

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Institute for Community and Regional Development

MEMO

November 24, 2004

TO: Mayor and Council-members, Ed Koryzno, City Manager
Participants in the Goal-Setting Workshop, City of Ypsilanti

FROM: Dr. Joe Ohren, ICARD/EMU

RE: Minutes of the November 20 Work Session and Revised Draft Action Plan

I have summarized below the Minutes of our meeting on Saturday November 20th for review and reaction by the group at our follow-up session scheduled for Tuesday evening, November 30. Following a brief discussion of decision process issues, much of the early discussion focused on the Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Finance and on the Report of the Recreation Commission; the key themes of that discussion are reported in the Minutes, highlighting key issues and action plans rather than presenting a verbatim transcript. The latter part of the discussion turned to the Goals, and to some extent the action strategies, in the Action Plan adopted by Council in January 2004. To simplify understanding of the latter discussion, I have incorporated notes in boxed text into the draft itself.

The agenda for our follow-up session builds off this narrative; ultimately we want to emerge at the end of the evening with a draft Action Plan that we feel comfortable with, both in terms of substance and priorities for action. Hence, prior to Tuesday evening, please:

1. Review the Minutes and the changes I have made to the text of the Action Plan. Do the notes from the November 20th session accurately reflect our discussion? Are there changes that should be made for clarification? As you read the summary, did other things come to mind that you want to add to the discussion?
2. Review the minor revisions in the language of several of the action strategies. Do you agree with these changes?
3. Review the new strategies designed to reflect the morning discussion—do you agree with the language? Are there other action strategies that should be added to or deleted from the list? Are there other changes in the existing language that need to be made?
4. Identify those strategies for each Goal that should be given highest priorities. We did this systematically last year, and we should do it again in light of changes over the past year. Are there items currently listed as High Priority that can be moved down in priority? Are there strategies that should be moved up in priority? Note particularly that new strategies should be ranked in priority.

As I indicated on the 20th, we will provide a light dinner on Tuesday evening, 11/30—food will be available at 5:30—with the session scheduled to begin no later than 6:15 and adjourn by 9:30. See you on the 30th.

These notes, prepared by Dr. Joe Ohren, constitute an attachment to the official record of the work session of November 20, 2004 provided by the Clerk (for the record, I have also attached a digital copy of the Retreat Agenda that was distributed on that day). The first section summarizes the discussion of decision process issues and of the two reports on the agenda, while the discussion of the draft action plan is incorporated into text notes in the draft itself.

Decision Process Issues

The group began by reflecting on decision process issues—how do we make decisions as a group? How might we improve the decision process? What barriers or constraints need to be addressed? One issue that was surfaced related to the need to keep all elected officials alerted to emerging issues/problems/recommendations; to put it simply, as someone said, we want no surprises. Suggestions for addressing the concern related to using existing lines of communication—such as the Manager’s information letter, Manager’s report to council, and informal communications with council members—to alert officials as soon as possible on upcoming issues. Participants acknowledged that the problem may be a product of the constraints of staff reductions in the Manager’s Office, but all agreed that we need to do our best in keeping everybody informed. Identify issues that are coming up, provide staff material as soon as it is available, make sure that all officials get all the information, and so on.

Blue Ribbon Committee

Paul Tait, chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Finance, began the discussion by providing an overview of the findings and a perspective on the recommendations; he noted that the Committee was diverse, had strong participants with varying views, and yet the report was unanimous. He noted that Ypsilanti is ahead of the curve in considering the many finance issues facing the city, since many local government jurisdictions are just now coming to grips with the same concerns. The Committee felt very strongly that despite the staff cuts, Ypsilanti is a well-run city, in some cases, “keeping departments going with duct-tape.”

The Committee felt strongly that continuing the status quo is not an option. Tweaking the expenditure side of the budget, “nickel and dime cuts” as he called it, were not going to produce the kind of cuts necessary to produce real savings. Hence, further expenditure reductions must focus on blocks of services, a’la the Recreation Department cuts made two years ago. On the revenue side, the Committee recommended consideration of a city income tax, regionalization of services (although they recognized that cooperative or regional efforts take time and might not be an immediate option), and innovation in service delivery.

Short Term Recommendations: The Blue Ribbon Committee will present a final report to Council after the first of the year, but the Interim Report presented several short term recommendations. The City Manager summarized what has been done to date by staff and other suggestions were offered:

- ✍ continue the practice of annually adjusting user charges and fees;
- ✍ examine further opportunities for cooperation with new township officials;
- ✍ explore more systematically the potential savings from a Fire Department merger (the Chief noted that there already exists extensive cooperative efforts in training, mutual-aid, and equipment purchases, and suggested a districting concept that might also be considered as an alternative to merger); and

- ✍ examine the savings from combining police and fire departments into a Public Safety Department (both Chiefs explained that there are many variations of the public safety concept and that the savings would depend on the kind of department that would emerge).

