think more regionally. 1

Advice for the Mayor and City Council

Continue to build a quality relationship with the town of Normal which will facilitate more getting done in the future; start thinking in more regional terms than City-only terms going forward with the idea of gaining efficiencies, such as fire service and economic development; both cities need to focus on what is happening at the core because as growth moves out, attention to the core evaporates-e.g., The Grove. Will Bloomington look at development boundaries? 2

Remained focused on the community as a whole and minimize divisiveness due to Ward competition 1

Don't improvise and appear manic. Back up with consistency. 1

The City Council needs to demonstrate some enthusiasm and exuberance. 1

Understand the form of government-that the governing board sets policy and employs a city manager to direct staff. 1

Consult staff before starting to make changes to a Plan at the table. 1

No matter how the vote falls, once a decision is made be supportive and let it go. 1

Community Leaders continued

Feature good management in spite of the unpopular decisions of the past. Most understand that such decisions linger. Let people see the positive changes-things like the Friday afternoon sessions help with perception.	1
Include citizens in decision making as much as possible.	1
Don't lose sleep over 4-500 people out of a population of 80,000 who are disgruntled-not that bad.	1
Require the private business that manages the Coliseum to appear before the Council periodically to provide updates, as a professional courtesy and because of the City's stake in its success.	1
Get better about elevating discourse, being more civilized and congenial, exhibiting professional courtesy and etiquette and valuing diverse opinions	1
Jointly create a singular, consolidated vision and rally around it.	1
Don't be afraid to have public forums, explain why things are happening-people don't like surprises. Get out in front of the issue, if something is controversial and must be done, get out in front of it and take your lumps. Properly explain why it has to be done-people respect that. Make the tough call and move on.	1
Discontinue threats and stand behind and support the City Manager; treat each other well and discontinue unbecoming behavior.	1

Other

The Ward system exacerbates lack of cohesion and interferes with accountability to everyone in all parts of the City.	2
Hoped for infrastructure technology, to be a WiFi community. Collaboration would be great but the idea may not be realistic	1
Times have changed and we are no longer in the 50s. The community is changing and evolving, it could be stronger and better. What do we want to be? As a community we need to start thinking in a broader sense.	1

Employees

Nine employees were interviewed and invited to speak to any subjects they wished.

These questions were provided as a guideline. The questions I provided them were similar but not identical in nature to those provided to Community Leaders.

1. Can you offer some observations about the City organization, its achievements, direction, focus and performance? What are you particularly proud of? Where is there room for improvement?
2. What are your observations or perceptions about Bloomington's political leadership (the Mayor and City Council) relative to strategic leadership, reputation, effectiveness or other areas?

3. In your view, what 1-3 essential priorities for action are required to advance the City's health and success?
4. What makes you hopeful about the future of the City of Bloomington?
5. What are your doubts and reservations?
6. What advice do you have for the City Manager and City organization?
7. What advice do you have for the Mayor and City Council?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Employee interviewees were informed that City Manager David Hales asked me to obtain their frank answers to questions pertaining to the City organization and that, like all their responses, the results would be shared without attribution. Detailed content and advice from the interviews has been provided to the City Manager and is not part of this report.

Employees

General Observations of the City Organization

Employee morale is very low; all-time low morale	8
My department is great and I wish other departments maintained a similar attitude	4
Experience administrative roadblocks	4
Overall employee performance is not what it should be	3
Fear of losing job; job insecurity; unclear messages about contracting out	3
Irked about/question the fountain	3
Employees have been overworked for too long and undercompensated; hard to get regular work done on time due to labor-intensive reports	3
Notice improvements in the last year or two; exploring and opening to new ideas, being proactive (e.g., bar scene Downtown); infrastructure studies and need for maintenance	2
Don't feel appreciated, respected, valued, trusted	2
Appreciate being in the black	2
Outside impressions, rating agencies and the media have a positive outlook about the City of Bloomington-that it is stable and things are in order	1
Morale somewhat improved	1
Positive about new director appointments	1
Frustrated with negative attitudes around the City-those individuals feed off each other and it's a runaway train	1
Employees want clear communication on the City's direction	1

Employees continued

Departments seem to be on their own and need to come together as a whole 1

Observations of Political Leadership

There is a new sense of energy, eagerness and enthusiasm; expects the rough patches to get worked out; improving and will take a little time 3

The City Council has no common purpose, no cohesion, only nine individuals with their own agendas-no leadership; hopefully the City Council can work together 3

Inconsistent direction, cater to the squeaky wheel; Indecisive; need to get a vision 3

