

2021 Strategic Planning Retreat
500 N Houston Lake Boulevard
Centerville, Georgia
On November 17, 2021 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Present

Mayor John R. Harley	Rebecca Tydings, City Attorney	Alicia Hartley, Events
Councilman Justin Wright	Sara Caldwell, Municipal Court	Carol Harrison, Finance
Councilman Micheal Evans	Krista Bedingfield, City Clerk	Cedric Duncan, Police
Councilman Edward Armijo	Mike Brumfield, Operations	Jason Jones, Fire
Laura Mathis, MGRC	Caitlin Mee, MGRC	

Not Present:

Councilman Robert Bird

Call to Order

Mayor Harley called the meeting to order at 9:00am. Mrs. Mathis of the Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC) welcomed everyone and outlined the appropriate terms of engagement as well as explained the general purpose of the retreat. Mrs. Mathis then gave the time over to the attendees to present any department updates.

Councilman Wright

- Theme: Scale- City should focus on planning for exponential growth before it becomes catastrophic.
- Would like to investigate ways to diversify the city's tax base.
- Develop ways to regulate the minimum standards for mobile homes and mobile home parks throughout the city.
- Have a five-year plan for each department
- Personnel- Update internal policies. Focus on recruitment and retention of employees. There is an opportunity to define and streamline city job descriptions and roles.
- Develop a "baseline" in Centerville
 - Identify what the city does well

Councilman Evans

- Theme: Here by choice, not by chance.
- Consider the citizens
 - What additional services and quality of services can Centerville provide its residents and visitors
 - Focus on developing Old Stone Crossing as a gateway corridor to downtown Centerville

- Revisit the benefits of the senior exemption

Councilman Armijo

- Study the condition of the streets in Eagle Springs: what is the most effective way to provide maintenance
- Would like to be sure to keep Phase II of the Center Park Plan development on the radar
- Study the cost / fees associated with Center Park rentals

Rebecca Tydings, City Attorney

- Mobile homes
 - Create affordable housing options and create policies to deter slumlords
 - Assess existing housing, specifically mobile homes and mobile home parks, by age, square foot per lot
 - Create policies for the inspection of mobile homes and mobile home parks
 - Establish a rental property registry
- Update the personnel manual – not necessary at this time
 - Streamline the open records requests process (~100 requests per month)

Krista Bedingfield, City Clerk

- eTicketing process
- Requested a sonic wall upgrade for IT- \$1800/year for the license and would increase internet security
- Need additional video cameras for the police department

Mike Brumfield, Operations

- Theme: What do we need to do with what the city already has.
- Difficulty attracting quality work force and develop incentives to retain employees long-term
 - Pay scale study (\$11 an hour is not enough)
 - Long term incentives to stay
- Operations handles 1,000 to 1,500 work order a month
- Operations has four open positions (14 staff members would be “fully staffed”)
- Currently using Premier Staffing Agency
 - Collaboration with STEM/Tech schools
 - Could use the vacant Sear’s Store as a training school in collaboration with Central Georgia Technical College or Middle Georgia Technical College.
- Supply chain challenges for parts and materials.

Alicia Harley, Events Coordinator

- Made \$7,345 in pavilion rentals in the last year

- (\$45/hour with a 2-hour minimum + \$400 cleaning fee for rental)
- General comments:
 - Revisit fee amounts for rentals
 - Potential discount on fees for residents
 - There is a need for more event facilities
- Important to focus on the economic development of Center Park and around it
 - Events at the park are geared to provide a business incubator for small businesses with hopes they would establish a brick and mortar spot around Center Park (such as food trucks turning into store fronts)

Carol Harrison, Finance

- 20% of the year's property taxes were already collected
- The city currently has a 5 to 6-month reserve
- Some ARPA funding has been allocated to general fund for lost revenue provision

Cedric Duncan, Chief of Police

- Theme: Standardizing the agency to bring about “positive change”
- Chief Duncan has focused on mentorship and career growth since starting during the summer of 2021.
- The department is currently one officer short.
- Establish a more rigorous hiring process as a way to ensure committed officers
- The department is having success utilizing the eTicket software
- gTech, a data storage service, was mentioned as a solution to additional data storage for body camera footage, etc.
- Increase extended training and career development opportunities for current officers, both in-house training and external opportunities
- The police department currently has 6 vehicles in service.
- Police department needs a larger fire safe facility for record storage.
- As the city grows, the number of officers will need to increase with the population size.

