

THE
KENMORE CITY COUNCIL
MINI-RETREAT

January 29th, 2024

Summary Report

Introduction

The Kenmore City Council held a “Mini” Retreat on January 29th, 2024 at the Kenmore City Hall. The purpose of this retreat was to discuss key projects and topics identified prior to the retreat. The following agenda guided the discussions during this council retreat:

1. Review of 2024 City Work Plans
2. City Council Team Building
3. City Council Norms and Working Agreements

The following report is a summary of the discussions and outcomes of the retreat (a complete recording of this retreat was made and is retained by City officials):

Review of 2024 City Department Work Plans

The retreat began with a presentation, overview and brief discussion of the 2024 City Department work plans in the following areas:

- City Manager’s Office
- Community Development
- Development Services
- Engineering
- Environmental Services
- Finance and Administration
- Operations
- Police
- Planning Commission Docket

City Council Team Building

Beginning in 2024, three new Council Members joined the City Council. Accordingly, the next discussion module focused up topics designed to initiate the reformation of the City Council as a policy team.

Looking forward to into 2024. Each participant was given the opportunity to indicate what they were looking forward to addressing/accomplishing in 2024. City Council Members noted the following:

- A successful 2024 would include positive movement on the Lakepointe Project.

- Reengaging our community with more community engagement activities, working together in an effective manner.
- Continued enhancement and use of the Downtown area.
- Addressing the need for mixed use and more housing stock.
- Moving the Public Pool project forward.
- Address increased density, putting in more sidewalks, protecting the environment.
- Enhancement of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and safety.
- Address a Tier 2 tree ordinance.
- Continuing with the good day-to-day work we are doing.

The City Staff noted the following:

- A good sustainable budget.
- Upcoming events including Farmers Market and others.
- Hank Heron mascot costume.
- Public Works Operations Center Project

Polarity Thinking. During the June 2023 City Council retreat, the City Manager presented a team building concept for discussion known as “Polarity Thinking” developed by Barry Johnson. The essence of this model is the recognition and understanding of how two “good things” seemingly exist and compete with one another over time, forcing choices that are difficult and often at the heart of conflict. Participants discussed the nature and impacts of polarity thinking and the role of compromise to avoid false dichotomies and polarizing “good vs. evil” rhetoric at the June retreat. The participants were shown the YouTube clip of this presentation from the 2023 retreat.

City Council Norms and Working Agreements

As extension of the above Team Building discussion the participants next discussed the nature and purpose of Team Norms and Working Agreements. Norms were loosely defined as “a standard or pattern of behavior that is typical or expected”. It was noted that other cities are identifying and writing down their City Council norms to assist in the onboarding of new members and to serve as an informal guide for creating productive working relationships and outcomes (See Appendix Two). It was also noted that approximately twenty years ago the City of Kenmore City Council along with other jurisdictions had

identified various working agreements as an aid to productive working relationships (see Appendix Three).

Participants further discussed the nature of council norms to include how norms/agreements differ from Council rules, formal codes of conduct and professional expectations. A range of various types of agreements were discussed such as the “no surprise” rule, the value of having freedom to speak ones mind, freedom to change ones position on issues given new developments/information, the importance of assuming “good intentions”, the value of asking questions and gaining necessary information and the value of letting colleagues know where one stands on issues as they progress. It was noted that consistent working norms between the City Council and Staff are also important. Finally, it was noted that professional disagreement on issues is not just to be expected but is valuable in the creation of effective public policy. It was noted that “effective disagreement” is a characteristic of great policy teams. Based upon the discussion, the following are norms seemed to be potentially useful to the City Council:

1. Practice the “no surprise” rule with each other, staff and community partners.
2. Assume the best intentions in your colleagues and others.
3. Explain your position on issues as they progress toward final outcome.
4. Speak to the policy at hand and not about the people involved.
5. Practice effective disagreement where we value what others have to say, encourage one to speak their mind, and make it about the policy not the people.
6. Strive to encourage, invite and solicit all participants views on policy issues.
7. Notify colleagues and staff of media interest and/or work on city issues once you become aware.

After a long discussion the participants agreed to the following:

Agreement One: An ad hoc committee consisting of the Mayor Herbig, Council Member Culver and the City Manager will meet to discuss the possibility/process for establishing written Council Norms. Note: One Council Member does not support the codification of council norms.

Appendix One

Retreat Participants

Mayor
Nigel Herbig

Deputy Mayor
Melanie O'Cain

Council Member
Jon Culver

Councilmember
Nathan Loutsis

Councilmember
Joe Marshall

Councilmember
Valerie Sasson

Councilmember
Debra Srebnik

City Manager
Rob Karlinsey

Selected Department Directors Participated During Specific Conversations

Facilitator
Michael Pendleton

Appendix Two

St. Louis Park City Council norms

DO:

- Assume good intentions
- Agree to disagree
- Pay attention to each other; listen
- Accept the vote once taken and support implementation. *(Suggested response: "I accept the body's decision, even though I didn't vote for it.")*
- Make sure everyone has opportunity to speak
- Be respectful, open and honest
- Exercise humility
- Seek opportunities to make/build connections with each other
- Address problems with other council members in a timely and constructive manner
- Accept the decisions of other council members
- Focus discussions on policy
- Check self in adherence to norms; practice self-regulation

DON'T:

- Have side conversations
- Personalize policy disagreements, or take offense to what someone says as their truth
- Get stuck when you disagree with an outcome

Accountability to norms

- Exercise caution calling each other out in public
 - Identify/own your feelings and needs when speaking up ○ Say "I'm not feeling heard" or "I'm feeling we are not able to agree to disagree"
- Address issues/concerns one on one or with an intermediary

Guidance for council/staff interactions *(to be further developed at a future workshop)*

- DO strive to request only information you need to make the decision at hand
- **DON'T** re-litigate points with staff during implementation

Established January 27, 2022; updated May 9, 2022

Council protocols for key situations

Titles

- During *council meetings*, council addresses each other using titles (for example, Mayor Spano)
- During *study sessions*, council uses first names.
- Staff uses council titles in public communications with council; council uses first names for staff.

