Sessions facilitated by Molly Rodriguez Keating and the Hein Consulting Group
In early 2014, the Vancouver City Council began the process of creating a new strategic vision and plan for the City. Under the burden of the recession for the previous five years, the City’s attention had been limited and focused on assuring continuation of basic services to the community.

But with the gleam of recovery starting to shine, Mayor Timothy D. Leavitt determined to lean into the opportunities presented by an intersection of new elected Council leadership, economic recovery, and the harvest from the seeds of fiscal austerity that City leadership planted several years ago.

As he noted to the City Council, “The addition of two new members brings new perspective to our council, as well hold the potential to catalyze new thinking by the rest of us. This opportunity is one I do not want to allow to pass, and am intent on taking the steps necessary to capture and cultivate the promise that a newly seated council brings.”

In March-May 2014, the Council held four “strategy sessions” to identify high-level goals that would serve as the foundation for a strategic planning process and set direction for the balance of the decade. The sessions were facilitated by Molly Rodriguez Keating, M.S.W. and Alanna Hein of Hein Consulting Group.

The goal of the strategy sessions was to review, refine and verify the City’s vision for the community. Council began by identifying their shared values and their vision for the community, defining what excellent leadership looks like and talking about what they would like their legacy to be. Strategy sessions also included an environmental scan, looking at the City’s purpose, inputs, outcomes, feedback loops, etc. The last sessions focused on identifying and exploring the Council’s big dreams and goals for the future of the community.

The sessions were attended by the Mayor, Councilmembers and the City Manager and were supported by staff from the City Manager’s Office. A secondary goal of the sessions was to build a strong, effective working relationship among Councilmembers.

STRATEGY SESSION OBJECTIVES

Use a facilitated process to ensure the meaningful contributions of all Council members

Create durable, long-term goals to inform future planning and decision making

Build capacity for Council to work together with trust and efficiency
The process used by the facilitators for these sessions was based on the “Future Search” approach originated by Ronald Lippett and Eva Schindler-Rainman in the 1980s. This approach uses the following principles to effectively move people to consider a hoped-for future for their communities:

- Get everyone in the room
- Explore the whole system before seeking to fix part of it
- Get everyone to share what they see in the environment
- Treat problems and conflicts as information
- Meet under healthy conditions
- Work across days so people have time to think about the work
- Encourage self-management and responsibility for actions by participants before, during and after the sessions

## STEPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on roles on the team and as a team</th>
<th>Focus on current internal and external trends</th>
<th>Focus on ideal future scenarios</th>
<th>Identify and confirm common ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Individual interviews&lt;br&gt; * Values Identification&lt;br&gt; * Desired atmosphere&lt;br&gt; * Leadership&lt;br&gt; * High performing organizations&lt;br&gt; * Communications goals&lt;br&gt; * Decision making criteria</td>
<td>* Environmental scan&lt;br&gt; * Maps&lt;br&gt; * Background materials&lt;br&gt; * Planning criteria</td>
<td>* Legacy for the future&lt;br&gt; * What’s needed to make this future vision a reality?&lt;br&gt; * Big, Hairy, Audacious goals (BHAGs)</td>
<td>Vancouver is a safe, vibrant and prosperous city</td>
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VISION

Vancouver is an exceptionally vibrant, safe, welcoming and prosperous city.

VALUES

LEADERSHIP: We inspire and motivate members of the organization, our partners and members of the community to pursue a shared vision for Vancouver. The City does this through the actions of its elected and appointed leaders and the activities of its workforce, and through its policies and allocation of resources.

STEWARDSHIP: We responsibly manages and protects the community’s assets to maximize their benefit for today while preserving their value for future generations. Our assets include our people, the publics trust, the natural and built environment and our financial resources.

INTEGRITY: We reflect a high standard of honesty, objectivity and transparency in the conduct our relationships and work, fostering a sense of respect, trust and confidence among our employees and the city we serve.

COLLABORATION: We seek ways to work cooperatively to develop solutions that reflect the City's values, advance the interests of the community and support achieving the City's Vision.

ACCOUNTABILITY: We recognize our decisions and actions - as individuals and as an organization - have an impact in the community. The City embraces responsibility and is accountable for those results.
What does excellent leadership look like to you?

