

Martinsville Council Retreat

February 28, 2025

**The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research
150 Slayton Avenue, Danville, VA 24540**

Notes

Mayor L.C. Jones called the meeting to order at 9:20 a.m. In addition to the Mayor, Vice Mayor Kathy Lawson and Council Members Rayshaun Gravely and Julian Mei were present. Members of the City Executive Team in attendance were City Manager, Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides, Chief Operating Officer, Edena Reese-Atmore, Managing Director of Public Works, Greg Maggard, Managing Director of Administration, Travis Hodge, Chief Finance Officer, J. Richard Stanfield, Interim Chief Technology Officer, Jared Pruett, Interim Managing Director of Development, Eric Payne, Director of Budget and Procurement, Robert Floyd, Executive Assistant, Shasta Carmichael, and Deputy City Clerk, Peyton Nibblett. Berkley Group Executive Managers Margaret Schmitt and Kimball Payne served as facilitators for the retreat.

Notes for the retreat were captured on flip charts. A transcription of the flip chart notes, with clarifying annotations, is attached as an addendum to these notes.

After calling the meeting to order, Mayor Jones turned the retreat over to the facilitators. Mr. Payne and Ms. Schmitt thanked the Council for having them back to facilitate the retreat. They then referred to the agenda and reviewed suggested goals for the retreat as follows:

- Work as a team and develop consensus
- Encourage input from all Council members
- Discuss how to work together as an effective team
- Discuss effective governance principles
- Receive a briefing on finances and the budget
- Review progress addressing actions identified in previous retreats
- Identify priorities for the next two years
- Craft a work plan for the next 18 to 24 months
- Identify longer term issues

They mentioned themes that might run through the day's discussion including Council roles and responsibilities, dynamics and processes, Council/Manager roles and relationships, public engagement, and potential limitations that might have to be overcome to address Council's priorities.

The following ground rules were offered to guide Council's discussion:

- Everyone participates; no one dominates
- Engage
- Be honest
- Listen to each other
- Respect different opinions
- No idea is too outlandish
- Seek to understand
- Ask questions
- Seek consensus (formal action at a future Council meeting)
- Silence means consent – speak up if you disagree
- Use the parking lot for issues that may evade consensus or require more background
- Have fun; don't take ourselves too seriously
- We will take breaks when it seems appropriate

During the review of the agenda, the facilitators noted the common themes, issues mentioned by more than one Council member, that they heard during the pre-retreat interviews.

- Housing, including homelessness
- Code Enforcement
- Infrastructure
- Council working together as a team
- Updating the work plan to reflect Council's goals and priorities
- City reputation, branding, public relations, citizen communications
- Economic development – new businesses

The facilitators asked if the agenda, the goals, and the ground rules were consistent with the Council's expectations, and if there were any questions. There were no questions, and the agenda, goals and ground rules were accepted by unanimous consent.

Team Building Exercise

Ms. Schmitt led the Council through a team building exercise. She asked that the Council members provide answers to the following questions:

1. *Tell your colleagues something about yourself that they probably don't know.*
2. *What strengths do you bring to the City Council team?*
3. *What two things might people find challenging when working with you?*

Responses to the last two questions were recorded without individual attribution.

The cumulative strengths identified by Council members were (flip charts #1 & #2):

- Integrity, transparency, legitimacy
- Open mind, listens, willing to compromise
- Knowledge, listens, tries to understand
- Hates being late
- Willing to learn, listens
- Supports everyone, regardless of background or standing
- Easy-going
- Has a good gut instinct
- Respects the office and role of Council member
- Studies matters
- Conscientious, cautious
- Honesty
- Receptive to citizens
- Business background
- Institutional knowledge
- Social media acumen
- Community standing
- Desires to make it work
- Shows up
- Appreciates diversity

When asked if anything was missing that, if present, would make for a stronger Council team, the ideas that were offered were: another female, better communications, and to be more representative of the community.

With respect to challenges that might arise when the Council members worked together, the following were identified (flip chart #3):

- Too receptive to every critique
- Social media involvement
- Business focus
- Youth, less experience, different perspective
- Age (maturity)
- Experience getting in the way
- High expectations of others
- Impatience

Ms. Schmitt pointed out that a combination of strengths and challenges was a characteristic of every team. The goal was to utilize the strengths and overcome the challenges for effective teamwork. She also noted that some strengths, taken too far, could become challenges, and asked how potential challenges might be overcome or compensated for to help the Council work better together.

