

**HIGH POINT CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
(STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP)
DECEMBER 1, 2015 – 9:00 A.M.
HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY, PLATO S. WILSON SCHOOL OF COMMERCE
BB&T EXECUTIVE BOARD ROOM**

MINUTES

Present:

William S. Bencini, Jr., Mayor; and Council Members Cynthia Davis (At-Large), Latimer Alexander (At-Large), Alyce Hill (Ward 3), Jay Wagner (Ward 4), and Jason Ewing (Ward 6)

Absent:

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Davis (Ward 5); Jeff Golden (Ward 1), and Chris Williams (Ward 2),

Staff Present:

Greg Demko, City Manager; Randy McCaslin, Deputy City Manager; Randy Hemann, Assistant City Manager; JoAnne Carlyle, City Attorney; Lisa Vierling, City Clerk; and Maria Smith, Deputy City Clerk.

Others Present:

Felicia Jones, Citizen

News Media:

Pat Kimbrough, *High Point Enterprise*

Strategic Planning Workshop- Facilitated by Meridith Elliott Powell

City Manager Greg Demko introduced Meredith Elliott Powell, speaker and author, whom he invited to facilitate today's strategic planning workshop. Mr. Demko noted Ms. Powell would be sharing information with Council on how the city can move forward in today's economy. Ms. Powell has been invited to work with the City Council, department heads, etc.... to get a better understanding of how the economy has changed, the impact those changes can have on the community and the fact that great customer experience is the path to a successful community.

Ms. Powell reported the first part of the presentation would help explain the reasons why the world we're living in today is different and in the second part of the presentation, Council would get an opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas on paper with some great things that would be taken into the strategic planning session that will take place in March.

She shared that she was listening to Tom Friedman, the New York Times columnist and best-selling author of That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind, who was being interviewed on National Public Radio (NPR). She noted he took about an hour and talked about the national

debt, the healthcare crisis, corruption, greed, and cronyism. Ms. Powell referenced an important statement that Mr. Friedman made during the interview in no matter what we've been through, you can see it documented down through our history. There has always been a segment of the population, just about 20% of the people that chose not to focus on the negativity and he said it has been that group of people that have come up with the ideas and solutions that helped to pull us out of any economic downturn and will put the country back on track.

She alluded to the numerous things going on in the economy that can impact the community in a negative way with most of it being out of our control. She noted in essence, we have fallen victim to an economic situation that we have done little to create and the moment and that people spend more time and energy talking about things that are not working, which results in depletion of energy and ideas that are needed to innovate and come up with new ideas to find ways that will put this community on top. She pointed out the question is whether or not Council wants to be challenged by this economy or succeed in this economy, whether the things going on are obstacles or mere opportunities.

She then shared three strategies needed to understand how this economy has changed, how this has impacted the community/customers/employees, and specifically what needs to be done to get this economy to start working for the community.

Strategy #1: "Pull" through Trust

Ms. Powell reported that according to the economists, we have experienced an economic shift and moved out of a "push" economy and in to a "pull" economy (this essentially means that the customers in the community just moved in to the position of control, are calling the shots, and have all the power). She advised that the ability to purchase all things on-line has played a major role in making the economy what it is today. This is what Ms. Powell referred to as the "trust and value" economy, an economy where trust is what attracts people. She explained trust is lacking and proactively adding this value helps to keep employee/community members engaged long-term. She further advised this is also a relationship economy, an economy where the relationships that are built with one another and with the employees is more important than the relationships built with community members and customers because it is the experience and reputation that is growing the business. The services the city offers has become a commodity, but how they are offered and what people are saying about the community is actually what is building the community from the bottom up. She noted in this economy, Council is 100% dependent on how engaged the employees are, how much they care about the community, how much they want to achieve the vision.

Ms. Powell shared some Gallup statistics:

- Disengaged employees cost governments and organizations up to \$450 billion annually (absenteeism, drama, lack of quality, decreased productivity, etc....). This number is expected to rise to \$550 billion in the next two years.
- To solve it, over \$700 million is being spent annually on incentive programs, training/development. This number is expected to be over \$1.5 billion in the next two years.

- 70% of today's employees admit that they are disengaged and will not do any more than they are asked to do. In the next two years, this number is anticipated to rise to 84%.