- Serving as though you’re not up for re-election
- Each person is a community ambassador for the entire Council
- Respecting the City Manager’s position
- Being visionary and looking long-term
- Being accessible
- Doing what’s right, not necessarily what’s popular
- Being collaborative
- Being willing to make bold, tough decisions
- Identifying the path to get to “yes” and trusting that there can be a positive result
- Keeping the public in mind as we act and understanding what citizens want
- Recognizing changing demographics in the community
- Valuing open communication for all, inside and outside the Council
- Understanding people’s roles—who needs to lead and when
- Encouraging clarity
- Discuss, debate, decide
- Listening for understanding
- Honoring group decisions and moving forward as a team
- Leading from in front or from behind depending on the situation
- Being flexible and changing course when needed
- Engaging in participatory decision making
- Being transparent and making work visible to others
- Sharing information
- Valuing and needing the minority opinion
- Honoring equal opportunity and valuing diversity
- Being proactive, not reactive
- Participating in the community
- Going to the people—door to door, webinar, etc.
What preconditions are necessary in order to have a clear vision for the future and generate big ideas?

- Know “who we want to be”
- Having a connected community
- Having a vision and not being satisfied with the status quo
- Know what we have to offer – where our strengths lay
- Ensuring the basic needs are met
- Thinking like a city
- Understand dates, sequence, how things change over time
- Understand/identify needs – what is missing and where the “holes” are

A clear vision for the future - big ideas
Legacy for the future. How would you like to be remembered?

Our legacy is a product of our leadership; as individuals and as an organization.

- Knowing the community
- Having deep, strong, flexible roots
- Distinctive, durable
- Celebratory and energetic
- Trusted, valued and respected
- Diverse
- Useful, making an impact
- Real people—approachable and accessible
- High aspirations
- Action oriented
- Honoring and caring for another generation
- Making sure people love the area and want to stay here
- Problem solvers
- Hard workers
- Focused on Vancouver
- Family oriented
- Showing respect for veterans and military
- Promoting clean industry
- Creating opportunity
- Encouraging economic growth
- Providing recreation opportunities
The Mayor and Council considered two fictional “case studies” of children who live in Vancouver today, and discussed what they would like to have available to those children—and all citizens—in 2020.

- A system that addresses root causes of problems, not just symptoms
- Opportunities to be outdoors with family—opening the gates to nature
- Parents with financial stability and prosperity
- A solid web of basic, baseline services
- Safe and convenient transportation/roads/sidewalks
- More and different kinds of parks (skate, disc golf, etc.)
- Safe, supervised activities where kids can learn healthy skills
- Access to education including education about drug and alcohol use
- Healthy peer groups
- Enough to eat
- Strong community relationships
- A City with the expertise to lead
- That this case study could be a reality for all children

What types of things would help keep young people in the City or encourage them to return in the future?
What is needed to make the future you envision a reality?

- Consensus/agreement on what is most important
- Shared community-wide vision
- Partnerships—public, private, schools, non-profits
- Ready access to technology
- Expanded educational opportunities
- Sharing of resources
- Capitalize on tourism opportunities
- Multi-modal transportation—sidewalks, bike lanes, public transit
- Marketing the City—branding, accomplishments, tourism, websites
- Community involvement - richer engagement with citizens
- Cost containment strategies
- Volunteers
- Leadership
- Sustainable revenue strategies
- Robust and diverse economy—high tech, medical, small businesses, etc.
- Physical connections throughout the community
- Cultivation of culture and vibrancy
- Accurate data and information
- Youth engagement
- Improved communication and outreach
- Staff support

Planning Criteria

Issues that should be taken into consideration when deciding what will best serve the City.

- Budget—is it affordable?
- Regulations
- Economy
- Time
- Stakeholder agreement and buy-in
- Staffing
- Political will
- Safety
- Legality
- Land availability
- Attainability
- Distinctive to Vancouver—branding
- Respects the community
- Within organizational capacity
- Within City ability to influence
- Diversity
- Job creation
- Strengthens neighborhoods
- Environmental impact
- Recreation access
- Community connectivity
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The Mayor and Council completed a review of the environment in which they operate, both internal and external, and created an environmental scan snapshot focusing on these key elements: Purpose, Boundaries, Inputs, Throughput, Outputs, Environment and Feedback Loops.

