

**HIGH POINT CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING  
(RETREAT)  
JANUARY 18, 2018 – 8:00A.M.  
HIGH POINT THEATRE, MAIN GALLERY**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Mayor Jay Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem Chris Williams (Ward 2); and Council Members Britt Moore, At Large; Don Scarborough, At Large; Jeffrey Golden (Ward 1); Monica Peters (Ward 3) [arrived at 9:52 a.m.]; Wesley Hudson (Ward 4); Victor Jones (Ward 5); and Jason Ewing (Ward 6)

**Staff Present:**

Greg Demko, City Manager; Randy McCaslin, Deputy City Manager; Randy Hemann, Assistant City Manager; JoAnne Carlyle, City Attorney; Jeron Hollis, Director of Communications & Public Engagement; Eric Olmedo, Budget & Evaluation Manager; David Briggs, Theatre Director; and Lisa Vierling, City Clerk.

**Others Present:**

Meridith Elliott Powell, Facilitator for Retreat  
Judy Stalder, TREBIC

**News Media:**

Pat Kimbrough, High Point Enterprise

Note: Inclement weather (snow and ice) resulted in a slight delay.

Mayor Wagner called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and turned the floor over to City Manager Greg Demko.

Mr. Demko expressed appreciation to everyone for attending in spite of the snow and ice. He reiterated the three goals that were set by the Council as a result of the 2016 Retreat.

1. Reduce Blight;
2. Retain productive young people; and
3. Identify a catalyst to bring people downtown to create a new community of wealth

He noted these have been expounded on and implemented with a lot of progress being made on an incredible fast track and pace.

**Update on Stadium Bonds**

Mr. Demko reported that the bonds were priced yesterday with a huge result. The result was a \$35 million issue with over \$160 million in subscriptions and interest. Bottomline, he noted the city received a 20-year taxable borrowing at 3.59%, which will result in a savings of over \$2.2 million.

**Welcome from Theatre Director**

David Briggs, Director of the High Point Theatre, welcomed everyone to the Theatre. He explained the meeting room in the Main Gallery has recently gone through some major upgrades to improve the sound/acoustics, which will allow them to start booking events in this meeting space. He shared some future events that have been booked at the Theatre and thanked Council for their service to community and for their support of the Theatre.

Mr. Demko pointed out the clouds in the ceiling of the meeting room, as well as the panels that have been installed on the walls in the Council Chambers help improve the acoustics, and are products of a local company in High Point, BuzzSpace.

At this time, he introduced Meridith Elliott Powell, successful business coach and author of four books.

Ms. Powell expressed excitement about working with Council, leadership, and staff again noting the progress made from the last time she was here is basically unheard of and extreme for a government organization. She hoped the progress made in this short amount of time solidifies that focusing energy and effort clearly helps to move forward.

Ms. Powell shared the following top issues for Top of the Mind Cities:

- Economic Development
- Public Safety & Poverty
- Budgets, Services & Taxes
- Infrastructure & Housing
- Education & Jobs

She then reviewed the *Systems Thinking Strategic Plan* and stated we have never lived in another time where the majority of things that could impact our success are outside of our control and stressed the importance of realizing the things that are happening externally to the city can impact the city's ability to grow and be successful.

Following a review of the Systems Thinking Strategic Plan, **She asked staff and Council to get into groups, to pick one or two important external issues that could be deemed an opportunity or a threat.**

The groups consisted of:

**Group #1:** Council Members Jason Ewing, Victor Jones, Don Scarborough; City Attorney JoAnne Carlyle; and City Manager Greg Demko

**Group #2:** Council Members Jeff Golden, Monica Peters, Wesley Hudson; Jeron Hollis, Director of Communications & Public Engagement; and Assistant City Manager Randy Hemann

**Group #3:** Mayor Jay Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem Chris Williams, Council Member Britt Moore; Deputy City Manager Randy McCaslin; and Eric Olmedo, Budget & Evaluation Manager

