Strategic planning board report 12-13-01

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING BOARD MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 13, 2001

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The Strategic Planning Board Meeting was called to order by Chair Lesly Smith at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, December 13, 2001, in the Town Council Chambers. On roll call the following Board Members were found to be present: Chair Lesly Smith, Vice-Chair Bruce McAllister, Board Members William Cooley, Alec Flamm, William E. Hutton III, and William Watchman Jr. Also present for all or a portion of the meeting were: Town Attorney John Randolph, Town Manager Peter Elwell, Councilman Norman Goldblum, and John Fernsler of Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Smith led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Agenda was approved through motion of Vice-Chair McAllister, seconded by Board Member Hutton, carrying unanimously on roll call.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING BOARD MEETING ON OCTOBER 10, 2001

The report of the Strategic Planning Board Meeting of October 10, 2001 was approved through motion of Board Member Flamm, seconded by Board Member Hutton, carrying unanimously on roll call.

Report of the strategic planning board 12-13-01

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING BOARD MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 13, 2001

V. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY FORUMS

Town Manager Elwell announced that the reports of the three Community Forum meetings were placed on the dias before each Board Member. He also announced he had been on the program at the Chamber of Commerce Breakfast held today, to give an update regarding Strategic Planning Board activities.

Vice-Chair McAllister suggested that the requests for input from the various civic organizations be re-visited in order to ensure that all of the organizations were aware of the interest of the Strategic Planning Board in that regard.

Town Manger Elwell responded that the message had been clear and consistent that the more participation from the community, the better the strategic planning process would be; he indicated that he would follow up on the requests for input.

John Fernsler, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC, reported that he had used the information collected at all three community forums to prepare the "Summary of Community Forum Input." He stated that he was incredibly gratified and pleased with the level of community response. He explained that his methodology in interpreting the information gathered was identifying the issues that appeared in the top five lists of all of the groups participating in the forums – issues identified as high priority or consensus items, identifying issues that appeared less than half the time, and then identifying issues that appeared only once or twice. All comments that were furnished from the forums were recorded in the appendix.

Mr. Fernsler then identified the following issues identified during the community forums:

PRESENT STRENGTHS

High Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Quality of Town Government
- Beauty/Appearance

Moderate Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Amenities
- People
- Ambiance/Essence of Palm Beach
- Community Reputation/Recognition

PRESENT WEAKNESSES

High Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Zoning/Development Regulations/Enforcement
- Traffic/Parking
- Beach Erosion
- Inadequate Infrastructure

Moderate Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Taxation
- North-South Disparities
- Appearance/Amenities
- Quality of Life Intrusions
- Population Imbalance
- Schools (public)
- Not "tech-ready"

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

High Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Zoning/regulatory changes
- Infrastructure System Improvements
- Community Enhancements
- Beach Renourishment

Moderate Priority/Consensus Issues:

- More community participation
- Improved Security
- Other (non-water) infrastructure improvements
- School improvements (public)
- Improve intergovernmental relations
- Improve demographics
- Improve health care

FUTURE THREATS

High Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Overbuilding/over-population
- Loss of beach/erosion
- Security threats
- Natural disaster
- Tax/cost increases
- Water shortages

Moderate Priority/Consensus Issues:

- Port/airport
- West Palm Beach/Regional Influences
- Loss of community character
- Continuing traffic congestion
- Irresponsible/unresponsive government

Mr. Fernsler commented that zoning issues appeared to be at the top of the list of weaknesses with many citizens.

Mr. Watchman noted that the term "commercialization" had come up several times in the group that he was facilitating during the forums, and he had found that there were very differing definitions of commercialization. He explained that he had found that the definition was seemingly very broad, including anything that seemed to be profit motivated, as opposed to calm residential activity.

Board Member Flamm pointed out that there was an interesting incongruity in that one of the top strengths was a real sense of satisfaction with Town government, however, one of the weaknesses identified had been the responsibility of Town government, such as zoning, mega homes, enforcement, etc. He noted that the opportunities identified were often "fixes" of the identified weaknesses. He suggested that if the perceived weaknesses were not fixed, satisfaction with the Town government would decline.

