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By:

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This week, the East Lansing City Council held its third in a series of dedicated meetings focused on developing Strategic Priorities for the City. All members of Council were present. This week's meeting followed seven hours of presentations from City department heads and discussion among Council members at meetings on Saturday, January 9 and Tuesday, January 12, and included consideration of possible new initiatives for the City to undertake.

Mayor Mark Meadows said he plans to complete the discussion and vote on the Strategic Priorities document at the Council's regular meeting on March 1. He also plans to bring back a practice from his previous service on the Council of having all members of the Council make a special public presentation about the priorities to the community at this meeting.

The five overarching priorities of the 2016 draft strategic priorities document, which are the same as the last two years, will be presented on March 1 by members of the Council:

- Strong Neighborhoods ? Erik Altmann
- Vibrant Economy ? Susan Woods
- Enhanced Public Assets ? Mark Meadows
- Environmental Quality ? Shanna Draheim
- High Performing (or Engaged) Government ? Ruth Beier

Reports from Department Directors:

At the January 9 meeting, City Manager George Lahanas explained that the purpose of naming strategic priorities is to identify work to be done by City staff beyond the ordinary work of administering the City. Employees are engaged in developing the priorities list, Lahanas told Council. He summarized actions ^[2] by City staff on the last strategic priorities set by the Council at the beginning of 2015.

The Council devoted most of the January 9 meeting on strategic priorities listening to presentations ^[3] by some City department heads, including Public Works Director Scott House, Fire Chief Randy Talifarro, Police Chief Jeff Murphy, Planning, Building and Economic Development Director Tim Dempsey, and Finance Director Mary Haskell.

At the second meeting on January 12, reports were presented ^[4] by Human Resources Director Shelli Neumann and Parks and Recreation Director Tim McCaffery. McCaffery's presentation included discussion ^[5] of trails, the Aquatic Center, the soccer complex, and more.

Debating the strategic priorities:

The draft strategic priorities document ^[6] discussed at this week's meeting was compiled by Assistant to the Mayor Megan Clark from the Council's conversation at the two prior meetings. It included objectives and activities on each priority that differ considerably from previous years.

Some activities in the strategic priorities plans are already underway, such as the Planning Commission completing the Comprehensive Plan, the Finance Department completing a review and overhaul of the City's cost allocation accounting system, and the Department of Public Works completing the state-funded Stormwater, Asset Management, and Wastewater (SAW) asset management plan.

The document also lists initiatives that this City Council has launched since December 2015. These include a review and analysis of non-conforming rental ^[7] property concerns, with recommendations to be made by the committee on this topic that began its work in January;

establishing and assisting with a Financial Health Team [8], which was appointed at the regular Council meeting this week; and a review of the residential parking permit system in neighborhoods across the city.

Additional activities in the current draft document include new initiatives to begin during 2016. These include the City becoming a member in the Michigan Community for a Lifetime and/or AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, developing a community consensus on a vision for the growth of East Lansing, analyzing East Lansing's street trees and developing a tree replacement plan, increasing bicycle infrastructure throughout the community, implementing a Pilot Basement Back-up Prevention Program, and returning to consideration of the possible benefits and barriers to a regional Fire Authority.

Another new activity in the current draft is expanding East Lansing Police Department diversity training. (Disclosure: During the public comment period, I applauded the Council's giving attention to the issue of policing and racial diversity and urged that this activity be broadened to include all six pillars [9] of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.)

This year's strategic priorities document contains more detail than in some previous years, and Council members debated whether this level of detail was beneficial or should be reduced.

Draheim made the case for shortening the document, noting that it is a list of strategic priorities, not a strategic plan. She noted the difference in role between the Council, which should legislate policy, and the staff, which is responsible for administering policy. Woods also spoke in favor of keeping the document broad.

Altmann, however, spoke several times about the importance of not losing the specifics that had been included in the document, which reflected concerns of city residents that he and others had heard in recent months. Structuring this document with points in different levels or supplementing the strategic priorities document with a second document with greater detail were discussed as options.

Mayor Meadows asked Council members to send any additional suggested changes to him for inclusion in the final iteration to be reviewed on March 1.

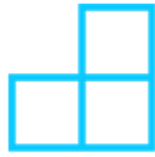
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