The following ideas to overcome challenges were offered (flip chart #3):

- Listening, good communications
- Being respectful of each other
- Having an open mind
- Practicing humility
- Practicing patience – utilizing "the pause" before reacting
- Defending the absent
- Demonstrating transparency
- Educating and explaining issues
- Finding the good in situations and in others

Members of the City's Executive Team left the retreat at 10:30 a.m. for a strategic planning discussion with the City Manager.

Effective Governance Discussion

Ms. Schmitt and Mr. Payne led a wide-ranging discussion with the City Council members on topics that included how Council could work together as a team, Council/City Manager/staff relationships and interactions, and improving communications. They discussed effective governance practices and shared some scenarios to make their points.

The facilitators focused the discussion by asking the Council members to identify principles that should be followed to help City Council work together as an effective team. These principles were identified (flip chart #4):

- ❖ Honesty
- ❖ Trust
- ❖ Open communications
- ❖ Respect/support for council decisions
- ❖ Accountability
- ❖ Equal information
- ❖ Respect for each other
- ❖ Ethical personal behavior

Some issues for further consideration, that were shared with the Executive Team when it returned to the retreat, were:

- Weekly one-on-one meetings between the City Manager and individual Council members, while valuable, may be problematic if a Council member misses the meeting, remembers it differently than others, or if the information isn't shared the same way in each meeting.

The facilitators suggested more written communication, memos or staff reports, to formalize actions and provide uniform information to both Council and the public regarding upcoming agenda items.

- Council's work sessions being held in a different, smaller room than Council's Chamber creates the impression of a "secret" meeting or one in which the public is not welcome. The location is not conducive to public attendance.

One suggestion was to consider utilizing Council's Chamber for work sessions but with a reconfigured seating arrangement, rather than Council members sitting at the dais, to allow for more informal interactions.

- There was concern that communication from the City to the public, especially proactive communication, was lacking. Some Council members have felt it necessary to use social media to inform the public and the public, to a degree, has come to rely on those Council members for information.

Council members expressed a desire for a single communications point of contact on staff who would be responsible for the City's website and social media accounts, and that those sites be kept up to date with frequent postings.

There was concern about a gap in communications from staff to the Council so that members would be informed about an issue before Council started receiving inquiries from citizens; for example, a recent power outage. The facilitators offered two important principles, that Council is not surprised by news and, that bad news comes to Council from staff first before getting to the members through other ways. All acknowledged that it was challenging to meet those aspirations in the age of social media.

Communication was a recurring theme throughout the retreat. The facilitators captured the different ways that the issue was raised on an un-numbered flip chart:

Communications
Social media
Staff interaction
Representation
Transparency – educate, explain, accessibility, open government
Citizen engagement
Misinformation
Communications plan
Rolling out of new initiatives

There was a general consensus among all of the participants that a communications strategy, with an implementation plan, was needed.

- Addressing new, emerging issues brought to Council's attention by the public, how to respond, and how quickly to react (example; concerns about coyotes).

The facilitators suggested that, unless there is an emergency or other clear crisis, there is rarely a need to act immediately on an issue brought to Council for the first time by the public. They offered that the principle of “completed staff work” allowed time for a review of the issue, an understanding of possible courses of action and potential consequences, the identification of alternatives and costs, and the formulation of a thoughtful recommendation for Council’s consideration. A scheduled agenda item, with a staff report, could provide better information to Council and the public when addressing a new issue.

The retreat was recessed for lunch at 12:30 p.m. and reconvened, with the Executive Team present, at 1:00 p.m.

Briefing on Finances and the Budget

Chief Operating Officer, Edena Reese-Atmore, Chief Finance Officer, J. Richard Stanfield, and Director of Budget and Procurement, Robert Floyd provided a high-level briefing on City finances, the status of the annual audit for Fiscal Year 2024, and the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026 Budget development process.

Ms. Reese-Atmore offered her perspective, after one year, that the City was in good financial condition overall. She noted, however, that there had been a loss of a lot of institutional knowledge from staff turnover and, that a lack of training and not taking advantage of the capabilities of the MUNIS financial software resulted in suboptimal productivity. Addressing this will be a focus moving forward. She also suggested adding debt management and investment policies to the City’s financial management policies.

Mr. Stanfield said that, after only two months, he was still learning about operations. Despite the loss of staff, it is his impression that the remaining employees are great, and he will be focusing on helping them to understand why they do what they do. He also addressed the delay in completing the annual audit for Fiscal Year 2024 but noted that progress was being made.

Mr. Floyd reported that his goal for the upcoming budget was to better tell the story behind the numbers to better inform the public and Council on the scope and purpose of City operations. Recognition of the budget by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) is a goal that he hopes to achieve with the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Ms. Ferrell-Benavides added that there was a need for documented processes across the organization, especially since so many employees were becoming eligible for retirement.