Vice-Chair McAllister commented that the consensus seemed to be that the citizenry was convinced of the talent, good-will, and sincerity of the most visible members of Town government, however, they were not sure why some of the perceived weaknesses were happening – whether it was a matter of the zoning code itself, or some legal or other difficulty in enforcing the zoning code. He noted that he had noticed in the minutes of the October 8, 2001 Town Council meeting that Town Attorney Randolph had advised that many of the variances granted over the last years were beyond what would have been legally required to have been granted. He stated that indicated to him that, at least in part, it was not the ordinances themselves that were the cause of too many variances being granted, but it was the responsibility of those interpreting and applying the zoning ordinances. He maintained that in order to fix something it would be necessary to determine where the mechanisms in place were not fulfilling the expectations of the residents.

Mr. Fernsler replied that a top priority under the opportunities category was to revamp the zoning code; to have a code that was much more specific and not subject to flexible and lenient interpretations.

Town Attorney Randolph commented that he believed there were two issues at hand; one issue was concerning the number of variances granted, and he noted that the Town code was very strict in the criteria for granting variances; the other issue was the issue of over-building and larger structures, particularly in the north end of Town - - he noted that issue had been a concern of the citizens of Palm Beach for the past ten years or more. He stated that he believed the two issues were entirely distinct from each other.

Town Manager Elwell commented that it was a very important to note that one of the issues had been addressed – over time there had been a trend towards a strict interpretation of the code by the Town Council when considering variances. The issue of reduction of mass of new homes was a separate and distinct issue, that had been the subject of much discussion.

Mayor Smith commented that during Mayor/Manager lunches held over the past two years, it had been indicated that the zoning code of the Town of Palm Beach was considered the gem in the county; however, enforcement was a problem.

Mr. Fernsler commented that there were two parallel tracks of investigation – perception and facts. It was clear that there was a perception that over-building was occurring, and there was a clear perception in the community that there was either a problem with the code itself, or with the interpretation of the code. There was a great deal of concern in the community regarding the issue, however, there was not a great deal of understanding of the specifics of the nature of the problem.

Mr. Fernsler concluded his report, requesting an indication from the Strategic Planning Board that it was satisfied with the results of the Community Forums, as a basis for moving forward into the creation of a vision statement. He noted that he was hopeful that the information would be used not only for crafting a vision statement, but for critically examining the ongoing initiatives to address many of the priority issues.

Councilman Goldblum commented that good communications were necessary, and many misconceptions could be clarified in that manner.

Mr. David Barton commented that many issues had not been addressed sufficiently, and that he did not believe that the questions raised were provocative enough to get to the heart of some of the things that had been omitted. He suggested that a Town survey be concocted to garner public opinion on issues, and that more structure and detail be used.

Chair Smith invited Mr. Barton to submit any additional questions to the Strategic Planning Board.

VI. CREATING A VISION STATEMENT - Next Steps

Board Member Flamm commented that Mr. Fernsler had asked the board to consider if the information gathered at the community forums was sufficient to develop a vision statement; it was not the same as using the information to develop a strategy and tactics that would back up the strategic plan itself. He questioned whether the type of information gathering suggested by Mr. Barton was necessary in development of the vision statement itself.

Vice-Chair McAllister commented that he agreed that what had been done to date was not yet sufficient to formulate a vision statement. He suggested that some thought be given to providing the "Summary of Community Forum Input" to the residents at large to obtain their reaction. He suggested that perhaps information could be obtained from a strategic planner or a town manager from a town that had been in the strategic planning process for a two year period. He commented that sending a questionnaire to every address in Town should be considered by the Strategic Planning Board.

Chair Smith commented that the Strategic Planning Board must have a vision statement prepared by April 2002; otherwise the enthusiasm of the community would be lost.

Mr. Fernsler commented that step one was to understand what the community was thinking about – their perceptions and aspirations. He suggested that there may be a point in the process of gathering public opinion where a survey would be useful, at a time when the Strategic Planning Board could identify specifics. The Strategic Plan itself would indicate how things would be accomplished, and how they would be funded. At that point, the community would need to be approached with specific questions and costs.

Mr. Ned Barnes, President of the Civic Association, commented that a survey had been done by his organization several years ago in relation to the north end zoning issue, and the results had been very similar to those obtained from the community forums. He noted that the civic organizations in Town had helped to get people to come to the forums, however, he had not been aware that a statement had been requested from each organization.