It was also suggested that the City must play a leadership role in explaining and promoting cooperation, regionalization, service delivery changes and service reductions to the public. Participants recognized that there is an emotional attachment to local government that becomes a barrier to adopting cooperative strategies. Bob Bruner described a recent summit on regionalization involving local government officials in the Plymouth area and suggested hosting a similar summit in the Ypsilanti area to identify the kinds of things that are being done in a cooperative fashion already and what else might be done to improve service delivery and cost effectiveness. The leadership group needs to think through what purposes the summit would service, who would be invited, who might play host, and so on. Participants agreed that this might also take the form of a new goal with attendant strategies in the revised Action Plan.

Other Actions: Several other specific suggestions were offered related to the report of the Blue Ribbon Committee:

1. as part of the preparation for the new budget, staff might estimate the budget impacts (i.e. cost estimates, revenue estimates)
2. the Report, and perhaps members of the Committee, might assemble and conduct an informational “road show” to share the findings and recommendations to EMU faculty and staff, COPAC, Neighborhood Associations and other appropriate groups
3. reexamine the potential for fee increases associated with festivals, perhaps with a two-tiered fee structure for inside/local groups and outside groups. The current fee structure doesn’t take into account risk, insurance fees/liabilities, and other related costs. Currently the city covers or subsidizes many of these costs for festivals. One suggested consideration was that major festivals be asked to share a percentage of their proceeds. Or, alternatively, use the capital improvement plan—essentially an estimate of the infrastructure and maintenance needs of the parks and facilities—to sell major festivals on committing proceeds to Ypsilanti’s general fund to cover festival costs.

Recreation Commission

Councilmember Filipiak, who served on the Recreation Commission, indicated that the Commission had shared its findings and recommendations with Council at an earlier work session and reported that Commission members feel good about being heard by Council.

The Commission’s recommendations are summed up in two pages at the end of the Report. Perhaps most important, the Commission believes that creating and filling the recreation coordinator position is necessary to move forward in reinstating the recreation department. At the present, the assistant city manager is filling most of the responsibilities and the rate of pay for the open coordinator position may not be attracting the most able applicants.

While Council was supportive of the recommendations in the report when it was presented at the recent work session, the critical issue is resources. Council member LaRue phrased it in policy terms, “What is the base level of recreation service Council needs to provide residents?”

Council needs to consider various policy options and determine what their goal with recreation should be. Participants discussed several of the options, without reaching consensus. They included:

- ✍ Return to the status quo before the cuts; i.e., a fully funded and city supported Recreation Department;
- ✍ Shelve the report and deal with recreation when more funding becomes available;
- ✍ Create a fee structure for facility usage, with the city making facilities available with no programmatic efforts;
- ✍ Regionalizing recreation, creating a regional recreation authority that would take over the functions of recreation for the region, with a broader tax base to support programming.

Participants agreed that the first priorities for the assistant manager will be to work on the Kroc Center proposal and then research the regional recreation authority options. Filipiak indicated that the Recreation Commission would like to know when decisions will be made and what their next steps should be? As part of the budget preparation process it would also be helpful for Council to know the costs of current recreation efforts—facility maintenance and personnel. The long-term viability of recreation programming needs to be determined; as someone put it, “the chicken wire and duct tape method will not last forever.”

Updating the Action Plan

The group then moved to discuss other critical strategic issues and focused attention on possible changes to the existing Action Plan. Several suggestions for change were offered, and a narrative explanation for each suggestion is reflected in boxed text in the draft document itself to simplify the presentation. New strategies have not been assigned a priority since that will be one of the tasks for the follow-up discussion on Tuesday evening November 30.

CITY OF YPSILANTI
DRAFT ACTION PLAN 2005-6
November 20, 2004

Goal One Continue to pursue a variety of strategies to strengthen the financial capacity of the City

Highest Priority

1. Continue to implement the Water Street Project and downtown revitalization initiatives and anticipate and establish priorities for redevelopment projects such as:

Motor Wheel property	Lowell Street Exemplar property
Superior Coatings	Smith Furniture property
City Landfill	Gateway Area
DTE Building	West Cross Street area
Downtown and Depot Town Business Districts	Rail Initiative

Ohren's Note: Deleted several specific items from the list of properties in strategy one as development has occurred; Crown Paper plant, Kresge Block, DPW/Farm Bureau Property, Renaissance Building. Deleted strategy number two—appoint Blue Ribbon Commission—and renumbered remaining strategies.