This indicates a major problem. She reiterated that the path to growth is 100% dependent upon how much employees care. Ms. Powell concluded that having an engaged employee base would differentiate High Point from other communities making it more of a livable community.

Because this is not working, it calls for a new way of doing things. She confirmed that if Council desires to make this economy work to the benefit of the City, there are three strategies that need to be done to get employees to be as passionate and build the type of culture that would give the City a competitive advantage. She stressed that the consumers today are highly skeptical, well-informed and squarely in control and are no longer interested in what a company says about a product or service, but will turn to friends, family and Google reviews instead. She reiterated that reputation and the customer's experience is everything in this economy.

Ms. Powell noted the path to profitability and growth is through the customer experience and to be successful in this economy requires pulling people to live in the community, rather than pushing them to do so. This requires creation of a "buzz" in the community for the amazing things that are happening. She stressed the importance of building a culture of trust so that people really understand what is important and what needs to be done in order to grow the community. She then shared ways to create a culture of trust:

1. Transparency (people need to know what they are facing)
2. Clarity

Strategy #2: Plug into the Power of Connection- Connect through Ownership. She explained connection to people require you to slow down and really listen to them because it sends a strong message that they matter and you care. Ms. Powell reiterated that in this economy, people want to be heard and listened to and know that their thoughts and ideas matter. She explained a transformational leader is a leader that holds on to the question of what the company needs to accomplish, what the goals are, and the question of how belongs to the team. She reiterated that people want to be heard, they want to have a voice, and they want to see their ideas carried out. She noted that ownership is the most important strategy.

Strategy #3: Add Value through Performance

Ms. Powell stressed the importance of value in this economy (benefit divided by the price, people, lead). She pointed out employees also want value and it was the City's job to proactively add value to come up with ways to infuse value into the employee base as well as customers. Ms. Powell shared in 2008, she was posed with a question of how to motivate employees in a down economy. She noted she was curious as to what really motivates employees and her research revealed that people really want to be held accountable and want support because accountability makes them feel safe when doing what they are asked to do. Ms. Powell also stressed the importance of support and noted that even if employees want to stay in their current position in the next twenty years, they still want you to sit down with them and have a conversation with them and learn who they are, what they want and where they want to go and

create an environment where they feel like they have opportunity. Managing performance with employees is how to show that employees matter, and is how they get value in what they do. She stressed when employees feel valued, they turn around and add value to the community, to their job, and to their customers.

Ms. Powell noted if these three things are done, it would help build a community that is positioned for success—a community that is really different from the other communities and a community that is in position to win. She closed by saying when she wrote the book, Winning in the Trust and Value of Economy, she interviewed leaders from all over the country and there was a small growth (about 20-30%) that saw growth, with everyone else flat or going backwards. She shared a story of one of her interviewees who accomplished the impossible by taking over a failed financial institution in South Carolina, but eventually turned it around. She asked him if he was worried about what he accomplished, and he informed her that he was worried that he might get comfortable in his success and since his ego would be attached to his strategies and thoughts while realizing what made it successful would not be good enough in the future and his biggest concern was that he would be too blind to see. She challenged Council to think about this and encouraged them to always question and not be afraid to change and try new things.

At this time, Ms. Powell had those present count off in fours for group assignments. She asked the groups to brainstorm **“ways to better engage the community, by attraction, involvement and participation of community members.”**

The results were shared as follows:

Group #1 (Spokesperson: Mayor Bencini)

- Focus should be on young people. Our young people usually end up moving away to other larger cities. The question is how we can entice them to stay in High Point. Currently there are some things going on in High Point that create a physical presence of excitement that may help attract young people: Proposed baseball park; Lotus Project. We need to try to get some momentum going to give young people a reason to want to live in High Point.
- Communication. We need to do a better job communicating what High Point has to offer (there are many good, positive things happening in the community that many do not even know about).
- Listen to the Millennials. It is all about attracting the generations with a lot of energy and seeking opportunities for them.
- Continue to develop job opportunities. It would be great for High Point to become the entrepreneurial capital of the world with the young people that are graduating starting businesses, but the reality is that as they graduate from HPU with a diploma, only a few (if any) banks would loan them money to start a business. They have to have some real world experience before stepping up to be entrepreneurs.
- Make City departments customer-friendly. The city must create a “say yes” culture within the city employee staff that says instead of saying “no.” Staff needs to figure out how to do this even if it is not clear in the Code book, guidebook, policies, etc....