Jason Jones, Fire Chief

- 5% increase of overlapping calls (multiple calls coming in through dispatch at the same time)
- 6-8% increase in general call volume
- Chief Jones suggested discontinuing part-time positions in place of more full-time opportunities
- Would benefit from having 3-6 fire officers per shift with one supervisory officer per shift available
- Fire department now in charge of issuing burn permits (as opposed to the state) for both residential and commercial
 - Suggested creating a digitized form (ex. Google Forms)

- The Boy Scouts are currently using the house portion of the old fire department building as a permanent location for meetings. The Girl Scouts are also temporarily using the building. Discussion about reusing the building as community resource center was made. The fire department does not have need of it or of the house also located on the property. Potential challenges for using the existing building for events mentioned were any lead-based paint remediation (age of the building), mold was noted as not being an issue any longer, liability, potential cost, and staff time to manage and schedule the building for events.

Sara Caldwell, Municipal Court

Most of the discussion regarding municipal court procedures was focused on COVID protocol and how it has affected the efficiency of the court. Sara noted that the court is experiencing an increase in dockets, however, staffing was not an issue at this time. The ability to have unlimited people in the court at a time, yet still enforce masking would help process cases more efficiently. Consensus was to allow Municipal Court to remove the distancing requirement.

The remainder of the retreat covered specific topics that were submitted in advance by Mayor, Council and key personnel.

PHASE II OF THE CENTER PARK/ TOWN CENTER MASTER PLAN

1. What enhancements does Phase I need?

- Second playground area for children under 5 years old
- Additional parking
- Additional Lighting
- Pedestrian connectivity and safety assessment
 - Front sidewalk and current park area
 - Church Street parking lot connectivity
 - Sidewalks in between the parking lot and the park
 - Enhance pedestrian safety at Gunn Rd/ Church St and Houston Lake Rd

2. Expansion of Center Park

- Active area across from the elementary school
- Amphitheater
 - Consider effects of noise on adjacent neighborhoods
- Indoor Soccer field- could be a multi-municipality project (partner with county/surrounding towns)

Next Steps

1. Revisit the existing master plan for Center Park and Town Center to guide the next phase of development

- Research appropriate sound buffers (i.e., vegetation, architecture, etc.)
- Slow traffic on Houston Lake Rd.
 - Use similar pedestrian safety measures as Poplar St. in Macon

- Stairs are being constructed as part of the LIHTC development leading to the Houston Lake Rd cross walk
2. Conduct a transportation and pedestrian study
 - Parking
 - Connectivity to mall
 - Lighting
 3. Need to address required change in launch site for fireworks.
 4. Consider a local enterprise zone or tax allocation district as a way to incentivize desired economic development in town center.

MOBILE HOME DISCUSSION

Councilman Wright, also on the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing Centerville team, wanted an opportunity to discuss the current state of mobile homes and mobile home parks located within the city limits of Centerville. The group was unanimously in support of establishing a plan and exploring the creation of policies to deter predatory practices, specifically with mobile homes, but also generally with rental properties throughout the city.

- 16% of Centerville is premanufactured mobile homes
- There is a need to focus on addressing predatory practices through policy creation
- Suggestion to conduct a mobile home and mobile home park study
 - Condition
 - Location
 - Age
 - Ownership (locally owned versus out of town/state ownership)
- Call for a temporary moratorium on the construction of new mobile homes and mobile parks while the current situation is reviewed, and new policies can be created.
 - Work with owner occupied mobile homes to acquire funding for maintenance and rehabilitation (CHIP/ CDGB/USDA)
- Establish mandatory inspections and minimum building standards policy (similar to the City of Woodstock and Baldwin County)
- Establish clear goals and benchmarks
- Codify land use moving forward: no new mobile home parks within Centerville city limits
- Make a zoning amendment
- Address code enforcement shortage- Staff will be needed to inspect and enforce any new policies
 - May want to dedicate a code enforcement officer and inspector to mobile homes and mobile home parks

Other affordable “missing middle” housing concerns:

- There is a need for moderately sized single-family homes for Millennials and individuals wishing to age in place.
- Other considerations regarding mobile homes and mobile home parks

- Manufactured homes on foundations are acceptable but still must meet potential minimum building standards code
- Parking area, lot size, permeable surface, and zoning are all characteristics that could be codified and regulated
- Ensure permitting and zoning allows for a variety of accessible and affordable housing types (cottages, multifamily, duplexes, etc.)