Vice-Chair McAllister explained that his earlier comments had been intended to offer any civic organization the opportunity to offer suggestions to the Strategic Planning Board about how information should be developed.

Chair Smith commented that it was very early in the process to ask for that type of information from the different civic organizations at this time.

Mr. Gerald Frank, Citizens Association, commented that he had attended one community forum, and visited two others, and noted that it had seemed that citizens were very interested in what was happening in the Town, although there seemed to be a problem with lack of communication to the citizens. He suggested that the vision statement incorporate a need for better communications in the future, as well as making the Town more attractive to younger people, the population of the future.

Board Member Cooley commented that the costs of housing were prohibitive in Palm Beach for younger families, as well as the costs of maintaining the housing, i.e., property taxes.

Town Manager Elwell suggested that the next step in the process was to articulate a Vision Statement, with thoughts and suggestions given to Mr. Fernsler, so that a vision statement could be prepared for the review of the Strategic Planning Board.

Board Member Flamm commented that he believed the tolerance to pay for the costs of living in Palm Beach would substantially increase as long as the residents understood the reasons for costs, and trusted that performance was effective.

Chair Smith suggested that the first six pages of the "Summary of Community Forum Input" report be copied and sent to all organizations, and newspapers, as well as be available in Town Hall at no costs.

Board Member Cooley moved approval of authorization to Mr. Fernsler to craft a vision statement for the review of the Strategic Planning Board before the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Board Member Flamm.

Mr. Fernsler commented that the Strategic Planning Board must be the author of the vision statement, and that he did not want to be perceived as the author. He stated that he would be happy to provide a first draft for the refinement of the Strategic Planning Board. He suggested two ways to craft a vision statement:

He referred to the visioning process in Sanibel, where the public perception had been that the island of Sanibel was a sanctuary. That had been articulated in the vision statement, basically to say this defined the essence of the community — it was and would always remain a sanctuary. The values of a sanctuary were stated, as well as the recognition that Sanibel was also an attraction for tourists, re-development, and those things would be allowed to occur only to the extent that it would not compromise the essence of Sanibel as a sanctuary, small town, and natural environment. He explained that was used as the basis for laws, regulations, and changes in the way business was done. He noted that this type of vision statement was appropriate in a community that had a good sense of what it was about, but needed to define that precisely, and define the mandate to protect it.

The other way to write a vision statement was to imagine the future, to describe the community as it would exist in ten years, and look back on all that had been accomplished. Specific issues would be addressed.

Mr. Fernsler suggested a vision statement that would combine both ways of crafting a vision statement – seeking to define precisely the quality of life that was intended to be defended, and also address the issues that would be successfully resolved within the ten year period of the strategic plan.

Board Member Watchman agreed that the combination of the two methods of crafting a vision statement would be appropriate. He suggested that the ability to communicate was limited in the Town of Palm Beach, as there was no mechanism available to do that. He stated that there was a real need for understanding and education on the beach renourishment issue, the issue of property taxes, and the north/south areas of Town.

Board Member Hutton commented that he agreed that there was a need for better communication, and agreed that both methods of crafting a vision statement should be used.

Vice-Chair McAllister commented that he did not believe that the input from the community forums was enough of a basis for a vision statement. He explained that he believed the community forums were a great success for what they were geared to do. They were not geared to develop analytical thinking about issues, and he suggested that it would be beneficial to Mr. Fernsler to have carefully thought out treatment of the issues that arose through the community forums. He suggested that the civic organizations in Town submit thoughts to the Strategic Planning Board, for transmittal to Mr. Fernsler, that would be helpful in development of the first draft of the vision statement.

Board Member Flamm commented that he agreed with the suggestions of Mr. Fernsler to combine the two methods of crafting a vision statement.

On roll call the motion to approve authorizing Mr. Fernsler to craft a vision statement for the review of the Strategic Planning Board before the next meeting, carried unanimously.

Mr. Louis Pryor commented that he believed there was some danger in insisting on direct input from the different civic organizations, and that they be asked to continue to inform their members and encourage their members to attend meetings. He suggested that expressing their opinions as individual organizations may lead to perceptions of bias on community issues.

