

MINUTES OF THE
SPECIAL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL
AUGUST 30, 2006

The special meeting of the City Council of the City of Benicia was called to order by Mayor Steve Messina at 6:06 p.m. on Tuesday, August 30, 2006, in the Commission Room, City Hall, 250 East L Street, complete proceedings of which are recorded on tape.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Council Members Hughes, Patterson, Schwartzman, Whitney, and Mayor Messina

Absent: None

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Mayor Messina led the pledge to the flag.

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS:

A sign stating the Fundamental Rights of each member of the public is posted at the entrance to the Commission Room per Section 4.04.030 of City of Benicia Ordinance No. 05-6 (Open Government Ordinance).

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

WRITTEN:

None

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Mary Wika – Ms. Wika commented on the Rose Center Project. She noted her concern with the interim period between when she submitted her concerns and when it will be on the agenda (9/19/06). She provided an overview of the response to her concerns to date and questioned the recent decisions made about the project. She requested that no permits and entitlements be granted until the City Attorney has time to review conformance of the project.

Mayor Messina thanked her for her comments and reminded her that this item is not on the agenda for this evening, so no action may be taken. He also thanked other members of the public for attending.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Vision and Priority Setting Process:

Jim Erickson, City Manager, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation describing the purpose of the special meeting. The presentation provided an overview of the expected process for the Strategic Plan update, and how that will lead into the budget process. He also introduced the idea of a policy calendar and requested that the Council consider utilizing such an approach for approaching policy issues.

Council Member Patterson asked why the General Plan does not serve as a starting point. It is a driving mechanism and strategies should be determined from that source. She also referenced an Annual Sustainability Report from the City of Santa Barbara and suggested a similar approach in so far as our overarching General Plan goal is sustainable development.

The City Manager and Council Members discussed the role of the General Plan. Council Members Schwartzman and Hughes agreed that the document should be considered a guiding document throughout this process. Mayor Messina noted that the Vision, as captured in the Strategic Plan, is similar to the General Plan in that it is a summary of direction and captures the essence of it. He went on to note that he is ok with referencing the General Plan more directly in the update.

Council Member Patterson talked about the need for a strategy, a road map that better illustrates how the Council gets to the priority projects. She drew a diagram illustrating what she felt would be a good process where the General Plan and Sustainability would lead to priorities and priority projects.

Mr. Erickson noted that staff is trying to lay the road map now, as part of confirming this process.

Vice Mayor Schwartzman suggested the Council not get off target on discussing this point, and moving along. He did maintain that the General Plan should be a principal source document. Council Member Patterson questioned how the Council would define strategies and measure them.

Public Comment:

1. Mike Ioakimedes – Mr. Ioakimedes noted that Council has identified ten hot button items that are not reflective of a strategic approach, rather they are political priorities. He noted that the Council tends to bounce around from issue to issue, rather than focusing on establishing strategic objectives.
2. Larry Fullington - Mr. Fullington expressed that this process should fall under the umbrella of the General Plan.

Mayor Messina noted that the General Plan has many goals, but the City does not have enough resources to accomplish them all. He agreed with Mr. Ioakimedes, noting that Councils do shift and so do priorities. He went on to say that the City is limited in terms of people and money, and each Council pulls out the sub-set of projects that they think is important, and some part always gets left behind.

Council Member Patterson agreed but noted that the Council still needs a road map on how to get there. With a strategy, the City can take small steps to meet the General Plan goals. Projects should be identified that could achieve more than one goal and build upon one another incrementally. She gave examples of multiple objectives being met by one strategic program (project). The City needs to stick to a direction. She again sited Santa Barbara's efforts, noting they have an action

plan for sustainable development. She suggested that the City needs an annual report illustrating where we are in achieving our goals – not just a list of what programs have been started or are done, but what the performance measurement for the goals are.

3. Anne Hansen – Ms. Hansen expressed concern that the Benicia Historical Museum did not receive timely notification of the recent Opticos community interviews regarding the Arsenal and Downtown. She noted they heard about it from the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Erickson and Charlie Knox, Community Development Director, explained the notification process, noting that the City sent out over 500 notifications but also worked with the Chamber and Benicia Main Street to communicate the interviews to residents. Mr. Knox noted that the charrette week will be 9/18/06 – 9/22/06 and postcards will go out to all addresses in Benicia.

Council Member Whitney noted that there seems to be a bit of a clash between driving forces and where “the rubber meets the road.” He suggested a sub-committee to help address the issue of the General Plan, and then moving forward. He asked how many changes had been made to the General Plan recently, and after receiving a response of not many, noted that perhaps the General Plan needs to be reassessed before being inserted into this process.

Council Member Hughes noted that the issue is not just the reference to the General Plan but the Vision. He commented that he does not feel that the process being described tonight gets the Council to the Top Ten. It doesn’t look at the whole picture.