### City’s Purpose
- Create and maintain a safe and welcoming urban environment
- Provide a high standard of vibrancy and livability
- Grow opportunities for prosperity through education and employment

### Boundaries: Walls, silos and separations that exist inside and between organizations
- City limits
- Revenues
- City authority
- Laws and regulations
- Labor contracts
- Election cycles
- Street system
- Columbia River
- Water system capacity

### Inputs: What comes into the City in many forms from many sources
- Industry, commerce and business sectors
- Non-profits and volunteers
- Neighboring communities and public agencies
- School districts and educational systems
- Natural environment
- Transportation modes and systems
- Housing organizations
- Development tools and incentives
- Business leadership organizations

### Throughput: Activities/tasks that help transform inputs into outputs
- Boards and commissions
- Income and poverty
- Safety issues and systems
- Housing policies
- School building policies
- Economic development
- Long-term unemployment
- Infrastructure capacity
- Zoning, comprehensive plan and regulations
- Development levels
### ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN con’t

#### Outputs: Outcomes

- Congestion management
- Public safety deployment and response
- Commuting across the river
- Education accessibility and quality
- Business and industry investment
- Neighborhood identity and safety
- Clean water and healthy environment
- Housing availability, affordability and accessibility
- Celebrating our history
- Public transit
- Quality and level of infrastructure
- Community engagement and volunteerism
- Productive partnerships
- Median income levels
- Accessible parks and public amenities

#### Environment: The political, social and physical environment communities function in

- Public and political debate
- Regional metropolitan governance and relationship with Portland
- State economy, budget and legislation
- Evolving social norms and electorate expectations (i.e. marijuana and other initiatives)
- Changing demographics and aging population
- Regional mobility
- Natural resources and environment
- Evolving regional partnerships
- Geographic location—relationship to Washington State issues and Portland metro issues
- Community and workforce diversity
- Perceptions of the community—“Vantucky”
- Ever increasing complexity of decision making environment
- Regional, state, federal governance and policy environment
- Media shadow

#### Feedback Loops: How we get information about what is and is not working well in the City

- Educational attainment
- Business community
- Property values
- Growth rate
- Interest groups
- Election cycles
- Unemployment rates
- Media
- Number of event invitations
- Citizen feedback
- Response times
- Crime rates
- Budget and forecast results
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The Mayor and Council identified overarching common goals to use when thinking about the City’s future. Out of this they developed their strategic objectives, which will serve as the basis for the Council’s new strategic direction.

PURPOSE

INVEST IN A SAFE AND WELCOMING CITY

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Ensure our built urban environment is one of the safest and most welcoming in the Pacific Northwest
- Residents and visitors can move safely around our City
- Our buildings, bridges, parks, transportation, street lighting, community centers and other infrastructure are safe, well maintained and innovative

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Set the standard for the most effective and innovative police, fire and EMS services in the Pacific Northwest
- We provide safe, reliable, responsive and well-resourced police, fire and EMS services

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Welcome people of all cultures and heritages
- We welcome people of all ages, cultures, family configurations, interests, educational backgrounds, trades and professions
- As a City, we are aware that our polices and actions encourage or discourage diversity
- We strive to have a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community it serves

PURPOSE

BECOME A MORE VIBRANT CITY

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: Be the most connected community in the region
- Connected via roads, bike lanes, river, air and public transportation
- Connect from government to residents and back
- We support proliferation of high speed broadband throughout the city and access to the internet regardless of location and socioeconomic status
- We connect by breaking down barriers—physical, technological and cultural

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5: Provide the best access to outdoor recreation in the Pacific Northwest
- The most complete green belt trail and park system in the region
- The highest levels of environmental stewardship
- A robust network of bicycle friendly streets
- A continuous connection to the Columbia riverfront
- Recreational opportunities for all ages and abilities
- Abundant opportunities for health and fitness lifestyles
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6: Offer premier historical/cultural experiences for residents and visitors
- Fort Vancouver is a premier historic site with a myriad of activities and programs for all ages
- A vibrant arts community with a performing arts center
- A minor league sports team