Priority When Resources Permit

2. Develop and implement systematic efforts to communicate the needs of the City to, and secure the support of, state and county officials, including such things as:
 - a. Nominate city residents and encourage the appointment of city residents to positions on county boards and commissions
 - b. Systematically communicate and share information with state legislators as well county commissioners from the area, inviting them to meetings periodically to discuss issues and sharing the city's action plan and needs
 - c. Participate with others through the MML and other organizations in statewide education and advocacy efforts on behalf of core cities and older urban areas
4. Aggressively pursue all relevant grant efforts to support development initiatives and maintain city funding to support and strengthen redevelopment efforts
5. Move aggressively to seek appropriate investment in the city, consistent with the vision that has been expressed in the Master Plan, while insuring that development standards are met
6. Continue to
 - a. insure that development expectations are clear and concise;
 - b. offer streamlined review and permitting processes; and
 - c. communicate access and service to prospective and current businesses

7. Develop strategies for minimizing the loss of property from the tax roll, including providing information to the public on the consequences of such action and requiring potential buyers to consider the fiscal impact on the city of the loss of tax base

Ohren's Note: Number eight is a new action strategy aimed at increasing development opportunities and bringing parcels back onto the tax roll. Numbers nine through eleven, also new, flow from the discussion of the Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission regarding educating residents about the financial challenges facing the city and estimating costs and potential revenues from specific alternatives, including recreation options.

8. Negotiate a right of first refusal with EMU and the Ypsilanti School District to protect options for the city in obtaining land; e.g., the former credit union property, Fletcher School, and Bus Yard on River Road
9. Sponsor a series of informational meetings to share the findings and recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee with a variety of audiences across the city, perhaps utilizing members of the Committee and partnering with others to get the message out
10. Develop cost estimates for alternative recreation policy options including:
 - a. Return to the status quo before the cuts; i.e., a fully funded and city supported Recreation department;
 - b. Shelve the report and deal with recreation when more funding becomes available;
 - c. Create a fee structure for facility usage, with the city making facilities available with no programmatic efforts;
 - d. Regionalizing recreation, creating a regional recreation authority that would take over the functions of recreation for the region, with a broader tax base to support programming.
11. Identify alternatives as well as costs and potential revenues and develop recommendations regarding fees imposed on festival organizers

Goal Two Continue to foster an environment in City government where communication and information is shared and services are provided in an efficient, cost-effective, friendly and timely manner

Highest Priority

1. Continue to implement the plan for strengthening the City's Web Page as an additional vehicle for communication and information sharing; commit the staff and other resources needed to implement the plan and maintain the Page

2. Emphasize in Council and staff communications with residents and others
 - o a “culture” of openness, a commitment by the City to information sharing and educating residents about the problems and challenges faced and the strategies to be employed to address them, and
 - o a “culture” of “community services” in relationships between the City and residents, neighborhood organizations, and others
3. Utilize a variety of means to improve media coverage of community issues and to insure that residents are provided sufficient information to understand and address policy issues

Priority When Resources Permit

4. Assemble a “Technology Task Force” to develop a long-range plan for using technology to improve the delivery of city services
5. Pursue technology improvements to equip City personnel to provide services in the most cost-effective fashion possible and insure support for and maintenance of that technology infrastructure over time
6. Develop a set of service standards within each department to guide the delivery of services
7. Continue to address employee fear and uncertainty about budget problems and potential budget reduction strategies
8. Consider providing greater flexibility in schedule options and leave policy and improving the salary and benefit package, including a tuition reimbursement program, to improve retention of employees

Ohren’s Note: Number nine and ten are new action strategies related to web development.
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9. Develop a policy regarding whether links to other entities should be placed on the city’s website, and if so, the types of entities to be included
10. Examine the feasibility and costs and benefits of incorporating e-commerce applications on the city’s website

Goal Three Strengthen neighborhood leadership and organizations and open lines of communications between neighborhood leaders and elected officials and city employees

Highest Priority

1. Work collaboratively with EMU through the COPC program to
 - a. support leadership development for neighborhood leaders,
 - b. facilitate or subsidize neighborhood communication (e.g., newsletters),
 - c. establish new neighborhood organizations, “group” building, as appropriate,
 - d. include the business community in the context of neighborhood development and participation in decision processes
 - e. engage the community in a broad strategic planning process to identify critical issues facing the community and strategies for addressing them

Ohren’s Note: As most of you are aware, HUD funding for COPC has ended although the mechanisms for supporting neighborhood associations and leadership development are still available to be tapped. Hence the strategy could be rewritten as follows: **Work collaboratively with EMU to continue to establish new neighborhood organizations and support leadership development for neighborhood leaders**

Priority When Resources Permit

2. Engage neighborhood organizations and city Boards and Commissions systematically as networks for information sharing, disseminating service information and securing feedback as a means of demonstrating the value of organizing
3. Host periodic workshops at the neighborhood level as vehicles for discussing specific issues and generating ideas for resolving problems