Does not appreciate and value all City departments; no affirmation from City Council; inconsistent behavior toward employees 3

Observe commitment to see things through; better at seeing to it that City Council weighs in at meetings 1

No recognition of employees in the picture; feel nameless 1

Acknowledge the strain, the backlog of needs and that elected officials must answer to the public 1

Appreciates more rigorous enforcement downtown 1

Staff feels a lack of trust from the City Council 1

Question intentions about outsourcing 1

Essential Priorities

Infrastructure: concentrate on this and an alternative source of water 2

Fiscal Responsibility and Integrity: maintain fiscal stability; take better control of finance, revisit fees in refuse and water departments-penalties and shut off fees are too high 2

Performance and Professionalism: address and improve, change the "public employee" stereotype 2

Morale: address and improve, establish cohesiveness within and between departments 2

Communication: internal and external; do much better job of telling positive stories to the community; show the value for the tax dollar; communication is key to everything up and down the organization 2

Training: mounting evidence of lack of training investment, safety issues 2

Customer service: customer service is poor 2

Employees continued

Reputation and Transparency: be open with citizens and find ways to invite their engagement; advertise the positive so people have a feeling that something positive is happening; eliminate secrecy	1
Downtown Bloomington: revitalize the downtown, make it family-oriented and tourist friendly	1
Vision/Goals/Priorities: Council is indecisive-would like them to get clear, focused, have a vision and know where they're going	1
Pension Issue: do a better job of wants versus needs - fund the pension system	1
Commitment: follow through with commitments	1
Succession planning: many retirements will occur within the next two years	1
Invest in employees: we are a valuable City asset	1

Hopefulness

Believes elected officials are trying and want to do better, but get stuck; hopeful that the Mayor and City Council can come together- want people to talk about Bloomington as they do about Normal	2
Committee of the whole may engender more trust	1
Continue to bring in business, make plans for the future and maintain stability	1
Community involvement	1
The economic climate, given the presence of the universities and State Farm	1
Glad that the City has reached out to do these interviews; wants the City to be competitive	1

Doubts and Reservations

Low level of trust; feel job isn't secure, language vague	2
Will elected official stick with the commitments they have made?	1
Concern about stability as regards State Farm and Mitsubishi	1
Don't repeat the mistakes of the past regarding downtown	1
Staff levels still way too low; forced to react every day, cannot be proactive and cannot retain institutional knowledge with reliance on contractors	1
Not sure everyone wants improvement	1

Advice for the Mayor and City Council

Would like Council to be more informed and knowledgeable before consideration of issues on the Council floor	1
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Employees continued

Project professionalism and stability; reduce drama and grandstanding on the Council floor	1
Integrate and balance the needs of the public and the needs of the organization	1
Focus on making policy decisions so staff has clear direction and can be consistent through policy, procedure and practice	1
Step into the shoes of an operational department	1
Appreciate employees for their service and the demands placed on them	1
Hold on tight; continue to develop the vision; be open-minded and know that changes needed	1

Other

The City needs to be more efficient-it is far behind in technology, systems, processes and practices	2
Front page stories have been upsetting to staff, caused unease and tenseness	1
Keep an open mind; listen to and depend on staff; appreciate the learning curve needed when new systems are introduced	1

Administrators and Directors

These four interviews were focused on administrators' and directors' observations of the governing body in preparation for the Council Retreat. In addition, I inquired about their observations of the City organization on request of City Manager David Hales. That feedback has been provided to him separately and is not part of this report.

Administrators and Directors

Observations of Political Leadership

Would like to see them work as a team; seems it's every man for himself; sense of team has deteriorated; the Council is not hanging together; Council complaints continue; Council is fractured	4
There is a culture of criticism and negativity toward staff; some grandstand and belittle staff; the climate erodes morale and discourages creativity and innovative ideas; staff are forced to be on the defensive; feel a sense of hopelessness; we should have earned their trust; people can't survive in the environment	4
Lacks trust and respect of each other, some pettiness	2
Mayor is energetic, an ideas person; has capacity to lead	2
Mayoral and Council involvement in resident complaints has created serious	2

- challenges; routine complaints have been escalated, appear to be urgent and require extra time be spent unnecessarily
- Council is unclear about their role; some enjoy getting into day-to-day management (perhaps because it's fulfilling, officials want to "get credit" or think the work won't get done without them) 2
- Would like to see a higher standard of behavior and more consideration in written and oral communication 1
- Would like to see better use of the process to bring the Council to consensus on matters of great import to the City's future 1

cc: David Hales, City Manager