- Create an atmosphere that will encourage everybody, especially young people to stay in High Point, make investments in High Point, and crank it up in High Point.

Group #2 (Spokesperson: Council Member Ewing)

- Communication. We have talked for years about how to better communicate and need to identify how to better communicate and use resources for better communication (i.e. printed materials, emails, social media, utility bill inserts, etc....) as a means to better engage the community.
- Improve listening skills. Need to be willing to take the time to listen and adapt information and feedback from employees/citizens. One way to accomplish this would be to create a database and send out an email to them immediately to give them an opportunity to share input on their experience. This will enable the city to start tackling some of the reputation issues we have had in the past.
- Service benchmarks. Need to do this in a timely fashion to have a better expectation of when things need to be done.

Council Member Alexander added that another thing the group also spoke about was the periodic surveys that are sent out to the community, but some people on the City's team and some elected officials do not believe the results. He stressed that it is time that we start really listening to the community and must have confidence in whatever device is used as a means to engage the community, hear what the community is saying, and come up with plans to meet expectations. He noted that the survey results are ½ of 1%. Council Member C. Davis clarified that the surveys are sent out to 1% of the citizens with a return rate of .05%. Council Member Alexander pointed out that if Council does not trust these survey results, then it is perceived that Council is not listening to the citizens. He asked at what point does Council start listening to the citizens and stop fighting with the results.

Deputy City Manager Randy McCaslin pointed out the timeliness of this subject and noted the results of the last survey would be reviewed with Council during a Briefing Session on December 7th.

Ms. Powell commented that it does not matter whether you hear back from two or if you hear back from 50,000 because if Council is not responding or reacting to the surveys, then they have disengaged the few that were engaged. She further explained that engagement is like a domino effect and if action is taken by Council as a result of the survey, it sends a positive message to the citizens and it starts building trust so that more may respond to the next surveys that go out. She reiterated that Council should acknowledge the fact that some people care enough to respond and they need to take action around that.

Mayor Bencini noted that sometimes Council, as an elected body, does not really listen and stressed the importance that Council listen and engage the community. Ms. Powell applauded the fact that Council included listening and communication together because oftentimes people are saying that they do not feel like they are a part of anything and while you may be doing things to make them feel a part, for some reason they still feel more communication is needed.

Group #3 (Spokesperson: Council Member C. Davis)

- Having people feel like they matter & engaged. In addition to the surveys, it is really word of mouth too. Ensuring that employees feel valued as well as members of the community so they will feel like they are engaged and part of the problem-solving process when they voice concerns to management that they do not like a process, or they let them know that something just is not working, etc....
- High Point is not an affordable place to live. In order for people to feel engaged, they have to have extra money in their pocket to be able to frequent some of the places in the city, but if they do not have those extra resources, they cannot be much more engaged.
- Need to be more strategic, smart, and creative and more competitive. Locally and regionally with jobs so people can get more engaged in the activities that the city currently provides as well as the ones that will be provided in the future.
- Involve citizens more.
- Encourage participation of employees and the citizenry by looking at each suggestion/idea based on merit instead of the person that is sharing it, while investigating each one and provide a response. This gives credibility and builds trust and makes them want to participate in the conversation or process.

Group #4 (Spokesperson: Council Member Hill)

- Marketing to Millennials. Need to look at housing that Millennials are looking for, as well as restaurants, night life, urban life style and gathering spaces, etc.... They discussed and agreed with many of the points made by Group #1.
- Involvement/Communication in such a way that people will be responsive.
- Seeking citizen's input and following through by acting on their input and celebrating their input when things come to fruition as a result of their input. This will give them assurance that they are important.
- Participation- Private/Public partnerships. By building trust relationships with the private sector because without it, you cannot have that partnership unless both sides feel that the other will fulfill their obligations. You cannot have participation if everyone is working toward a different end result.
- Building a common vision.

