



TOWN OF LA CONNER

MAYOR

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IVAN CARLSON
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NOTICE OF AND CALL FOR A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LA CONNER TOWN COUNCIL

DATE: Tuesday, July 11, 2023
TIME: 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
PLACE: Upper Maple Center
108 Commercial
La Conner, WA 98257 or
By Zoom, Information below

The undersigned Mayor of the Town of La Conner is hereby calling for and providing notice of a special meeting in accordance with RCW 42.30.080.

AGENDA

The purpose of this meeting is a Council Retreat.

(Discussion)

Ramon Hayes, Mayor

This notice will be posted on the Town Website, Town Hall and emailed to the La Conner Weekly News on July 5, 2023.

Distribution:

Councilmembers: Annie Taylor
Ivan Carlson
Rick Dole
MaryLee Chamberlain
Mary Wohleb

Join Zoom Meeting – This meeting will be Recorded

<https://phaudowud-online.zoom.us/j/85817976188?pwd=dVBia1Z1Q0NUU0d5K3BneGJJamJRU09>

Meeting ID: 858 1797 6188

Passcode: 140556

One tap mobile

Phone Number: 1-253-215-8782

Meeting ID: 858 1797 6188

Passcode: 140556

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kdzUmITtO0>



Town of La Conner

Date: July 5, 2023

To: Town Council

From: Scott G. Thomas, Town Administrator

Subject: Retreat

At long last, the development of a five-year strategic plan will begin to take shape with the upcoming Town Council special meeting on July 11th. The meeting will begin at 5:00 p.m., at which time our retreat facilitators, Brian Murphy and Julia Tesch of BERK Consulting, will lead the Council on a discussion of the Town's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Our facilitators have asked me to share with you the Workshop Overview, which is attached. They have also asked me to ask you to review the data rollup of the recent survey conducted by the Town, which is also attached. The data rollup, which reflects the community's views on an assortment of issues, will be a starting point for your discussion on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Finally, I have attached below an overview of the strategic planning process that was written in 2014 by Stan Finkelstein (the original article was written as a two part series; I have only included the first part below, as I thought it most applicable to La Conner's current process.)

Please let me know if you have any questions, and I look forward to hearing the discussion next Tuesday.

Strategic Planning

Virtual Town Council Workshop | Tuesday, July 11, 2023, 5 pm

Meeting Objectives

- Establish a shared understanding of the strategic planning purpose and process.
- Discuss the Town's strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats to identify potential areas of strategic focus.

Agenda

5:00 – 5:15 pm	Welcome and Introduction to Strategic Planning
5:15 – 5:50 pm	SWOT Analysis
5:50 – 6:00 pm	Conclusion and Next Steps

Advance Work

To prepare for the meeting, please review the community input collected via the recent community survey and prepare to participate in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. See below for details on the SWOT.

SWOT Definitions

- **Strengths:** What our community and our Town organization excel at.
- **Weaknesses:** How our community and our Town organization could improve.
- **Opportunities:** External factors that could create new advantages for La Conner.
- **Threats:** External factors that could pose challenges to La Conner.

To Consider in the SWOT Analysis

- Land use planning (e.g., growth, historic district)
- Public safety
- Economy (e.g., tourism, business)
- Capital projects
- Tribal engagement (including the Swinomish, Upper Skagit, Samish)
- Organizational health (e.g., staffing, interdepartmental coordination)

TOWN CONDITIONS SURVEY

TOWN OF LA CONNER

Survey Report prepared July 2, 2023

Scott Thomas, Town Administrator

Executive summary

This report reflects the results of a survey conducted of town residents earlier this year concerning the quality of government services offered by the Town, and the most significant issues likely to confront the Town in the next several years. The survey was aimed at Town residents and business owners.

Despite relatively modest crime statistics, survey respondents expressed concern with public safety in La Conner, with respondents viewing crime as an increasing problem.

The lack of affordable housing was expressed as a significant concern, although respondents also identified housing density, the preservation of neighborhoods, and retention of the Town's historical character as closely related concerns.

Residents expressed frustration with the availability of information related to Town activities, and ability to influence public decision-making.

Background and objectives.

This survey was performed to gain a perspective of residents' views on the current status of the Town of La Conner, and specifically the quality of government services provided as well as an understanding of the most significant issues confronting the Town. These survey results will be used as a component in the creation of a strategic plan. All governmental services provided by the Town were identified, and survey questions developed to explore the current state of those services along with questions intended to allow the development of issues expected to be confronted by the Town in the near-term.

Survey method.

This survey was focused on Town residents, and business owners who operate a business in town but may not live within the Town's geographic boundaries. The survey was advertised on-line; in flyers distributed with utility bills; in the Weekly News; and announced at various meetings, including Town Council meetings. The survey was conducted on-line, over a two-week period. Hard copies of the survey were made available at Town Hall for those unable to complete a survey on-line.

The Town received 83 responses to the survey.