Mr. Erickson explained that hopefully the City’s mission, vision, and strategies won’t change over time as much, but will help guide the budget process and identify top priorities. The General Plan is comprehensive, while the Strategic Plan recognizes we can’t do it all right now, and helps answer the question of which ones should be addressed.

The Council continued to discuss the need to identify priority projects in a manner that will show a clear process. Council Member Whitney again suggested that two Council Members could get together with Mr. Erickson and Mr. Knox to craft a strategy that better incorporates some of the concerns raised this evening.

Public Comment:

1. Bob Craft – Mr. Craft commented that something needs to be guiding this process. He is not sure if that is the General Plan or not, be the Council needs to be working against something.

Mayor Messina agreed that the General Plan is an issue that needs to be addressed as part of this process and noted that he thought it would be fine if Council Members Patterson and Whitney want to work with Mr. Erickson further. Vice Mayor Schwartzman noted the he felt it should just be Mr. Erickson, in terms of

staff, so as not to utilize additional staff time and resources. The Council discussed this further and agreed on this approach.

Mayor Messina then confirmed that the direction given to staff is that the Council signs off on the proposed process, given better incorporation of the concerns regarding the role of the General Plan in the process.

Mr. Erickson reviewed the PowerPoint slides regarding the Policy Calendar. He described the process as a time budget that would allow the Council to schedule the discussion of various policy issues throughout the year. He noted he is looking for the Council's reaction to this idea.

Mayor Messina summarized his thoughts on it, noting that he felt it is a good concept and would be comfortable with utilizing this approach. He noted he would like more time to think about it and get input from the public before selecting the study issues.

Council Member Patterson agreed that she is supportive of the idea, but thinks it should be better organized and better guided. What are the criteria for selecting the issues to discuss?

Vice Mayor Schwartzman agreed it is a good idea, but that the list of suggested topics it is not a complete list and it needs to be prioritized. He noted it is a good first step.

Council Member Hughes also agreed that it is a good idea, but has concerns with how things make the list.

Mayor Messina again suggested that the Council take this away, talk to constituents, add projects to the list and then come back to establish the calendar at a future meeting. He noted that at first, the Council should be conservative about how many to add to the list, and they can see how it goes in terms of how many they can get through per year.

Council Member Whitney noted he is also supportive of the idea. He raised the issue that, with some of the suggested topics, staff is already working on. He referenced the Regulating Retail Alcohol Sales topic. He asked for clarification on how they would move forward on issues such as that, if staff is already working on.

The Council discussed this issue further and Council Member Patterson raised the question of whether the criteria for making the list would be at all dependent on whether it was already being worked on by staff or committees (e.g., the tree ordinance.)

Mr. Erickson noted that not all issues are necessarily study session issues; some may be more appropriate for being scheduled at a regular meeting. Council Member Hughes noted that whether an issue is currently being worked on may not necessarily work as a criterion for selection and used Code Enforcement Priorities as an example. He noted that the Council should be able to say why an issue is on the list, that it not just be a voting exercise.

Council Member Patterson reiterated the need for some sort of criteria and suggested that staff make a checklist of 3-5 criteria. Mr. Knox noted that in the Strategic Plan, there are Strategic Issues listed that might be used as criteria.

Council Member Whitney commented that he feels the Council is all on the same page. He went on to suggest that when an issue is new and needs more work and review, perhaps a study session, but if staff is already working on, perhaps a regular meeting is more appropriate. Some will fall in between these two, and Council will need to determine how to deal with these.

This was followed by further discussion of the amount of staff time utilized on those issues already in progress. Council Member Patterson inquired about the General Plan status reports, and Mr. Knox noted that the Housing Element portion is complete and staff is working on the rest. Council Member Patterson commented that this would be useful information.

The Council then agreed the policy calendar would be placed on an October agenda to finalize.

Public Comment:

1. Citizen - A woman (no name given) asked for clarification of the process and how this works with the priority project identification. Mayor Messina and Vice Mayor Schwartzman further explained the policy calendar concept. The citizen noted her concern is with economic localization and the Mayor suggested she get additional information to the City Manager.

The City Manager then raised the issue of how Council Members agendize items for regular meetings, describing a two-step process where an item is placed under Council Member Comments at a regular meeting to be introduced and then agendized for action at a subsequent meeting if a majority of the Council agrees to do so. He indicated he would like to establish an understanding that this process would be utilized by Council Members going forward, or the alternative would be to set up a study session to address the requested topic.

Mayor Messina noted this seems consistent with the Rules of Procedure. Council Member Patterson raised the concern that it doesn't always work, not always timely and cited the example of supporting a proposition.

Vice Mayor Schwartzman agreed that some issues, due to timing, should not go through a two-step process.

They all agreed to utilize the two-step process or a study session, unless the requested item has a clear sense of urgency.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor Messina adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.