Review of Progress Implementing Actions Identified in the 2024 Retreat

After each of City Council's retreats in 2023 and 2024 a work plan was developed from the desired actions identified by Council during the retreat. The 2024 retreat reviewed progress on implementing the 2023 work plan and revised the work plan for the subsequent year. The facilitators asked the Council members to review their progress over the last year by asking three questions:

- *What are the most significant accomplishments over the last year?*
- *Were there any surprises that required immediate action or an adjustment of priorities?*
- *Were there any disappointments or missed opportunities that should be acknowledged?*

Council identified the following accomplishments (flip chart #5):

- ✓ Forward motion in general
- ✓ Cultural change
- ✓ Staffing - department heads hired
- ✓ Informative budget
- ✓ Balanced budget
- ✓ Morale improvement
- ✓ Staff recognition
- ✓ Rules of Procedure adopted
- ✓ Website/Facebook page improvements
- ✓ Community engagement
- ✓ Covid survival
- ✓ Improving Uptown vibe
- ✓ Cooperation with partners
- ✓ Power washed the municipal building
- ✓ Transparency Portal

Surprises that required immediate action or an adjustment of priorities included (flip chart #6):

- Courthouse facilities issues
- Legal issues
- Staff loss
- Snow & cold weather impacting operations and costs
- Blowback from some decisions

Disappointments or missed opportunities identified were (flip chart #6):

- Economic development projects not moving forward
- Code enforcement
- Community policing and visibility
- Animal control responsiveness

The facilitators then walked Council and staff through a review of the work plan from the 2024 retreat. That work plan evolved from a review of actions identified at the 2023 retreat. In the summary below, the status of actions from the 2023 retreat as of March 8, 2024, is indicated, actions from the 2024 retreat are highlighted in yellow, and the status of those actions and any follow-up, if desired, is noted in bold italic. Highlights of the discussion were captured on flip chart #7. The facilitators encourage Council and staff to, as much as possible, identify actions that had “SMART” characteristics; that is, that were Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound.

Actions from the 2024 Retreat

2023/2024 Chronological Work Plan Review (from the 2023 Retreat)

Items That Were Incomplete on March 8, 2024

- Develop a Housing Plan. By November 1, 2023. *2024 STATUS: Work started with the Danville Housing Authority but was delayed by internal issues with the Authority. The City has hired a former employee of the Authority to be its Executive Director for Housing starting April 1, 2024. The new Executive Director will work with stakeholders to develop a housing “vision” for Martinsville. A proposal will be brought to City Council in Fall 2024. Once the vision is adopted, a more specific housing plan can be developed. This did not happen.*

Two additional tasks were identified in concert with the development of the housing vision.

- * *Review and update the land use and housing sections of the Comprehensive Plan to provide guidance for the development or redevelopment of housing options. The Berkley Group has been hired to facilitate a review and revision of the Comprehensive Plan. The new plan will be developed in collaboration with Henry County. The new plan will be ready for review and subsequent action by the Martinsville City Council and the Henry County Board of Supervisors by July 1, 2026. A Housing strategy will be included in the new plan.*
- * *Identify and inventory public and private sites for potential housing development; capture information on the site characteristics (location, size, etc.), zoning, and potential environmental issues. Council clarified that it would just like to see a spreadsheet with a list of properties that might have the potential for housing development. Site characteristics can be added at a later date. June 1, 2025, was established as a deadline for providing the information to Council.*
- Explore the creation of an Economic Development Authority (EDA); understand their authority and the opportunities they create. By December 1, 2023. *STATUS: Appointments have been made to the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and it has been re-energized and meeting. There will be a presentation by McGuire Woods consultants on March 18th to explain the authority and opportunities of an IDA or EDA. A name change will be considered after that meeting. The Authority and Council will also be developing policies, processes, and practices in the areas of staffing and financing. The name change to an EDA has been completed. Work continues on developing policies and procedures. This item will be removed from the work plan.*

- Utilize the Citizens Advisory Board to make recommendations to improve community engagement.
 - Clearly define its purpose
 - Provide staff support
 - Use its input in the development of the Community Engagement Plan
 - Sunset the board after 18 months unless extended by Council.