Survey results

1. Perceptions of the Town, and the quality of family life, is high

Over 75 respondents indicated that they were either satisfied, or very satisfied with the overall quality of life in La Conner, and 70 respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall image of the Town. This was further reflected in quality of life focused questions, in which respondents ranked the Town as an excellent or good place to live or to visit.

At the other end of the spectrum, 11 respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with their overall feeling of safety in the community; an additional 11 respondents indicated that they were neutral about their feelings of safety.

In addition, 16 respondents were dissatisfied with the overall value that they received for their tax dollars.

2. Effectiveness of Law Enforcement and Fire.

As noted above, several respondents indicated that they did not feel safe in Town. While 63% of respondents believed that the Town had not declined as a safe place to live, work and raise a family, over 30% did feel that the Town was less safe than it was a year ago.

Even so, of the 49 respondents who rated their experience with a law enforcement officer in Town, 83% ranked the experience as being excellent or good (16% of all 83 respondents stated that they knew an officer.)

19 respondents were dissatisfied with the visibility of police officers in their neighborhood, a figure that was higher than the 19 respondents who were satisfied), and 21 were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the visibility of police officers in retail areas. 10 respondents were unhappy with the speed of response to emergencies. Over 32 respondents indicated that they did not know enough to respond to a question about the quality of public safety programs, a much higher number than those who expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

The overwhelming number of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of fire protection services.

3. Code Enforcement.

60 respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall aesthetics of the Town, and over 70 respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall appearance of the community. Over 80% of the respondents thought that the appearance of their neighborhood had stayed the same (64%) or improved (17%) over the past three years. At the same time, the data shows that efforts to remove inoperative vehicles (20 respondents) and the enforcement of codes concerning the junk or trash on private properties (25 respondents) was a concern.

4. Utilities (Sewer, Water.)

The overwhelming number of residents expressed satisfaction with the utility services that they received.

37.5% of respondents thought that water and sewer costs were too high, and another 23.8% believed that the costs were high but unavoidable.

5. Streets.

The physical condition of neighborhood and arterial streets in Town was generally regarded as adequate, with few respondents expressing dissatisfaction. The condition of neighborhood sidewalks generated more dissent, with 20 respondents indicating dissatisfaction.

The availability of bike lanes and pedestrian facilities ranked lower. More respondents (22) were unhappy with access to bike lanes than those who thought availability was adequate (25 respondents expressed no opinion or were neutral.) 20 respondents were unsatisfied with pedestrian facilities, compared to the 35 respondents who were satisfied or very satisfied.

6. Parks services

Of parks facilities, over 90% of respondents report that they have used the boardwalk, while 66% state that they have used public venues (Maple Hall and Garden Club), and 62% have used public trails in Town. Nearly 50% of respondents state that they use Town parks weekly or daily.

While respondents had few complaints about appearance and maintenance of park facilities, 19 respondents indicated unhappiness with the number of Town parks available; 40 respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the number of parks.

7. Planning Outcomes

Of all uses surveyed, the quality and affordability of housing in La Conner generated the most negative responses – 55% of respondents were not satisfied, and 58% believed that affordability was one of the three factors that was most important for the Town to consider regarding new development. Other significant factors included the historical character of the surrounding neighborhood (45%), housing density (36%), and lot size (34%). Encouraging the development of affordable housing ranked as the second most pressing issue facing the Town in the next three years. At the same time, neighborhood vitality was identified as a significant concern.

8. Communications.

The news sources most commonly used by these respondents include organization websites (69%) and social media (64%). A lesser number of respondents obtained information from newsletters (44%), E-newsletters (44%), meetings (43%), and email (40%).

Respondents expressed frustration with the level of public involvement in decision-making (24 respondents dissatisfied, as opposed to 25 who were satisfied or very satisfied). Similarly, 14 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the timeliness of information provided by the Town, with 26 respondents being satisfied or very satisfied.

9. Pressing Issues.

The survey asked respondents to identify those issues of significance that the Town would face in the next three years. Of the 83 responses received, the need to address natural hazards such as flooding ranked high, with 70% of respondents identifying this as a pressing concern.

Charting a Future Course for Your County or City

Strategic Planning: Mission/Vision-Goals-Objectives

November 2014

By Stan Finkelstein, Chair, Washington State Public Works Board

Introduction

The reality is that in this day and age the citizenry, for the most part, desires dynamic local governments. They abhor lethargy and they want to see positive change. They want their elected officials to position their jurisdictions to anticipate future needs. For the past 6 years most Washington counties and cities have been “treading water” as they've struggled to sustain vital services; address critical capital needs; and respond to evolving citizen demands in an environment characterized by shrinking resources, inordinately high unemployment rates and increased levels of citizen unrest. Most local governments have had to focus on addressing current needs without the luxury of being able to engage in any form of meaningful long-range planning.