**Group #1:**

- **Education** with focus on the following three components:
  1. Having a physical presence with the Guilford County School Board and the Guilford County Commissioners—not just at their meetings, but at their work sessions as well to show them that we, as a city, have a vested interest in our education system and that we want them to provide more resources for our system versus the other schools that High Point taxes pretty much subsidize.
  2. Providing the data to support the argument for more funding and more resources for High Point.
  3. Having a “hot sheet” that identifies all the support that the city already provides to its schools that is not statutorily required, such as the Safe Route to Schools sidewalk program
- **Economic Development**
  - Continuing to improve the service levels that the city departments offer to complement businesses and help businesses operate, start-up, etc...

**Group #2:**

- **Economic Development and Jobs**
  - All five issues are interrelated. Public safety issues could deter people from locating here, or create an issue with people want to locate businesses here. The question is whether people would choose to live here, and what effect that might have on education and jobs.
  - The timing of the Catalyst Project came in at the time where the economy is improving, and this has enabled the progress moving forward.

**Group #3:**

- **Upcoming Olympics in North & South Korea**
  - No control over this, out of our hands
- **Competing Markets, such as Greensboro and Winston Salem**
  - How much of our citizens go to Greensboro and Winston Salem and how much of our money is funneled to Greensboro and Winston Salem.
- **International Community and Immigration**
  - How the International Community in High Point responds to the National direction and how High Point responds to that direction.
- **Political Partisanship**
  - How do we respond to a partisan State House?
  - What happens to decisions that affect us?

- Effect of HB2 (negative impact)

Ms. Powell stressed the importance of being mindful of some of these things that cannot be controlled. She shared that the following things would determine what can make the City of High Point successful or not:

- ✓ Ability to focus;
- ✓ Being clear and concise about what you want;
- ✓ Collaboration and Teamwork;
- ✓ Keeping the lines of communication open.

She encouraged Council and staff to realize how much impact they have over what happens going forward, although a majority of those things are way outside of their control.

Ms. Powell then reviewed the city's vision and mission statement and identified the values that determine the success of these statements: Integrity, Creativity, Helpfulness, Responsibility, Partnership, and Balance.

**VISION STATEMENT:**

*"Creating the Single Most Livable, Safe and Prosperous Community in America"*

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

*The City will serve as the catalyst for empowering the community's human, economic & civic resources for the purpose of creating the single most livable, safe & prosperous community in America.*

Ms. Powell proceeded to review the goals set by Council at the 2016 Retreat:

1. Increase the population of active, engaged, entrepreneurial and working millennials living in High Point by 25%.
2. 100% proactive enforcement of codes.
3. Create a downtown catalyst project that produces:
  - 500 private sector jobs,
  - 15-20 new restaurants and shops,
  - 250 additional residential housing units, and
  - A centralized gathering place.

At this time, Ms. Powell provided an opportunity for Council and staff to share comments on these goals and what has transpired moving forward.

Council Member Williams felt the city has done a great job in the aspect of the proactive enforcement of the codes, but there were many other things that made it so much more than that. Assistant City Manager Randy Hemann agreed and noted that the real goal was blight reduction, but other aspects such as Operation In As Much, the partnership with Pinnacle Bank, etc.... all

have played key roles in the success. Council Member Ewing attributed the success of these goals to keeping them in the forefront and providing updates on a monthly basis.

Mr. Hemann elaborated how Goal #3 actually morphed into something broader by the creation of Forward High Point, an effective downtown development organization, and how they are not only talking about the catalyst project, but also how to connect these areas to Main Street.

Council Member Golden suggested one of the biggest things were the tools that were implemented that help to measure and compare the numbers effectively. Council Member Williams agreed, but felt it goes beyond the numbers because the people in the communities are actually seeing physical changes within their communities.

Ms. Powell asked for comments on the goals that Council gave to staff to focus and work on:

1. How do we address underperforming schools?
2. How do we plan for and build around our catalyst project?
3. How can we utilize technology to better communicate?

Mr. Demko asked Jeron Hollis, Director of Communications & Public Engagement to address the communication aspect.