STATUS: Seven members have been appointed to the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) and it has been meeting and has adopted bylaws. Its current focus is to review and analyze tools (such as “See, Click, Fix”) for resolving citizen raised issues. The ongoing role of the CAB is still being defined; there needs to be clarity on its responsibility, authority (if any), and Council’s expectations of it. This has not been accomplished due to insufficient support from Council and staff. There was a difference of opinion on Council as to the potential value of a CAB. It was noted that the original Community Advisory Board no longer existed due to the sunset provision when the board was established. Council agreed to review this matter and reach a resolution by July 1, 2025. The re-establishment of the CAB would require new appointments of citizen representatives.

- Convene a joint meeting with the County Board of Supervisors within three months of the appointment of a new City Manager. *STATUS: Not yet accomplished. This remains a goal. Not accomplished. The consensus was to remove this item from the work plan.*
- Develop a Community Engagement Plan. Presentation to Council, January 2024. *STATUS: Not accomplished. A new deadline of July 1, 2025, was identified. On track. The deadline was reaffirmed.*
- Develop an Events Policy that addresses City expectations and possible support by January 2024. *STATUS: Not accomplished. A new deadline of September 1, 2024, was identified. Done.*
- Adopt financial management policies, including a budget calendar, for FY 2025. *STATUS: The budget calendar for FY 2025 was developed and is being followed. Financial management policies will be adopted with adoption of the FY 2025 Budget. Done.*
- Develop an asset management plan for City facilities and equipment for FY 2025. *STATUS: Not accomplished. A new deadline of July 1, 2025, was identified. Not accomplished. The deadline was extended to July 1, 2026.*
- Provide clear charters, expectations, FOIA and COIA training, and staff support to City boards and commissions. *STATUS: A handbook for boards and commissions is in development and will be presented to Council for adoption by July 1, 2024. Some progress, although a handbook has not been produced. Revisit after May 2025.*
- Clarify the potential use of the 42-acre City-owned site; ensure the site is included on the State’s VEDA list. *STATUS: Staff will continue to monitor the Rives Road property. It is currently being used for storage by a nearby industry. The property has potential for residential development within constraints related to floodplain. The Housing Authority is evaluating the site.*

- * *Consider transferring ownership of the property to the IDA/EDA to facilitate redevelopment. Questions have arisen about the feasibility of the property for development. The consensus was to remove this item from the work plan.*
- Explore joint education opportunities, particularly with respect to trades, with Henry County. STATUS: *This remains a long-term goal once relations with the County are stronger. The consensus was to remove this item from the work plan.*
- Attain the GFOA Budget Award. STATUS: *The goal is to achieve the award for the FY 2026 Budget. On track for accomplishment.*
- Conduct a survey of customer service experience; identify appropriate standards of good customer service and conduct regular training of staff. STATUS: *Customer service training has been delivered, and the City Manager will conduct an ongoing assessment and provide further guidance to staff. A citizen's survey has been conducted; results will be presented to Council in May 2025.*
- Adopt Rules of Procedure for Council operations. STATUS: *Rules of procedure have been drafted as part of the Policies and Procedure Manual of City Council and will be presented to Council by May 1, 2024. Done.*
- Implement an effective on-boarding process for new Council members. STATUS: *A process will be developed and provided to Council members elected in November 2024. Done.*
- Conduct an organizational assessment to include an evaluation of human resources policies and practices. STATUS: *This is being accomplished by the City Manager as she becomes more acclimated to the organization. Ongoing; the consensus was to remove this item from the work plan.*
- Develop and adopt an Economic Development Strategy for the City by the end of calendar year 2024. STATUS: *A new goal of December 31, 2025, was identified. On track.*
- Adopt an Incentive Philosophy/Policy for public support of desirable development. STATUS: *To be addressed as a part of or after the adoption of an Economic Development Strategy. On track.*
- Explore opportunities for collaborative ventures with Henry County. STATUS: *An ongoing goal as relations with the County grow stronger. The consensus was to remove this item from the work plan.*
- Take actions to build a stronger relationship with the Harvest Foundation. STATUS: *Ongoing. Relationship building continues. Suggest removal from the work plan as there is no specific measurable action or deadline.*

Additional Actions Identified at the 2024 Retreat

Housing/Economic Development – A **climate action plan** is being developed as a George Mason University class project. A draft will be presented to the City by **December 31, 2024**. *Done.*

Education – A **schools facilities study** will be completed by **July 1, 2025**. *The deadline was revised to July 1, 2026.*

Revitalization and Redevelopment – A **legal briefing** on the City's responsibilities and authority to address abandoned and derelict commercial properties will be provided no later than **August 1, 2024**. *There was some uncertainty whether this had been done as a part of the Sands Anderson briefing. Verify and revisit if necessary.*

Economic Development – Develop an **incentive philosophy and guidelines**, including the role of the IDA/EDA, for the support of development and redevelopment projects in the City. *To be a part of the Economic Development Strategic plan as noted above.*

Healthy Community – Complete a **study of City parks** – **May 2024**. *A Parks Improvement Plan was completed and is available for review on the City's website. The next step will be to incorporate improvement projects into the Capital Improvements Plan.*

Review of the City's Vision, Mission, and Values Statements, and Strategic Priorities

Ms. Ferrell-Benavides reported that the Executive Team had discussed the strategic plan framework when it broke out from the retreat. She asked Deputy City Clerk, Peyton Nibblett to brief Council on their work.