Current evidence indicates that the national economy is on the upswing. National unemployment rates have fallen below 6 percent; inflation is under control and the national budget deficit is less than half of the level of just 5 years ago. At the state level, there has been a significant uptick in sales tax receipts, an increase in population growth and in housing starts and in economic activity. While not all jurisdictions have benefited from the turnaround in the state's economy, the state is clearly coming out of the Great Recession and many of our local governments are experiencing a fiscal recovery.

With the return to a more stabilized economy, our county and city officials are now able to turn their attention to their jurisdiction's future. They can focus on what they want their county or city to be like in 10, 15, or 20 years; and how they can position the county or city to achieve those visions. This is what constitutes strategic planning; anticipating the jurisdiction's future needs; positioning the jurisdiction to address those needs and developing a vision for what they want that future to be.

Why Engage in Strategic Planning?

Our local governments do not exist in a static world! Demographics, citizen expectations, and economic conditions change. Additionally, local governments encounter changing state/local relations as well as inter-jurisdictional issues. Many elected officials recognize that the geo-political environment is rapidly changing and it is critical that general purpose units of local government, counties and cities, position themselves to be able to define their future in a manner that best reflects the desires of the citizenry.

What then is “strategic planning”? Strategic planning is the process whereby elected officials step back, examine the current situation of their jurisdiction and then develop a vision of what they would like that jurisdiction to be like in 10, 15, or 20 years, based on

forecasted needs and conditions. It is the ability to engage the citizenry and key stakeholders in a visioning process whereby the elected officials are able to determine what those parties would like their jurisdiction to be like in the future. It is the ability to define goals for that county or city and objectives to achieve those goals. It is also the ability to periodically redirect and modify the “plan” as conditions warrant. Most important to achievement of the strategic plan is how on an ongoing basis the jurisdiction's resources can be deployed to achieve the plan's goals.

As an example, let us assume that you're the mayor of city of 80,000 residents characterized by a heavy concentration of industrial activity; inadequate park and library services and facilities, stifling roadway congestion during peak periods, rising housing costs, the absence of “affordable” housing, and a public desirous of improved public safety and other services. Looking to the future, you recognize that the city will continue to grow. It has also been predicted that the city's population growth will be of primarily younger families. Those are the characteristics of the community; the question is what the community's future should look like? Strategic planning is the process whereby you consider those conditions and position the city over time to address those needs.

What is the Difference between Ongoing Policy Making and Strategic Planning?

County and city legislative bodies make public policy! They adopt annual or biennial budgets; they approve land-use variances; they set utility rates, approve conditional use ordinances, and adopt annual property tax rates. These are among the many ongoing and recurring responsibilities of legislative bodies. They address the current needs of the jurisdiction, and those are subject to review and change on a ongoing basis. They are not caste in concrete and few, if any of these policies have long-term implications for the county or the city.

Strategic planning, on the other hand, is an array of actions that can have significant long-term impacts. Adoption of a comprehensive land-use or capital improvement plan; extension of utility lines into formerly undeveloped areas; establishment of an increase in the jurisdiction's minimum wage, or even the decision to partner with the school district to help finance pre-school education, are all elements of a strategic plan to in one way or another shape the jurisdiction's future. As distinct from general short-term policy making, many of the aforementioned actions are the result of a longer, more deliberative process.

Charting Your Jurisdiction's Future: Getting Started

Initiating the process that leads to adoption of a strategic plan requires a well thought out set of procedures. Following is a brief identification of the eight steps in developing a strategic plan for a county or a city.

1. Secure a consensus amongst the members of the county or city's legislative body that a strategic plan for the jurisdiction should be developed.
2. Select a facilitator to guide the development of the strategic plan.

3. With the guidance of the facilitator, assess present conditions, including an evaluation of your county or city's strengths and weaknesses; the nature of the community and what you think the citizenry's expectations for their jurisdiction's future is.
4. With the assistance of the facilitator agree on a process for the development of the plan (e.g. retreat, subject matter committees, and ongoing committee of the whole).
5. Determine a means of obtaining citizen and stakeholder input in the development of the plan (e.g. citizen advisory committee, town hall meetings, surveys).
6. Determine the duration which the strategic plan will cover (e.g. 5, 10, 15, or 20 years).
7. Determine how frequently the plan will be reviewed and updated.
8. Initiate the process!

Development of the strategic plan could take 4-8 months depending on the size and complexity of the jurisdiction and the breadth of issues to be addressed. As mentioned above, a subsequent article will describe in detail the above abbreviated process and provide guidance for those counties and cities undertaking the development of a strategic plan.

In closing, it should be noted that in a democracy, government is a composite of the priorities of its citizenry. The citizenry tends to support the efforts of its elected officials when they have a sense that their governments are proactive; identifying current and future needs, and adopting a process that engages the citizenry in identification needs and development of solutions. The adoption of the strategic plan is the culmination of that process.



About Stan Finkelstein

Stan Finkelstein wrote for MRSC as a guest author for several years, and he also served as the Executive Director for the Association of Washington Cities from 1990 to 2009.

Stan passed away in 2020.