Board Member Flamm expressed great concern in soliciting comments from the various civic organizations, pointing out that the community forums had been held to obtain individual opinions. He discouraged the request for formal comments from the civic organizations.

Vice-Chair McAllister commented that he considered the civic organizations as resources, with time and people to devote and focus organized thinking. He expressed disappointment that the board would not have the benefit of those resources.

Chair Smith commented that the Garden Club had determined that the executive committee would not make any statement on behalf of the organization; she noted that the community forums had encouraged individual opinions that would otherwise not have been expressed before the Town Council. She stated that she believed there was a need for better communication, and that the civic organizations could help in that regard.

Town Manager Elwell commented that the 27 civic groups would be provided with a copy of the first six pages of the "Summary of Community Forum Input," as well as to the media with a news release; the report would also be available at all Town facilities.

Board Member Cooley moved approval of a letter, signed by Chair Smith, requesting thoughts and comments from the various civic groups, to accompany the copies of the first six pages of the Summary of Community Forum Input. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair McAllister. On roll call the motion carried 5/1, with Board Member Flamm casting a dissenting vote.

Chair Smith clarified that Town Manager Elwell would draft the letter for her signature.

Mr. Fernsler advised that he would be attending the January 10, 2002 Strategic Planning Board meeting with a first draft of the vision statement.

After discussion, it was determined that the Strategic Planning Board meetings would generally be held on the Thursday following each monthly Town Council meeting.

VII. ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - Update And Discussion Regarding Scope

Town Manager Elwell commented that core issues of concern would be defined in the vision statement, and suggested that the environmental scan await the initial draft of the vision statement so that the Town resources could be used appropriately to research and report on the issues of concern. He explained that staff had begun accumulating the material for the environmental scan, however analyzing and reporting the information to the Strategic Planning Board would require a much more intense effort.

Chair Smith suggested that items of concern be discussed today, so that the suggestions could be considered by the Town Council as early as possible.

After discussion of the issue of traffic, Town Manager Elwell pointed out that there were traffic counts done in Town, and studies had been done of isolated areas, however, there was not a Town-wide traffic study available.

Vice-Chair McAllister moved that a comprehensive traffic study be recommended for the approval of the Town Council. The motion was seconded by Board Member Hutton, and carried unanimously on roll call.

Town Manager Elwell clarifed that he would confer with staff regarding existing information regarding traffic, and the recommendation for hiring a consultant to perform a traffic study would be brought to the Town Council at the January 8, 2002 Town Council Meeting.

Board Member Watchman suggested that staff provide a report at the January Strategic Planning Board meeting of studies of issues of concern, such as storm drainage, traffic, etc., that were currently being done, or had been done in the recent past.

In response to Board Member Cooley, Town Manager Elwell replied that there were voluminous studies that had been done on water desalinization; he noted that the water agreement with the City of West Palm Beach provided for the Town to be able to do emergency back up on a small scale using reverse osmosis, and also to own all of the infrastructure on the island at the end of the 30-year franchise.

Town Manager Elwell commented that storm drainage would be discussed by the Town Council over the next several months. He suggested that copies of the executive summary of the drainage reports be given to each Board Member, with one full set of the reports in the library that was being assembled.

Mr. Fernsler commented that parking may be an issue for which the board may want to consider obtaining a report/study.

Town Manager Elwell replied that the traffic study would also include parking.

VIII. ANY OTHER MATTERS

There were none.

IX. PROPOSED NEXT MEETING DATE: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2002, AT 10:00 P.M. IN THE TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Town Manager Elwell clarified that the next meeting would entail working on the vision statement and then going into more details on the environmental scan. Mr. Fernsler would provide the draft vision statement at least one week in advance, with board members prepared to attend the January 10th meeting with edits and suggestions.

Town Manager Elwell clarified that he would work with Mr. Fernsler in order to get the draft vision statement to the board members by January 3rd; then any board member who wished to transmit something back to the Town Manager prior to January 10 could do so. He would then assemble those comments and provide them to the board as a package on the day before the meeting.

X. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

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Chair Lesly Smith

Next Meeting Date:
January 10, 2002 @ 10:00 a.m.

Prepared by:
Susan Eichhorn
Deputy Town Clerk