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7: Create strong, distinctive and livable neighborhoods
- A strong, active neighborhood program through project funds that enhance livability and community connections
- A City where every neighborhood is a “20-minute neighborhood,” with a unique identity
- We create community gathering places—a central Vancouver community center, a downtown waterfront park and a focal point in east Vancouver

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 8: Become the City with the strongest river connection in the Pacific Northwest
- Clean water
- Abundant public access to the waterfront
- Thriving river commerce
- Varied and accessible water-based recreational opportunities

GROW A MORE PROSPEROUS CITY

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 9: Strive to build the strongest most durable economy in the region
- Vancouver is the best place to locate a business in the region
- We create infrastructure and policies that support job creation
- We support a wide variety of business and industry

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 10: Ensure all levels of education are attainable within the community
- Connected and coordinated partnerships with our educational institutions
- Our community offers many paths to affordable education for our residents

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 11: Make strategic infrastructure investments to promote economic and community growth
- Invest in transportation infrastructure—streets, bridges and sidewalks
- Maintain our utilities, water, sewer and fiber optics
- Invest in our parks, trails and facilities
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 12: Become an international destination for the creative sector

- Innovation
- Partnerships
- Knowledge
- Quality of life

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 13: Encourage exceptional connectivity throughout the region

- Strong local and regional partnerships, both public and private
- Bi-state efforts that successfully address infrastructure, transportation and environmental issues
CONSULTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

What kind of atmosphere to you want to create at Vancouver City Council meetings?

- Honest
- Jovial
- Relaxed
- Thoughtful, aspirational, creative
- Willing to stretch and explore
- Open
- Appropriate level of confidentiality
- Full participation
- Don’t take it personally
- Assume positive intent

Vancouver City Council meeting communications guidelines

- Share what the Council is doing on a regular basis, not just at the Monday Council meetings
- Be clear about the process by which items are added to the agenda. Get proposed items to the City Manager by Thursday.
- Give fellow Council members as much of a heads-up as possible. Keep each other informed with courtesy check-ins. No surprises. If there’s an issue, deal with it directly with the person.
- Communicate within the rules; observe open public meetings laws
- During meetings, it’s fine to not comment if you are not prepared to
- Be recognized to speak by the Mayor. Listen for understanding. Encourage clarity of discussion
- Respect diversity of opinion and leadership
- Respect and support the decision of the whole

Council Decision Making

The formal structure for making decisions at Council meetings is Robert’s Rules of Order. At the same time, the Council’s informal decision making processes are constantly active. Here are some principles we recommend applying to your ongoing decision making processes:

1. Take the time to gather information. Listen to key stakeholders. Don’t just gather information to support your own position—listen to all sides. Share information with your colleagues.

2. Listen for understanding, not just factual information. Decisions are most satisfying when they meet peoples’ interests and needs. It’s not just WHAT they want; it’s WHY they want it.
3. A powerful way to discover interests is to ask open-ended questions. This is also an excellent way to diffuse strong emotion. First, summarize what you've heard them say. Then, questions might include:
   - How has this situation impacted you?
   - What would you like to see happen? Why?
   - Help me understand…
   - What's at the center (or heart) of the matter for you?
   - How would the future look different if…?

4. Establish criteria for your decision. Your broadest criteria are:
   - Does it help our City become more vibrant?
   - Does it help us grow a more prosperous City?
   - Is it an investment in a safe and welcoming City?

5. Explore options. Stay open, and be creative where you can. The best option is often a combination of more than one.

6. Make durable agreements. Weigh your agreements by the criteria you've established. Stand by the decision of the whole.

Support and Continue this Work
In order to continue the good work of the Council, a few simple procedures could be implemented:
   - Schedule a regular agenda item where the Council reviews the work it has done during the past season. Reflect on whether the work you are currently doing is, or is not moving the City closer to the preferred future the Council has described here.
   - Schedule regular check-ins to discuss and ensure continued effective communication between Council members.
   - Identify some milestones that the Council can use to mark the City’s progress toward the preferred future, and plan to celebrate each milestone as it is achieved.