Mr. Nibblett started by reviewing with Council the results of a SWOT analysis performed by the Executive Team. He noted that most strategic planning efforts include an examination of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and treats as background early in the process. The Executive Team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Fresh Perspectives** – New team members bring innovative ideas and approaches.
- **Professional Expertise** – Skilled and knowledgeable staff across various domains.
- **Passion for Work** – Employees are dedicated and invested in their roles.
- **Strong Work Ethic** – Hardworking and committed personnel.
- **Diverse Experience** – A range of backgrounds and expertise enhances problem-solving.
- **Strategic Resources & Location** – Martinsville's assets provide a competitive advantage.
- **Extensive Service Footprint** – Wide range of services despite being a small town.

- **Staff Perseverance** – Resilient workforce capable of overcoming challenges.
- **Hands-on Management** – Leadership maintains direct involvement and operational insight.
- **Varied Perspectives & Exposure** – Employees contribute diverse viewpoints and experiences.
- **Adaptability** – Ability to pivot and adjust to changing circumstances.
- **Self-Awareness** – Acknowledgment of organizational flaws fosters continuous improvement.
- **Competence & Intelligence** – A highly capable and skilled team.

Weaknesses

- **Lack of Trust** – Internal trust gaps hinder collaboration.
- **Limited Flexibility & Vision** – Difficulty adapting to future needs and opportunities.
- **Communication & Involvement Gaps** – Challenges in ensuring clarity and engagement.
- **Loss of Institutional Knowledge** – Departure of experienced staff has impacted continuity.
- **Cliquish Culture** – Segmented groups limit integration and collaboration.
- **Emotional Intelligence Deficiencies** – Struggles with interpersonal dynamics and empathy.
- **Difficulty Articulating a Shared Vision** – Challenges in conveying long-term goals.
- **Lack of Ownership & Accountability** – Limited sense of responsibility at various levels.
- **Top-Down Decision-Making** – Restricts innovation and employee engagement.
- **Low Motivation at Lower Levels** – Reduced enthusiasm and engagement among staff.
- **Reactive Approach** – Tendency to respond to issues rather than proactively addressing them.
- **Staff Recruitment & Retention Challenges** – Difficulty attracting and keeping talent.
- **Limited Training & Development** – Insufficient investment in professional growth.
- **Staff Feeling Ostracized** – Some employees feel excluded or undervalued.
- **Integration Challenges** – Struggles in unifying departments and operations.
- **Lack of Alignment with City Initiatives** – Difficulty in fully integrating with municipal goals.

Opportunities

- **Wealth of Expertise & Knowledge** – Leveraging internal talent for growth.
- **Building Buy-In for the Vision** – Opportunities to strengthen engagement and alignment.
- **Organizational Reinvention** – Chance to redefine priorities and structures.

- **Willingness to Take Risks** – Support for innovation and learning from failure.
- **Open Communication Culture** – Employees feel comfortable voicing concerns and ideas.
- **Federal Layoffs** – Potential talent pool expansion from government job reductions.
- **Shifting Political Climate** – New policies may create opportunities for growth.
- **Creative Strategic Planning** – Ability to implement innovative solutions.

Threats

- **Lack of Confidence in Leadership Direction** – Concerns about the organization’s trajectory.
- **Political & Council Dynamics** – External influences impacting decision-making.
- **Employee Burnout** – High workloads leading to decreased morale and productivity.
- **Declining Motivation** – Struggles with sustaining employee engagement.
- **Unequal Workload Distribution** – 20% of employees carrying 80% of the responsibilities.
- **Lack of Documentation & Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** – Absence of formalized guidelines.
- **Rising Operational Costs** – Increasing financial pressures on the organization.
- **Talent Shortages** – Difficulty attracting qualified applicants.
- **Aging Infrastructure** – Deteriorating systems requiring significant investment.
- **Limited Development Opportunities** – Scarcity of developers and mixed-use projects hindering growth.

