

For the April 21st CEDC Meeting
Summary of work to date by the Subcommittee on Planning and Visioning (SP/V)

At our first meeting on March 24, Stephen and Frances opened the meeting by passing out copies of the Tacoma Strategic Plan and the Vancouver, WA 2008 Update to the city's strategic plan. Stephen reported that he has calls in to various cities to enquire about the usefulness of their strategic plans. The group discussed the goals and work plan for future meetings and this one.

We agreed that there are three principal areas we need to work on to produce recommendations for the City Council. First, we need to describe why the City of Edmonds should develop a strategic plan. Second, we need to describe what the process should be to develop a strategic plan. We will likely want to provide several options and estimates of the costs of each. Third, we need to identify what would be included in the plan.

The group discussed the value of using methodologies that both get at a representative sample of the Edmonds population through scientific random sampling and consult with special interest/knowledge groups, such as youth, city employees, seniors, and others. A strategic plan should tell the city what the priorities of the population are, thus helping the city to decide what it can and cannot afford. Rob Chave reminded us that the Planning Board is working on a sustainability plan for the city and we need to avoid redundancy between the two plans and make sure they converge. The need to create a transparent process that gives all the people an opportunity to provide input was discussed as a way to take into account divergent views. The process must offer many opportunities to give input, and the CEDC can recommend what a facilitator needs to focus on.

We discussed the need first to take our report to the full CEDC for comment and approval. Then we might present our recommendations in a special meeting to deliver the plan to the community first, while filming for Channel 21, before taking the report to the City Council. This can help the community establish a vision for the city. The CEDC might also assist the Council with interviewing candidates to coordinate development of the plan.

At our second meeting on April 1, Stephen handed out examples of cities' strategic plans from Alexandria, VA and Edmonton. He reported that a citizens' group, Imagine Edmonds, has expressed an interest in conducting a visioning process. This could tie in with 2 of the CEDC's recommendations to the City Council. He suggested we might invite them to attend our next subcommittee meeting to exchange information about Strategic Planning and Visioning and how each group would approach such a process and possibly coordinate efforts. Imagine Edmonds already has a consultant who works with communities on visioning. This might make strategic planning more financially feasible for the City of Edmonds if the City can leverage its dollars against others dollars.

The goal of this meeting was to discuss and make recommendations regarding why the City of Edmonds needs a strategic plan. We reviewed the handout on Strategic Planning Purposes, a compilation of what Stephen had found on the internet from various cities' strategic plans. Many of these reasons are also ours:

- ✓ To get people to contribute to preparing a plan for the future of Edmonds.
- ✓ To set priorities for the city and how the city departments will achieve their plans.
- ✓ The strategic planning process is an effort to move the City forward in realizing the goals of the community. Community input is important to this process and will help shape the development of the City's plan.
- ✓ Simply stated, a strategic plan serves as the community's roadmap that will take us from where we are today to where we want to go in the coming years. Having a plan is as important to our future as architectural plans are to building a home. The foundation of strategic planning are the statements we make that describe who we are, where we want to go, and how we will strive for our goals.
- ✓ Increasingly, governments are faced with the challenge of "doing more with less." Tax dollars are finite, and yet they need to be allocated where they are needed most. A strategic plan developed in concert with the people we serve helps the City allocate limited resources to the programs and services that matter most to our residents.
- ✓ Strategic planning determines where an organization is going, how it's going to get there and measures success over time. It ensures the most effective use of the organization's limited resources by focusing the resources on key priorities.
- ✓ Strategic planning offers an opportunity for:
 - ✓ An alignment and focus of the council and staff
 - ✓ Identification of how resources should be allocated
 - ✓ A road map for achieving that direction – the plan
 - ✓ Engagement and energizing the leadership of the city
 - ✓ Thought provoking discussion and new ideas
 - ✓ Linkage to existing systems and processes within the city
 - ✓ It is the roadmap that directs our City toward positive change and serves as the City Council's policy direction for the City government. The strategic direction establishes priorities for City government to focus its staff time, energy and money.

Frances commented that the City of Edmonds already does extensive planning for the City Comprehensive Plan, and also has done some strategic plans for particular areas such as the Arts Commission, but it is important to be clear about how an overall city strategic plan is different: prioritizing among bigger picture goals, readily accessible to the public, etc.

