

2010 ICMA Strategic Leadership and Governance Nomination: City of Westminster Strategic Planning – Process and Implementation

In 2002, the City of Westminster embarked upon a new strategic planning process that now serves as a map to the City's future. The process was challenging, innovative and rewarding. It resulted in a fully integrated long term Strategic Plan that has allowed the City to provide real value to the citizens through well designed priorities and programs; provide a level of excellence through a focused and deliberate approach to implementing and accomplishing work plans; and links the budget and performance measures to the goals outlined by Council to help measure tangible progress in achieving the Strategic Plan goals. The Strategic Plan vision, principles and goals that were developed in 2002 have remained essentially unchanged over time, providing a high level of continuity for staff in working towards achieving big, tangible goals set by City Council.

Prior to 2002, the City of Westminster approached its annual goal setting process utilizing a variety of creative processes to identify goals for the coming year. City Council included the executive management team in the goal setting process. Despite modifications to the process each year, the end product was relatively consistent – a new list of goals and projects that did not tie back to the prior year's list. City Council left each retreat with a sense of accomplishment; Staff typically left the retreats feeling overwhelmed as additional projects were added to an already full work plan (i.e., nothing typically came off the list of projects to complete, but new items were typically added).

Strategic Planning Process: With the transition from annual goal setting to long term strategic planning, Westminster introduced a shift in the mindset of City Council, management, employees, and the community. The development of the City's Strategic Plan is just the beginning. It serves as the map for the next year, decade, and beyond. For the City of Westminster, the Strategic Planning process is seen as the ongoing map for the journey to provide “exceptional value and quality of life” to the residents of this community, which is the mission of this organization.

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Vision: With the development of the first Strategic Plan in 2002, City Council outlined its long-range vision and goals for Westminster as the foundation of the Strategic Plan. The vision serves as the 25-year long-range destination on the map to the City's future. The vision consists of multiple principles or integral checkpoints along Westminster's journey to its 25-year vision. Westminster's vision includes nine guiding principles established by City Council with input from the City's executive team. That vision, in turn, shapes shorter-term goals. An example of one of the nine principles is "Strong Tax base through Sustainable Local Economy." This is defined as: (1) Having a diversified local economy; (2) Having a strong sales tax base – Residents shopping Westminster, others coming to Westminster for shopping; (3) Attracting and retaining choice retail; (4) Redeveloping and reusing existing retail spaces; (5) Having a variety of and more primary employers with high paying job opportunities; and (6) A great place for small and/or local businesses.

Goals: The five goals, and their subsequent objectives and action items, are established for a horizon of five years. They constitute the medium-term priorities necessary to achieve the long-term vision for Westminster. Unlike past goals that changed annually with each retreat, Westminster's goals were written in an enduring nature. Despite changes to the composition of City Council, the same five goals have remained with only minor amendments made. The goals were created with the intention of being seen and used widely throughout the organization. Westminster attached an icon to each goal that serves as a constant reminder to the community, City Council and Staff of the goal. Each goal has objectives and action items linked to them that serve as mileposts along the way. They bring form and meaning to what we do, and project the City towards the achievement of our vision.



STRONG, BALANCED LOCAL ECONOMY

- Healthy retail base, increasing sales tax receipts
- Attract new targeted businesses, focusing on primary employers & higher paying jobs
- Business-oriented mixed use development along I-25 corridor & US 36 corridor

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- Retain & expand current businesses
- Multi-modal transportation system that provides access to shopping & employment centers
- Be a great place for small and/or local businesses

Execution Plan: The goals outlined in the strategic plan are accompanied by steps to execute them, or specific directions to get to the next point on the map. The execution plan includes a list of short-term challenges and opportunities, a prioritized list of specific actions for the coming year, and a list of major projects that tie into that goal. Although City staff is involved throughout the entire strategic planning process, the execution plans are specifically developed in conjunction with the City's Department Heads to ensure that the departments are indeed working towards achieving the City Council's goals and objectives.

Mission and Values: Through the strategic planning process, the City also developed its mission and values. The mission and values serve as a reference guide for the City to see where it needs to focus, or as the marking on the map to serve as a reference that the City is on the right path. The City's mission and values reflect a culture that existed long before the development of the strategic plan, but through the strategic planning process, it was possible to integrate the values into work plans and daily lives of employees. The values are articulated in the acronym S.P.I.R.I.T. (Service, Pride, Integrity, Responsibility, Innovation, and Teamwork). The mission is "Our job is to deliver exceptional value and quality of life through SPIRIT."

Results: The greatest result of the strategic planning process for the City of Westminster has been the stability that it has brought to the organization through continuity in direction received from the City Council. The process has allowed for a concentrated focus on delivering services, programs and projects that support the core mission and values of the City of Westminster.

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The City has developed a strong performance measurement program that links back to the Strategic Plan, which has allowed the City to provide a greater level of accountability and reporting for progress towards achieving Strategic Plan goals and objectives. This has given City Council a better grasp on successes and challenges in the implementation of their directives.

A significant benefit that has been enhanced through the Strategic Plan process is the trust and respect between City Council and Staff. An example of how this continued nurturing of trust is essential was the acquisition of nearly 60 acres of land along US Highway 36 for future development. Thanks to a shared vision reinforced through the Strategic Plan, the land was acquired and integrated into the City's plans for a large-scale retail development and is currently an important source of sales tax revenue. This project clearly tied back to City Council's 2002 goal of a "Balanced, Sustainable Local Economy" and the objective of "Attracting and Retaining Businesses Along US 36."

The strategic plan will continue to play a large role in the success of daily operations and future redevelopment projects throughout the City, as it allows for quick and agile decision making. Thanks to the Strategic Plan, everyone is on the same page.

Transferable Takeaways: The transition to strategic planning came with many lessons learned. Some lessons were unique to the City of Westminster, but many are transferable to other cities. Lessons learned through this process include:

- Acknowledge your accomplishments. Use the Strategic Plan retreat as one of many opportunities to regularly report back to City Council on successes, even when they are assumed as part of the

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Strategic Plan. Achievements for items identified as goals/priorities through the Strategic Plan process need to be celebrated.

- Communicate the Strategic Plan with employees. Being direct with all levels of employees as to what the plan is, how it will affect them, and how their daily job responsibilities are important to accomplishing the larger vision will help achieve buy in from employees as well as help reduce natural anxiety that comes with organizational changes.
- Institutionalize the process. Using a facilitator can help provide consistency and a formal process as City Council members and management change. Consistency is one of the greatest benefits of the Strategic Plan. The City of Westminster spends approximately \$4,000-6,000 each year on the Strategic Plan update process.
- Integrate the Strategic Plan into the regular organizational processes. Do not simply develop a plan that just sits on a bookshelf. The effectiveness is dependent upon the use of the plan; it will not work by itself.
- Do not be afraid to try. It is an evolving process that needs consistency, but it is also critical to have the ability to be fluid with the needs and desires of the community and City Council. The process and plan will not be perfect, but after a few iterations the rewards will be well worth it.
- The plan is not the result, it is the beginning.

The Westminster City Council has embraced a vision of a City that is rich in complexity and a community that is desirable as a place of residence or business. Whether Staff is referencing the Strategic Plan as a citizen or as an employee of the City of Westminster, Staff is encouraged to focus on the vision and its guiding principles as a destination – one that requires a commitment and plan to reach.