The facilitators then asked that Council review and ratify, or amend, the City’s vision and mission statements:

Vision: *Martinsville is a thriving, full-service city centrally located in southern Virginia, offering excellent education and superior quality of life in a picturesque setting while embracing inclusivity and opportunities to ensure a sustainable and fulfilling lifestyle to live, visit, and grow.*

Mission: *Martinsville City proudly promotes a safe, healthy, thriving community dedicated to delivering excellent services and meaningful public participation.*

Council agreed that these statements were still relevant.

Mr. Nibblett reported that the Executive Team suggested that the City's core values be modified and expanded under an overall theme of "We are Martinsville."

*"We are Martinsville: We are: **Motivated, Accountable, Responsive, Transformative, Inclusive, Neighborly, Safe, Versatile, Industrious, Loyal, Limitless, and Effective.***

Council was receptive to the change with suggestions to find a way to include "diversity" and "integrity" in the core values.

Strategic Priorities, Objectives, and Actions

Mr. Nibblett then reviewed with Council the five strategic priorities of the strategic plan framework and with objectives under each priority as developed by the Executive Team.

Since the time for the end of the retreat was rapidly approaching, the facilitators suggested that Council and staff identify ideas for action that could be developed into a work plan at a later time. As Mr. Nibblett reviewed each strategic priority and objectives, the facilitators captured ideas on the flip charts.

At the conclusion of the retreat, Council members and Executive Team members were each given three sticky dots and were asked to place one dot beside three ideas that they felt should be priorities for action in a work plan. The number of votes is indicated in the notes below.

HIGH PERFORMING GOVERNMENT - GOVERNANCE – As an employer of choice, deliver efficient and effective operations and services while demonstrating fiscal responsibility and transparency as a high-performing organization.

Objectives

- Attract and retain employees who will address current and future city needs.
- Align organizational structure and business processes and practices to result in outstanding customer service and responsiveness.
- Establish sound fiscal management practices to support city services, facilities, and infrastructure, including capital investments, debt management, and proactive fund balance management.
- Use technology enhancements and investments to make data-driven decisions, support transparency in government operations, and deliver accessible and effective city services.

Ideas developed during the discussion (flip chart #8):

Governance

- Adopt a debt management policy
- Adopt an investment policy
- Establish customer service standards

[1 staff vote]

- Address municipal building issues
- Provide adequate courts facilities
- Jails upgrades

[1 staff vote]

DEVELOPMENT – Continue to expand our local economy and housing opportunities while taking pride in our natural landscapes; by supporting local businesses, providing ample opportunities for new businesses, and marketing ourselves as a City of Choice.

Objectives

- Improve and streamline the city's processes to provide easy, quick, and friendly experiences when opening and operating a business.
- Enable appropriate, sustainable opportunities for redevelopment and adaptative reuse that complement the city's historical and natural landscape.
- Encourage private investment that allows for upward housing and retail opportunities. Alleviate Blight in order to allow for more development opportunities.
- Update and maintain a land development and maintenance code that facilitates economic development and improves quality of life.
- Continue intergovernmental relationships and partnerships with Henry County and surrounding jurisdictions to improve our long-term economic health by leveraging the region's competitive advantage and strategy.

Ideas developed during the discussion (flip chart #9):

Development

- Update the land development & maintenance codes *[4 Council, 3 staff votes]*
- Adopt an economic development plan *[4 staff votes]*
- Update and revise the comprehensive plan [from flip chart #7]
- Complete the buildable lot inventory [from flip chart #7]
- Adopt a Housing Strategy [from flip chart #7] *[1 Council, 6 staff votes]*

INFRASTRUCTURE – As a safe and reliable city, sustain high-quality service delivery by investing in public infrastructure, including parks, buildings, equipment, roads, and technology.

Objectives

- Develop a comprehensive asset management program to optimize the lifecycle of the City's Water, Sewer, Electric, and Telecommunication systems.
- Support existing infrastructure needs while developing reliable infrastructure that sustains future growth and development.
- Expansion of GIS Capabilities to fully utilize all aspects of GIS throughout the city.
- Develop a financing plan for long-term sustainable infrastructure growth and replacement that implements an equitable fee structure and incentives for conservation.

- Provide safe, efficient, sustainable, cost-effective, well-maintained, and aesthetically pleasing public facilities & city properties for delivery of municipal services to residents and visitors.