The group discussed why Edmonds in particular needs a strategic plan. We need to paint a picture of Edmonds. We can use some of the description from our report to the City Council to describe the economic importance of developing a strategic plan. But its importance goes beyond economic issues. There are lots of different perspectives on our city's future, and a strategic plan offers an opportunity for all citizens, city staff, organizations, and the City Council to come to agreement on priorities. Also there is a perceived lack of trust and confidence among civic leadership, city staff, and the city council, and development of a plan offers an opportunity to achieve agreement on work agendas and priorities. Around the country and state, cities that have developed and implemented a strategic plan have a success story to tell. We might find creative ideas and new ways to do things. We know of lost opportunities in Edmonds' past; we do not want to miss future opportunities.

The group agreed that a strategic plan is not static; it is continually revised because it is impossible to have thought of everything in development of the plan, and things change that impact the plan.

At our third meeting on April 14, three guests were present: two from Imagine Edmonds and one from the Pomegranate Center, a non-profit that is working with Imagine Edmonds. Stephen opened the meeting at 5:00 PM. He discussed the background of the CEDC's recommendation to the City Council and creation of this subcommittee for the guests to understand why we were interested in their participation. We are interested in hearing what they are doing and sharing with them what we are doing.

Jack Faris began by describing the Imagine Edmonds founding idea. They want to think and work toward a positive future for Edmonds while retaining what we love about the city. He explained that the group has no interest in duplicating efforts and is not trying to sell anything. They do have aspirations. There is a lot of civic spirit in Edmonds, but also logjams occur. Imagine Edmonds wants to engage a larger number of people to come up with creative solutions to the city's problems. They begin with no preconceived ideas, just a conviction that we need to engage the community in a skilled manner.

Imagine Edmonds is in the process of forming an impressive steering committee, although they do not want to incur overhead or raise funds. They prefer to remain a purely voluntary organization. They do not want to "drive an agenda," but they prefer to "open a dialogue." Jack gave the floor to Mr. Matanovic to describe the Pomegranate Center's involvement.

Mr. Matanovic described the Center as a 501c3, a non-profit that has worked in the arts and planning areas and focuses on exploring and creating gathering places, reinventing “the commons” idea with communities. They are exploring whether the Center’s skills would be useful to Imagine Edmonds.

The Pomegranate Center has developed methods to shape meetings to be more creative and participatory so they do not get dominated by a few vocal persons. They create a code of conduct among leaders so they can collaborate with the community. A successful project has more people who feel ownership, which results in fewer complaints afterwards. They strive to create more future leaders and bring more talent to the table. Their methods combine inclusiveness with decisiveness so the process does not drag on and on. The code of conduct they create is agreed on by stakeholders and seeks a “culture of collaboration.”

Mr. Faris added that together the two organizations are also looking for a constructive role for philanthropy. The Pomegranate Center has submitted a grant proposal to the Hazel Miller Foundation to engage the community in a visioning effort for Edmonds.

Stephen explained that with so much focus on Edmonds’ downtown, the neighborhoods have been neglected. He sees no reason why there can’t be a visioning for the entire city that includes a part for the neighborhoods.

Mr. Faris emphasized that economic development must be part of the picture for planning and visioning to be successful. He agreed that while a lot of people focus on downtown and the waterfront, we should be open to addressing the neighborhoods.

Mr. Senderoff said that with so many groups interested in addressing the same issue, it is important for all to work together. There needs to be a process that the community can buy into before any data are collected.

Mr. Matanovic said that every city has a Comprehensive Plan, but few citizens know much about the Comp Plan contents. The Center helps cities translate their Comp Plan into community values.

Stephen Clifton cited some of the many individual city plans that need to be taken to the community so they are understood. Frank Yamamoto discussed his fears that work might get fragmented with so many groups working on the issues. He emphasized that the CEDC has demonstrated that we can bring people together. We want the organizations to work with us and not at odds with us.

Mr. Faris said that Imagine Edmonds does not want to complicate things. Instead they want to bring added value to the process and improve chances of success by increasing public enthusiasm. He restated that this group differs from others because it does not have a program to sell or an agenda.

Mr. Matanovic said that every community has single-issue activists, and these are the voices most often heard. Imagine Edmonds is willing to put their own ideas aside in search of community consensus to solve community problems. Mr. Faris ended by saying his group would be successful only by collaborating with the CEDC and other groups. Faye May summarized by saying that there are a lot of people in Edmonds, like her, who have not been active in the community but have ideas they want to bring forward. She feels a lot of people will feel encouraged to come forward during this process with the support of Imagine Edmonds.

Stephen handed out a draft document summarizing our previous discussions on why to do a strategic plan. He explained that it needed more work since his computer had lost the original document. The goal of this meeting was first to finalize a document on this subject. Since Stephen is about to leave town, he will email the document to the entire subcommittee so we can work on it. The group made a few comments on the draft.

The agenda for the next meeting will be to address what should be included in a strategic plan.