Mr. Hollis shared that staff has to have the commitment to continue to talk about and market to the constituents and stressed the importance of them understanding why changes in downtown are needed. He stated that his staff has tried to accomplish this over the last couple of years by using Facebook and Twitter, and as a result, the numbers of followers and people listening to conversations have significantly increased.

He shared that Social Media is still an untapped free source of marketing and communication. The public can go to the city's website and choose which categories they want to receive notifications/information on and whether they want to receive the notifications by text, email, or both. Council Member Ewing noted in the citizen surveys, communication has always been the #1 issue. He felt this was a huge win from the citizens standpoint because this allows staff to point them to the city's app, to the website, to various links and places that they can go to find the information they are seeking. He shared that staff is now reaching more people than in the past due to the methods being used for communicating by using creative methods that grab their attention.

Council Member Jones suggested that a problem with millennials in High Point is that High Point's brand is not attractive. He noted that being an "International City," and the "Furniture Capital of the World" does not appeal to millennials; they are more interested in having really cool, eclectic places to eat and socialize. He pointed out the other cities like Durham, Asheville, and Charlotte all have brands and suggested that High Point come up with a brand in an effort to attract millennials.

He also felt it is important to know that the word out in the business community is there are some challenges to open up businesses in High Point, but this could be fixed. Council Member

Scarborough felt other businesses such as the Brown Truck are needed in High Point because they create a sense of community and it encourages people to get out, talk to one another, and to get to know one another. Mr. Hemann suggested that funding a more active downtown development corporation to start a more active revolving loan fund program could help to get more businesses. He noted that the face of the downtown could be changed, but it would take investment in the city to do that.

Mayor Wagner pointed out there are quite a few eclectic restaurants in High Point, but many people are not aware of this because High Point's story is not being told well. He hoped the catalyst project would create an area where there is a critical mass of those creative, interesting, eclectic places, all within close proximity and within walking distances of each other.

Regarding the branding, Mayor Wagner explained that Durham had an active branding effort and they actually stumbled upon the brand that they now use: "Find Your Cool," which did not come from a consultant, but a young guy that made the suggestion. He agreed that High Point does need some kind of branding effort to define what the city is or what people in the city can do as it relates to the happenings in the city. He, too, suggested that maybe High Point's story is not being told and shared. Council Member Moore agreed that High Point's story has not been told well and commented that we have allowed people to continue to talk negatively about High Point to the point where the "lie" has become the "truth."

## **ROLE CLARITY**

Following the comments, Ms. Powell instructed everyone to get back into their groups for an exercise on **clearly defining the roles of the Council, Leadership, and Staff.**

### **Group #1:**

- Looked at it from a statutory standpoint
- Council: Develop policy and direction; energy/tone of initiatives
- Leadership: Policy, implementation and planning; building strategies to accomplish initiatives; top advisors to Mayor/Council
- Staff: boots on the ground; do the work per instructions from the leadership; and hands on in providing the services

### **Group #2:**

- Council: Identifies problems; sets priorities; liaison to the residents; respects the role of the leadership
- Leadership (managers, management team, at times directors): address issues; follow-up with resident and council; come up with solutions
- Staff: Implements the plan; go out and execute

### **Group #3:**

- Council: set goals; define policy; provide follow-up and accountability (as goals trickle down the chain and back up); provide leadership (within the city and the city government); provide the resources; approve the budget and instruct where the money goes;

- Leadership: execute the goals and policies that are created by Council; provide leadership to the staff; get the buy-in of the employees and provide employees with the recognition they deserve; come up with creative and new ideas; have to be business-friendly
- Staff: Boots on the ground execution of the services, ideas, initiatives, day-to-day operations

Ms. Powell explained the importance of this exercise and encouraged Council to look at it three times a year to ensure that everybody understands their role and staying on task because these are the keys to productivity. This allows the ability to accomplish tasks as much as possible, as fast as possible, and as efficiently as possible.