Goal Four Continue to pursue a variety of strategies for improving the physical condition of neighborhoods and increasing the rate of home ownership in the community

Highest Priority

1. Continue a systematic program to enforce standards, coordinating the efforts of the building official, the police and fire departments, the planning and development department, the city attorney’s office and others to improve the physical appearance and condition of neighborhoods across the city

2. Update the master plan and the zoning ordinance over the next two years and consciously and systematically engage residents in the process
 - a. Consider reducing the extent of the community shown for multi-family uses
 - b. Promote homeownership **in selected areas of the city** and explore all the tools (e.g., limit the number of unrelated adults, nuisance charges) for encouraging homeownership
 - c. Explore the use of overlay districts, architectural controls, and historic districts as means for improving neighborhoods

Ohren's Note: It was noted in the discussion that portions of this strategy designed to strengthen home ownership may conflict with the goal seeking to strengthen the tax base. Participants suggested that one approach might be to designate appropriate areas for ownership efforts, recognizing that for some areas residential development may not be appropriate or that in others, multi-family development may be more appropriate. I have inserted a phrase in bold text in 2b that may meet this need, but there may be better ways of handling this.

3. Develop and communicate a citywide policy statement on standards and procedures for implementing traffic calming measures in residential neighborhoods

Priority When Resources Permit

4. Systematically study and identify impediments to home ownership and develop a plan for addressing those impediments over the next two to five years
5. Wherever possible develop partnerships with other governmental units and with other entities to implement strategies to improve the condition of neighborhoods

Goal Five Continue to address the broad range of facility and infrastructure needs across the City

Ohren's Note: Inserted the word **facility** in the language of the Goal to broaden the attention to both facility and infrastructure needs. Revised strategy number one under Goal Five, deleting the reference to the street improvement project since that is coming to an end, and added a new strategy six addressing park improvements (the latter has not been prioritized).

Highest Priority

1. Continue to implement the project designed to improve the downtown parking lots
2. Establish priorities for maintenance, rehabilitation and construction for city buildings and public parking lots

3. Continue to work with Washtenaw Area Transportation Study and YCUA among others on infrastructure improvements

Priority When Resources Permit

4. Identify funding sources to finance highest priority infrastructure investments
5. Schedule infrastructure improvements or construction over the next three to five years, including replacement of existing and new improvements to the technology infrastructure
6. Complete the capital improvements plan for city parks and identify priorities for programming and potential funding sources

Goal Six Continue to strengthen working relationships with the University to address mutual problems and strengthen the community

Highest Priority

1. Continue to utilize student and faculty resources to address community needs and challenges through internships, class projects, independent studies, volunteer programs, etc
2. Continue regular meetings between University and city officials to improve communication and joint problem-solving and to explore new ways to work together to address emerging issues and opportunities

Priority When Resources Permit

3. Include both EMU and City representatives in long range planning efforts conducted by both the University and the City to ensure that the needs/challenges/opportunities of both entities are taken into consideration
4. Monitor the University's implementation of its master plan for the boundary areas where the campus meets the community – especially in those areas where the adjacent land is a residential neighborhood
5. Partner with University officials to pursue and secure resources to implement the goals of the Cross Street study
6. Pursue joint advocacy efforts with University officials to secure mutually beneficial state appropriations and state policies
7. Continue and expand efforts to examine other university communities for examples of town/gown partnerships that have been used successfully to address common issues and challenges
8. Recognize and acknowledge the success of the University when appropriate

Ohren's Note: During the discussion of the Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee several participants suggested that a new goal should be added to the Action Plan to assume a leadership role in promoting to residents and other public officials regional strategies for service delivery. I have provided some language and incorporated the action strategy that was identified. But this will need to be discussed more fully at the follow-up session.

New Goal **Assume a leadership role across the community in promoting the need for regional and cooperative service delivery strategies**

1. Sponsor a summit to bring together public officials and residents from across the larger community to discuss the challenges facing local governments and the need for greater attention to regional or shared strategies for service delivery

Are there other strategies that should be included?

YPSILANTI CITY COUNCIL RETREAT

Saturday, November 20, 2004
Community Room, Haab's/St. Joseph Medical Center

AGENDA

INTRODUCTIONS, PURPOSE, PROCESS AND PRODUCT

TASK ONE – Decision Process Issues?

**TASK TWO – Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on City Finances
Assessment?
Action?**

**TASK THREE – Report of the Recreation Commission
Assessment?
Action?**

**TASK FOUR – Strategic Issues facing the City?
Are there new issues or challenges that the City should be addressing in the
coming year?**

TASK FIVE – Goals—are they still relevant?

- 1. Upon review, are the goals still relevant as a guide to Council action?**
- 2. Are these still the most important goals for the City?**
- 3. Are changes appropriate?**
- 4. Should new goals be added?**

NEXT STEPS