Ms. Powell then broke everyone up into three groups and asked them to discuss the following question: **How can you best support and appreciate employees? How can you get them to engage in our culture, support our mission and exceed service expectations?**

Group #1 (Spokesperson: Council Member Alexander)

- Traditionally the city has recognized and rewarded employees, so the group felt it might be a good idea to talk with the employees and find out how they would best like to be appreciated and recognized for their service. They suggested this could be accomplished by really listening to the employees.
- How managers/department heads could empower employees by creativity, ownership and accountability and how managers might empower employees by allowing them to take small steps to success or failure; then go back and evaluate. A strong foundation is

needed before management can move forward which will require engagement of all employees and clear expectations.

- Different management styles (former city manager as compared to current city manager). Council has to be able to recognize and learn how to meet the manager's expectations, so he can direct employees. Despite any turmoil, conflict, uneasy places that result naturally in a leadership change, recognize that we now have a new leader that deserves the same opportunity for people to share in his vision without conflict and turmoil.

Group #2 (Spokesperson: Council Member Hill)

- Empowering employees without micromanaging them and trying to tell them how to do their day-to-day jobs and giving them the leeway to accomplish their tasks.
- Engaging employees in developing strategies to build a stronger service/stronger culture of good customer service by asking them their input on how to accomplish and act on it.
- Encouraging more initiative from employees by having them do more than just the minimum duties, but going that extra step; showing the initiative and being proactive.
- Supporting the city's mission, revisiting that mission, keeping it in the forefront, and making sure it is relevant by testing decisions made against what the mission is. Making sure the department missions are aligned with the city's mission for consistency and a unified mission.
- Exceeding service expectations. Measure what the service expectations are for our customers, then use the data/resources to determine how to exceed those expectations.

Group #3 (Spokesperson: Council Member Ewing)

- Encouraging employees to be engaged in the changing culture.
- Improving training and support for employees to encourage them to present new ideas and take ownership in what they are doing.
- Show support for the employees bringing continuity between the staff and elected officials through consensus.

At this time, Ms. Powell started winding down her presentation and asked Council to take a few minutes to share some thoughts/ideas on **exceeding customer/community expectations, creating a WOW moment, knowing our customers are going the extra mile.**

Council Member Alexander shared that one of the key things he has realized as a business person is to meet the customer's expectations, you need to listen to them, consider their request, and let them know that you will be getting back with them by a certain point in time. He noted that sometimes because the wheels of government turn slow, citizens do not feel like they are being heard because they do not see immediate results. He felt in order to communicate to customers and meet their expectations, it requires being on the same set of benchmarks and letting them know it is a process and the reasons why it takes time to realize and see results.

Taking the WOW part of the question into consideration, Council Member Wagner felt the City, as an organization, should challenge itself to do great things on two levels:

1. If it is worth doing, it is worth being great at, and
2. To do one great transformational thing a year.

Ms. Powell stressed that could be huge—to work with a government with a “can-do” attitude and would really be a WOW factor to have people say they have been working with the City and that the City was going over and beyond to really help them out. She then thanked Council and staff for their time, energy and ideas and the information shared in today’s meeting would be rolled back into the strategic plan. She noted she would be making a similar presentation to the department heads this afternoon and talking about **personal responsibility, owning up to the vision and stepping up to the plate because she felt a two-directional change needs to happen.**

City Manager Greg Demko thanked Ms. Powell for facilitating today’s discussion. He stated from a competitive perspective, the City is like a monopoly because people that live in High Point cannot get their services from anywhere else. He shared that one of the things he has repeatedly heard from people is that they could just go ahead and do this or that in Winston Salem, Greensboro, etc.... He shared the following questions to ponder:

1. How do we provide the amenities that High Pointers are seeking?
2. How do we prepare a culture to give High Point residents those amenities that would go elsewhere?
3. How do we get them to tweet about how great High Point’s services are?
4. How do we build that culture and get that type of response?

He commented that High Point is like a “city upon the hill” with all the eyes upon all the world on it due to the international presence during the Furniture Market. And to live up to High Point being called the “International City,” we should own responsibility to present ourselves that way and give people that level of experience and those amenities as we strive to move forward.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m. upon motion duly made and seconded.

Respectfully Submitted,

William S. Bencini, Jr., Mayor

Attest:

Lisa B. Vierling, MMC
City Clerk