Ideas developed during the discussion (flip chart #10):

Infrastructure

[1 Council vote]

- Develop an asset management plan *[2 staff votes]*
- Adopt a feasible Capital Improvements Plan
- Develop a robust Geographic Information System *[2 staff votes]*
- Develop a plan for MiNet extension *[1 Council vote]*
- Adopt water and sewer master plans *[1 staff vote]*
- Adopt plans for all utilities *[1 staff vote]*
- Explore the idea of private ownership of the telecom residential service

PUBLIC SAFETY – Serve the Community through timely responses, increased transparency, and responder visibility. Continue to prevent harm, protect lives, and respond effectively and proactively to potential and real threats.

Objectives

- Improve public safety by utilizing data-driven analysis and maintaining a comprehensive police and emergency management system.
- Enhance community relations and trust by offering more opportunities for engagement and increasing department transparency in operations.
- Promote a healthy community by providing professional emergency and non-emergency medical services.
- Improve community health resiliency through an active mobile integrated health program.
- Provide responsive, flexible support to the citizens of Martinsville by cross-training and collaborating across Public Safety departments (Fire, Police, EMS)

Ideas developed during the discussion (flip chart #11):

Public safety

- Expand community policing *[3 Council votes]*
- Expand neighborhood watch
- Engage a consultant to review and make recommendations on community policing *[1 staff vote]*
- Explore the feasibility of creating a Public Safety Officer position
- Address animal control response issues
- Provide an adequate animal shelter *[1 staff vote]*

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT *[renamed during the retreat from “Community Pride”]* – Building community through celebrating our past, increasing access to recreation, educational, and cultural activities, and improving the relationship with our intergovernmental partners;

Objectives

- Improve citizen engagement through new forms of communication with an emphasis on underserved populations.
- Provide a comprehensive community-based range of programs, special events, and activities.
- Identify existing and new programs to improve connectivity and access to community and educational services.
- Ensure economic vitality through partnering and engaging with local businesses.
- Encourage activities in all areas of Martinsville that create a sense of belonging and offer a destination for residents and visitors.

Ideas developed during the discussion (flip chart #12):

Citizen Engagement

- Develop a communications plan *[2 Council, 7 staff votes]*
- Rewrite the outcome statement regarding "history"
- Add a statement about education in the objectives
- Conduct periodic community meetings

As it was past the designated time for adjournment, the retreat concluded once the sticky dot exercise was complete. The facilitators counted up the “votes,” with the following results:

- Update the land development & maintenance codes *[4 Council, 3 staff votes]*
- Expand community policing *[3 Council votes]*
- Develop a communications plan *[2 Council, 7 staff votes]*
- Adopt a Housing Strategy [from flip chart #7] *[1 Council, 6 staff votes]*
- Adopt an economic development plan *[4 staff votes]*
- Develop an asset management plan *[2 staff votes]*
- Develop a robust Geographic Information System *[2 staff votes]*
- Infrastructure, in general *[1 Council vote]*
- Develop a plan for MiNet extension *[1 Council vote]*
- Adopt a debt management policy *[1 staff vote]*
- Provide adequate courts facilities *[1 staff vote]*
- Adopt water and sewer master plans *[1 staff vote]*
- Adopt plans for all utilities *[1 staff vote]*
- Engage a consultant to review and make recommendations on community policing *[1 staff vote]*
- Provide an adequate animal shelter *[1 staff vote]*

Council's apparent highest priorities:

- Update the land development & maintenance codes [significant staff support]
- Expand community policing
- Develop a communications plan [significant staff support]
- Adopt a Housing Strategy [significant staff support]
- Develop a plan for MiNet extension
- Infrastructure

This compilation is offered to assist Council and the Executive Team to develop a work plan, with SMART actions, for the two-year period of the current Council's term.

Ms. Schmitt and Mr. Payne thanked City Council for allowing the Berkley Group to be of service to the City of Martinsville.

Mayor Jones declared the retreat adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Addendum: Transcription of flip chart notes

Martinsville City Council Retreat

February 28, 2025

Transcription of Flip Chart Notes (with annotations for clarity)

Flip Chart #1

MARTINSVILLE

2/28/25

STRENGTHS

- INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY, LEGITIMACY
- OPEN MIND, LISTEN, COMPROMISE
- KNOWLEDGE, LISTEN, TRY TO UNDERSTAND
- HATE BEING LATE
- WILLING TO LEARN, LISTEN
- SUPPORTS EVERYONE REGARDLESS
- EASY-GOING
- GUT INSTINCT

Flip Chart #2

- RESPECT FOR OFFICE & ROLE
- STUDIES MATTERS
- CONSCIENCE, CAUTIOUS
- HONESTY
- RECEPTIVE TO CITIZENS
- BUSINESS BACKGROUND
- INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE
- SOCIAL MEDIA ACUMEN
- COMMUNITY STANDING
- DESIRE TO MAKE IT WORK
- SHOWING UP
- DIVERSITY

MISSING?