Public discussions

- Council wants more organic and free-flowing discussion; the mayor is responsible for facilitating this.
- Mayor will generally speak last in council meetings but will participate more flexibly in study sessions.

Ward considerations

- For issues specific to a ward, the impacted ward member speaks first and make(s) the motion unless they decline to do so.

Recusals

- Council members should recuse themselves from an issue as soon as a conflict is reasonably apparent or identified, and no later than before a vote.
- Once a council member has recused themselves from an issue, they should not work on the issue with staff or speak on it as a council member.
- When a vote happens, they may elect to sit at or leave the dais and may choose to leave the room during the discussion.
- They also may only speak to staff or other council about the topic on the same basis as any other member of the public.

Connections

- Council will have recurring dinner connections on the first and third Mondays of each month. One will be before a council meeting/study session at city hall, one will be after the meeting offsite.

Spokesperson

- In general, the mayor represents the council to the media on issues of “why” and staff work with media on the “how.”
- Council may represent themselves on issues they feel strongly about, making it clear they don’t speak for the city council.
- As a general rule, council should always notify staff of media requests and/or appearances to avoid surprises.

Emails

- When a member of the public sends an email to multiple council or staff, the impacted ward member takes the lead (or mayor if not a ward issue).
- Suggestion is for the ward member to “reply all” to say, “Thanks for your message, I’ll reach out separately to avoid any open meeting law conflicts.”
- The group will give the mayor or ward member 24 hours to respond.
- It’s okay for council members to reply directly to senders to acknowledge the message.

- - Staff is also available to assist with crafting responses

Appendix Three
Sample
City Council Working Protocols and Agreements

Courtesy Norms

- 1. To be courteous and professional at all times**
- 2. To avoid discourteous behavior such as sidebar discussions or rolling of eyes when colleagues are speaking etc.**
- 3. To be recognized by the Mayor before speaking in study sessions, and full council meetings by the raising of hands.**
- 4. To speak in turn after being recognized.**
- 5. To praise each other in public and criticize in private.**
- 6. To have the staff follow-up with citizens, when appropriate, on issues brought before the council.**
- 7. To wait until citizens have returned to their seats in the audience before paraphrasing and responding to citizen presentations.**
- 8. To enforce and adhere to the three minute citizen speaking rule.**
- 9. To assist the mayor in responding to citizens and clarifying key points.**
- 10. To, at all times, treat staff in a polite and professional manner.**

Respect our differences, honor disagreement and vote and move on

- 1. Disagreement and differences is an honored and respected feature of government in “the city”.**
- 2. When requested, council members will be given time to explain their votes on issues, although council members are not required to make a public statement explaining their vote.**
- 3. Do not seek out the media to vent feelings when on the losing end of a vote.**
- 4. Do not criticize those who voted against your position on issues.**

5. When there is media coverage of an issue do not automatically assume that those who are in the minority on the particular issue initiated the media contact.
6. On Key issues (selection of Mayor, bond issues, etc.) strive for a 7-0 vote for the good of the whole.
7. Once the policy or issue is passed/defeated by majority vote get on board and do not work against the decision.
8. Once a vote has been taken on an issue indicate you will support the policy/vote of the council.
9. After a vote is taken on an issue only state the councils position on the issue and direct the media or others to the City Manager for a copy of your statements given in formal council meetings.
10. When in strong disagreement with your colleagues simply tell them face-to-face of your views.

Role of the Council: Policy vs. Administration.

1. Council members will focus on policy matters and not administrative issues.
2. The City Manager is the primary point of contact between the City Council and the staff.

No Surprise Rule

1. Make every attempt to notify staff in advance of public meetings about key questions and discussion points that the council would like addressed during the policy discussion.
2. If necessary, elaborate in open session on key policy elements etc. to establish for the public, a formal record on policy issues under consideration.

3. Council members should call each other on key issues to advise of emerging issues and/or to gain information from each other on policy issues.
4. The council will use the council initiative process to introduce new ideas or issues (see discussion below).
5. Learn to count to seven. When seeking support from your elected colleagues, ask for their vote and approach all members of the elected body (not just what is needed for a majority).

Role of the Mayor

1. The Mayor will continue the monthly meetings held every third week of the month.
2. The primary role of the Mayor is to facilitate meetings and represent the city in a ceremonial capacity.
3. When the Mayor has a strong interest in a policy issue and/or agenda item the Deputy Mayor can be asked to lead the council meeting so the Mayor can participate fully in the agenda discussion.
4. The Mayor will use the “council reports” section of the agenda to inform the council of Mayors activities for the past week.
5. The Mayor will use the council initiative process to bring new issues to the council
6. A FYI announcement will be given in advance of those public presentations/ceremonies/events that the Mayor is invited to attend.
7. The Mayor will ask others on the council to accompany or attend meetings in place of the Mayor when he/she cannot attend.

The council initiative process

- 1. Topic or issue is first raised in a council study session**
- 2. The topic/issue is first presented as a concept to include a statement of the problem (if known) and how the topic relates to existing city goals.**
- 3. On emerging issues, members can call their colleagues and ask to have the item on the next available council agenda.**
- 4. It takes four votes to move an item from study session to the full council agenda.**
- 5. If an agenda item on the regular council meeting agenda has not been presented/discussed in a study session, two members can ask for the item to be moved to a study session for discussion. The item will be moved to study session if there are four votes to do so. The item is removed for one week.**