When everyone reconvened from the 10-minute break, Ms. Powell assigned another exercise for the group work and asked the groups to get together and answer the following questions regarding the goals:

1. How can we specifically take our current goals/strategies to a more strategic level?
2. How can council increase communication, engagement of relationships with our community?
3. What do we need to do (council and staff working together) to exceed our customer's expectations?

#### **Group #1:**

**Question #1: How can we specifically take our current goals/strategies to a more strategic level? The group took the questions and applied each question to each of the strategic initiatives.**

#### **Millennials (Young Professionals):**

- Create cool focus on the quality of life, the play aspect, since young professionals find a place to live before they find a job.
- Create more opportunities for them to serve that shows they do have an impact on what they are serving on. Most do not want to sit in board meetings for an hour and a half, they want to take an idea and implement it. Finding more opportunities to create more openings for millennials to serve on where their voice is going to be heard and they're going to have an impact on that board or that organization is going to help engage them.
- Create a culture and perception that their ideas are welcome and valued and actually implemented.

#### **Code Enforcement**

- Engaging outside resources
- Continue to track and report through the council subcommittees

#### **Catalyst Project**

- Be more strategic.
- Increase the impact of Forward High Point, budgetarily offering more city resources for them to grow and be more effective in what they're doing and what we want them to do
- Strategic with infrastructure replacement projects.

- Connecting the current catalyst project to other sub-catalyst areas that have been identified through the growth and development process

**Question #2: How can council increase communication, engagement of relationships with our community?**

**Millennials**

- Know who, from a staff perspective, to address specific questions/concerns to.
- Follow-up
- Visibility and presence of young professionals at city events and council needs to be informed of opportunities to be engaged with young professionals
- Encourage momentum

**Code Enforcement**

- Stick to the commitment and tear down structures that the code enforcement officers say need to be demolished.
- Need to support staff

**Catalyst Project**

- More public events like the Demo Day, suggested having construction tours
- More give aways at these events as it helps us brand our city.
- Continue the project road show to keep citizens/organizations in the loop and up to date.

**Question #3: What do we need to do (council and staff working together) to exceed our customer's expectations?**

- Citizens expect the catalyst to be successful and not affect the taxes.

**Group #2:**

**Question #1: How can we specifically take our current goals/strategies to a more strategic level?**

- Ensure that progress and completion of certain projects are advertised well.
- Become more walkable in the areas we are trying to develop.
- Have more influence with the CVB and how they do things.
- Like to see the millennial group be a little more diverse.

**Question #2: How can council increase communication, engagement of relationships with our community?**

- Always be open/honest.
- Continue doing town hall meetings by doing town halls collectively and rotate locations throughout the city

**Question #3: What do we need to do (council and staff working together) to exceed our customer's expectations?**

- Educate the community on what the city does.



- Make random calls to residents to get their thoughts on our customer service.
- Use HPTV to show the city at work, possibly doing a Q & A session with council

### **Group #3:**

This group agreed that the overarching philosophy was how to keep the momentum going and capitalizing on the successes of these three goals, with a big emphasis on how to take it to the next level and building on the successes.

#### **Millennials**

- Provide a variety of living options and entertainment because their life circumstances are changing and if we get them here, we have to figure out how to keep them here.
- Quality of life. Is High Point engaging to the young professionals and do they feel like they are a part of the community?
- Effective communication of telling High Point's story. How do we tell High Point's story and let people know there are cool things to do here in High Point?

#### **Code Enforcement/Blight**

- Recognize the need that it will take more resources to build on the success we've had.
- Continue to push for the receivership legislation.
- Investments in infrastructure to induce new investment by returning the vacant lots to productive use. How do we get new investment in the neighborhoods? What is the city's role in promoting the reuse and the reinvestment into the blighted areas that are being cleaned out?

#### **Catalyst Project**

- Continue to engage and work with the community. How do we keep all the key groups that are now working collaboratively on the project engaged and focused in attaining the goal of attaining the livable, quality of life downtown.
- Will have to deal with the new look of Elm Street. How do we change that to promote walkability, the desired quality of life?
- Promote and enhance entrepreneurship to fill the spaces downtown and create the type of life and vibe desired in the downtown.

