

June 17, 2020

MEMO TO: Traci N. T. Fujita, Director
Office of Council Services

F R O M: Nicole Siegel, Legislative Analyst *NAS*

SUBJECT: **WEBINAR ON “GETTING MORE FROM PLANS WE ALREADY HAVE”** (PAF 20-148)

I participated in a planning webinar entitled “Getting More from Plans You Already Have,” the first in Verdunity’s “Emerge Stronger” series, on May 22, 2020. Verdunity is a planning and engineering firm that seeks “to ensure prosperity for everyone by helping communities build neighborhoods where people at all stages of life and means can survive and thrive,” according to its website. The purpose of the “Emerge Stronger” series is to advise municipalities on how they “can get more out of the plans and tools they already have invested in, as the COVID-19 crisis is creating even greater resource constraints for local governments.”

This webinar outlined three self-assessments for municipalities led by Verdunity’s Founder and CEO Kevin Shepherd and Community Consulting Program Leader AJ Fawver. The report that summarizes the information can be found using the link below:

https://www.crowdcast.io/e/emerge-stronger-internal-assessment?inf_contact_key=b3a02a36bf6aa5277789337fc12cd26e680f8914173f9191b1c0223e68310bb1

Challenges to growth and development.

- Growing wants and needs of citizens with limited resources.
- Lack of alignment between vision, plans, policies, and investments.
- Funding gap between needs and available revenue.
- Culture of apathy and skepticism.

Bridging the resources gap.

- Re-engage citizens.
- Cultivate community framework.
- Assess where you are (what can you control?).

- Organize your community's resources.
- Implement and iterate.

Evaluate existing tools.

- Make meaningful progress with the tools you have.
- Examples of tools within our control are communication and internal and external processes.
- **Level A: Vision and Plan Assessment**
 - Types of plans in each municipality's portfolio include strategic plans, comprehensive plans, codes, Capital Improvement Planning ("C.I.P"), budget, and neighborhood (special) plans.
 - Visions are often short-lived. They lose the hold they had in the beginning, and citizens' interests will wane over time.
 - Conflicting plans – how do you assess these? An example of this could be, one plan calls for walkable neighborhood, and another calls for widening streets and a more robust thoroughfare.
 - **The key is to find common ground and themes across those plans.**
- **Level B: Code & Regulatory Assessment**
 - Some examples of codes and regulations municipalities deal with on a regular basis include development regulations, urban design regulations, the zoning code, and the subdivision ordinance.
 - Municipalities also have codes and regulations others in our organization see on a regular basis, but we do not. An out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality can hurt implementation of these codes.
 - The purpose of codes can be maintaining safety or preventing certain activities from happening in an unsafe way or in a way that could devalue the community.
 - Some codes are outdated but can tell you a lot about your community and what it was struggling with at that time. They are often reactive to something that happened in the past.
 - Codes can also be used to deal with the future and trying to shape new development but are also important in a present sense.

- **Rigidity** can be a feature of codes, with the intention of wanting to create a sense of consistency and solidarity. However, that can lead in the opposite direction of where we have said we want to go.
 - **Interpretive element of codes.** Left unchecked, this can lead to abuse and inconsistency in administration.
 - **How codes can and should be used.** Municipalities tend to use codes to hinder certain types of behavior, but we should also use them to encourage and promote certain behaviors.
 - How do our citizens experience our codes and regulations?
 - There is often a perception by public that they are too complex and difficult to follow, and often are not enforced.
 - They may be written and crafted in a way that makes them difficult to enforce.
 - **Unintended consequences.** An example of an unintended consequence of a code is, we want to create multimodal communities, but we have codes conflicting with that goal.
 - **Readability of code.** It should work for a novice to an expert.
 - Graphics can help express the meaning of codes and regulations.
 - Make sure terms are defined clearly. There should be clear standards to follow that take out subjectivity.
 - There may be contradictions in certain parts of the code that you do not deal with daily. For example, a zoning code might interact with a property maintenance or nuisance code. They should be aligned.
 - **Return on effort.** Are we seeing measurable progress? If not, it might be time to revisit the way codes and regulations are structured. Are the codes in place being used?
- **Level C: Process Assessment**
 - Budget, developmental review, economic incentives, and C.I.P. budgeting are some processes municipalities use on a regular basis.
 - One reason for these processes is decision-making exercises.
 - Information gathering and distribution is another component of our processes.
 - **These processes should help us to plan ahead.**
 - Some processes are wholly internal and behind the scenes. This may help staff facilitate review.
 - Processes may include public comment and require decision-making where the community weighs in at public meetings.

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- Levels of bureaucracy can be excessive. Is there a way to streamline processes?
- A potential problem is that processes may be created to respond to issues but are never updated.
- People should understand how decisions are reached internally and externally and how the processes work. We need to make sure we communicate with the public.
 - Most of the complaints we hear are about the complexity of processes.

The attachment provides exercises that can be used to work on the assessments.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this webinar. Should you have any questions, please let me know.

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Attachment

cc: Supervising Legislative Attorney

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Part 1: Getting more from plans you already have.

Exercise 1.

Make a list of your city's adopted plans.

Think of three ways your plans conflict with each other and/or with your city's adopted vision.

Exercise 2.

Think of three parts of your code that are notorious amongst the staff for being problematic. What about them is problematic?

Think of three parts of your code that are notorious amongst the building community for being problematic. What about them is problematic?

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Part 1: Getting more from plans you already have.

Exercise 3. Think about a process in your city organization that you feel is in need of improvement. Ask yourself these questions:

Is the associated technology up-to-date?

Are the related forms up-to-date?

When was the fee (if there is one) last adjusted?

Do you know how much it costs to perform each part of that process?

Have the processes seen multiple iterations of team structures?

Could one staff member narrate the process from start to finish, including the pieces that are performed by other departments?

Is everyone who is required to participate in, or who is affected by, that process actually included within it?

Is it easy for others to understand how decisions are reached?

Does the process actually advance the city's goals in a way that is documentable and defensible?

How is information about each time that process is completed stored?