- MORE (ANOTHER FEMALE)
- COMMUNICATIONS
- REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY

Flip Chart #3

CHALLENGES

- TOO RECEPTIVE TO EVERY CRITIQUE
- SOCIAL MEDIA INVOLVEMENT
- BUSINESS FOCUS
- YOUTH, LESS EXPERIENCE, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
- AGE (MATURITY)
- EXPERIENCE GETTING IN THE WAY
- HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS
- IMPATIENCE

TO OVERCOME

- LISTEN, COMMUNICATIONS
- RESPECTFUL
- OPEN-MINDED
- HUMILITY
- PATIENCE - "THE PAUSE"
- DEFEND THE ABSENT
- DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY
- EDUCATE / EXPLAIN
- FIND THE GOOD

Flip Chart #4

PRINCIPLES OF COUNCIL TEAM

1. HONESTY
2. TRUST
3. OPEN COMMUNICATIONS
4. RESPECT/SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL DECISIONS
5. ACCOUNTABILITY
6. EQUAL INFORMATION
7. RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER
8. ETHICAL PERSONAL BEHAVIOR

Flip Chart #5

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- FORWARD MOTION
- CULTURAL CHANGE
- STAFFING - DEPARTMENT HEADS
- INFORMATIVE BUDGET
- BALANCED BUDGET
- MORALE IMPROVEMENT
- STAFF RECOGNITION
- RULES OF PROCEDURE
- WEBSITE/FACEBOOK PAGE IMPROVEMENTS
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- COVID SURVIVAL
- IMPROVING UPTOWN VIBE
- COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS
- POWERWASHED MUNICIPAL BUILDING
- TRANSPARENCY PORTAL

Flip Chart #6

SURPRISES

- COURTHOUSE
- LEGAL ISSUES
- STAFF LOSS
- SNOW / COLD
- BLOWBACK [from some decisions]

DISAPPOINTMENTS

- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
- CODE ENFORCEMENT
- COMMUNITY POLICING / VISIBILITY
- ANIMAL CONTROL RESPONSIVENESS

Flip Chart #7

ACTIONS

- COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION – [underway; to Council] JULY '26
- HOUSING PLAN - JULY '26
- BUILDING SITE INVENTORY - JUNE 1
- REVIEW BOARDS & COMMISSIONS - MAY '25
- Asset Management PLAN - JULY 1 '26
- CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS - MAY '25

Flip Chart #8

IDEAS

GOVERNANCE

- DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY [1 staff vote]
- INVESTMENT POLICY
- CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS
- MUNICIPAL BUILDING
- COURTS [1 staff vote]
- JAILS

Flip Chart #9

DEVELOPMENT IDEAS

- UPDATE LAND DEVELOPMENT & MAINTENANCE CODE [4 Council votes, 3 staff votes]
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN [4 staff votes]
- COMPREHENSIVE PLAN [from flip chart #7]
- LOT INVENTORY [from flip chart #7]
- HOUSING [PLAN – from flip chart #7] [1 Council vote, 6 staff votes]

Flip Chart #10

INFRASTRUCTURE

[1 Council vote]

- ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN [2 staff votes]
- CIP
- GIS [2 staff votes]
- MINET [extension] PLAN [1 Council vote]
- W & S MASTER PLANS [1 staff vote]
- UTILITIES PLANS [1 staff vote]
- [Explore the idea of private] OWNERSHIP OF TELECOM RESIDENTIAL SERVICE

Flip Chart #11

PUBLIC SAFETY

- EXPAND COMMUNITY POLICING [3 Council votes]
- NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH
- OUTSIDE CONSULTANT [to review and make recommendations on community policing] [1 staff vote]
- [Explore the feasibility of creating a] PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICER
- ANIMAL CONTROL
- ANIMAL SHELTER [1 staff vote]

Flip Chart #12

COMMUNITY PRIDE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

- COMMUNICATIONS PLAN [2 Council votes, 7 staff votes]
- REWRITE OUTCOME REGARDING "HISTORY" [in the strategic plan framework]
- ADD EDUCATION [in the objective]
- COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Un-numbered Flip Chart

COMMUNICATIONS:
SOCIAL MEDIA
STAFF INTERACTION
REPRESENTATION
TRANSPARENCY – EDUCATE, EXPLAIN, ACCESSIBILITY, OPEN GOVERNMENT
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
MISINFORMATION
COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
ROLLOUT [of new initiatives]