FIRE PROTECTION FEE

Mayor Harley wanted to explore the possibility of instituting a fire protection fee, similar to the one Perry has in use. New residents would pay a fee, similar to other utility fees, that would support the growth of the fire department. After discussion, there does not appear to be an interest in moving forward at this time.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: CITY ADMINISTRATOR

The city is currently administrated under the combined responsibilities of Director of Operations, City Attorney and City Clerk – rather than a City Administrator. Councilmember Wright was concerned about who would be tasked with administration for the city when those three retired and wished to discuss the topic of City Administrator further. The group agreed to periodically revisit the conversation as the city grew and assess the need at that point. Key points mentioned during the discussion were:

- Mentor current employees to potentially take on the position
- Professional Development
 - Importance of hiring new employees who had a desire to stay with the city for an extended time
 - Incentivize long term employment
 - Clearly define roles and expectations for such positions
- The city would need someone experienced in grant writing and administration

Concerns were raised about the increased level of communication and engagement that exists which could potentially be lost with the creation of the City Administrator position. Miscommunication issues were common with the position in the past. Felt as though having a city councilmember over each department was more beneficial and facilitated closer working relationships.

Consensus was to keep the structure as it is currently, without a City Administrator.

TEXT MY GOV APP

Text my Gov is an interactive phone app that could be used as a tool to disseminate information and alerts to residents. This is a project that was being researched by the former Economic Development Director. The company is offering an incentive discount if they City signs up by December 31, 2021. The app can be tailored to the need of the city and was created specifically for local governments to use to communicate. The group decided to table the conversation until later.

SPLOST & CAPITAL PLANNING

Carol Harrison, Finance Director, reviewed the Capital Needs Assessment for 2022 to 2026 as potential SPLOST projects for the 2022 SPLOST.

Specific Projects mentioned

- Sidewalk installation on Collins
- As mentioned by Chief Duncan, the police department will need additional archives and records storage. The building would have to meet the 3-hour fire rating requirements.
- Discussion regarding leasing over outright purchasing police squad cars. It was noted that trade in value might be better if vehicles were owned by the city. Additionally, it was mentioned that vehicles could be purchased for a dollar or traded in at the end of the lease.
- There is a need to replace the current community room located at City Hall with a new community center
- It was mentioned that moving the recycling near the public works building should be explored in the next 5 years
- Houston Lake Road to Carl Vinson Parkway will need to be resurfaced in the next five years

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA)

Projects that would be covered under the ARPA funding were discussed. The parameters in which the funding must be used was also mentioned. The city has until December of 2024 to allocate ARPA funding. The federal government has yet to release the final rules. It was suggested to explore what funding could be used that had less administrative tasks such as tourism. Councilmember Wright was in support of installing planter boxes throughout the commercial core. Ms. Tydings suggested infrastructure improvements, specifically, the installation of bioswales.

DRAFT COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM

The draft Community Work Program for the 2022- 2027 Comprehensive Plan was reviewed and changes were noted.

Economic Development

- Phase II of the Center Park development be updated to remove the specific reference to the Amphitheater and the amount be increased from \$1,500,000 to \$2,500,000 and the years moved to 2022-2026 under the economic development section.

Councilmember Armijo asked if a collaborative of small business merchants and a city liaison could be created in the future – as part of economic development.

Housing

Language about affordable housing and reviewing mobile home and mobile home park policies was added.

Community Facilities and Services

Add: Construct a sanitary truck main on Bay Gall and upgrade the lift station (ARPA/city funds could be used)

Transportation

Collins from Church St. to Houston Lake Rd (approximately 1.5 miles) needed to be updated in the CWP.

Edits to the “installing EV charging stations” from specific locations to identify potential locations throughout the city.

Broadband

Remove item for wifi in public buildings because that already exists.

At the completion of the Community Work Program, Mayor Harley adjourned the retreat at 5:00pm and thanked everyone for their participation.

Mayor John R. Harley

Attest by City Clerk Krista Bedingfield

Date