#### **Next Steps....**

Ms. Powell stated there are three strategic things that she heard from today's feedback:

1. More clarity is needed around exactly who the city is trying to attract to High Point, and then ensure that the growth plan in High Point aligns with that.
2. Start thinking on a strategic level what to do with the properties that have been cleared and the next steps needed to make these properties more productive. Council has done such a good job with code enforcement that now it has become tactical in nature and needs to go to the staff level.
3. Think about the next steps to ensure the success of the catalyst project, without it negatively affecting the residents from a financial standpoint.

She challenged the Council to create an avatar because they cannot be all things to all people, but they could create a city for the person that they want to attract and make them feel comfortable.

At this time, Mr. Demko provided an opportunity for Council to share their input on today's discussion.

### **Council Remarks**

**Council Member Jones** stated that he has been attending council meetings for the past year in an effort to get a feel for the job, and felt it was good and informative to hear some of the comments made during today's discussions regarding previous issues that have been tackled.

**Council Member Scarborough** shared that he has never thought about hand-molding a community before, but felt it would open up great things for the moving forward into the future.

**Council Member Hudson** expressed excitement about moving beyond the catalyst project, noting that it was yesterday's news, and now it is happening. He agreed that Council's job in moving forward is to determine and identify what strategies to use to ensure these initiatives are successful.

**Council Member Golden** stated he was part of the group that came up with the initiatives at the 2016 Council Retreat, but discussions today have opened his eyes to some things. In looking back in the past, there were a couple of issues that he would have voted on differently: one being the Library project, and the other being the Main Street dieting. He now sees the need for dieting Main Street to make way for a walkable community. He pointed out that perspectives change as things change.

**Council Member Moore** felt it is always good to have group sessions because it also gives perspective to how important and large the Council's job is, and it gives feet on the ground perspective to the enormity of what the city staff does, and the importance of the decisions that Council makes in the short term and the long term. He stated he would like to see a quarterly or monthly update of the State of the City to be printed in the newspaper. Council Member Ewing pointed out the Communications & Public Engagement Department is already putting out a monthly newsletter for employees and Council could be added to the distribution list. Council Member Moore noted it needs to be seen by the public as well and suggested putting it on YouTube.

**Council Member Ewing** shared that he enjoys and looks forward to the collaborative engagement amongst council members in these planning sessions. He felt the goals and initiatives identified in the 2016 Retreat have proved to be highly successful. He suggested looking at four-year terms for Council because of the learning curve that is necessary to get these initiatives done. He pointed out the three-year term for the former Council allowed the additional time needed to focus on these initiatives because it would take more than two years for Council to put goals into place and implement them.

**Mayor Wagner** felt the time today has been very good and productive. He stated that he has participated in quite a few strategic planning sessions with the city and other organizations as well, and it was definitely good use of his time. He shared that participating in the 2016 Council Retreat was probably the best one that he has been a part of and agreed the question now is where do we go from here, how to build on our successes, and how to take it to the next level. He agreed that it is a challenge to create a city that gives the right “feel” to people that we want to attract.

**Council Member Peters** felt the session today was great, noting that it is great for everyone to be working together and listening and sharing ideas. She really liked the questions posed by Ms. Powell because the questions were very thought-provoking.

**Council Member Williams** stated he has heard it said that “past success can be an enemy to innovation.” He felt it was important not to become satisfied because of the success over the last three years, but to continue the momentum in moving things forward. He agreed with Council Member Ewing’s suggestion and felt it would be beneficial to extend the terms of City Council to four years.

Mr. Demko thanked everyone for coming out in the adverse weather conditions and noted there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. He stated the momentum is going and it is time to keep building on it.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m. upon motion duly made and seconded.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Jay W. Wagner, Mayor

Attest:

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Lisa B. Vierling, MMC  
City Clerk