

County Administrator's Proposed Strategic Vision, Goals and Objectives

Over the past two years, this community and this organization have faced daunting challenges. In the wake of worldwide economic and financial instability many of those whom we serve have experienced erosion not only of their standard of living but also of confidence in their government. High levels of unemployment and residential foreclosures have quadrupled the number of clients seeking social services who are "in distress".

Despite these conditions, the County government's finances remain sound. Reserves are adequate to meet financial emergencies and contingencies, and the County's credit rating is at the highest achievable level of "AAA". However, many more challenges await us as we embark on our biennial budget deliberations. The tax base is not expected to grow if, as forecasted, the commercial real estate sector falters. The State's budget is projected to be critically out of balance – as much as \$6 billion – which could result in additional unfunded mandates for local government. And, continued high unemployment could choke-off a recovery in consumer spending and further foreclosures could aggravate the residential housing market.

As you know, the FY 11 budget was balanced with an injection of approximately \$18 million in non-recurring, "one-time" money in order to sustain needed services. This strategy provided breathing room for us to develop long-term, sustainable strategies to identify and fund essential services. At the same time, a vigorous effort is underway to restructure, reform, and reinvigorate the means and methods in which we serve our clients. All our efforts are focused on restoring accountability and clarity in our core mission. This will undoubtedly require us to look at programs and services we provide to our customers quite differently. Changing how those programs and services are delivered, and who delivers them, is necessary in order to phase out the \$18 million of one-time money and to deal effectively with any further deterioration in financial resources.

Nevertheless, I believe we can and will overcome these challenges. Opportunities abound. Already we have begun implementing more cost effective and efficient ways to provide service by examining our beliefs and changing the way we see the government's role. The consolidation of major operational groups – in Public Utilities, Family and Aging Services, and Infrastructure and Planning – have uncovered costly duplication and rooted-out the causes of non-responsive service. Serious efforts are underway to better collaborate with other governmental agencies in diverse areas such as: procurement; fire inspections, prevention and suppression; water and sewer infrastructure; emergency dispatch; after school care; children's services; and, financial and accounting systems. Although the County already provides a number of services by contracting or outsourcing to the private sector, we continue to look for additional opportunities.

As we move forward, radical strategic thinking will be necessary if we are to be successful in, first, stabilizing and then transforming the local economy to ensure sustainability and a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. To that end, I propose the following vision statements to guide us in developing a strategic plan for the biannual budget and beyond:

Community Building: Residents and stakeholders fully invested in creating a physically, culturally, spiritually and economically diverse, balanced and sustainable community.

Defining Essential (Core) Services: Perceived by those whom we serve as capable of and willing to provide the essential elements of community building for which local government bears a responsibility.

Customer Service: Customers who enjoy reliable, respectful and fully-facilitated access to service at all times

Organizational Culture: Employees who feel empowered to deliver service to the community with accountability to their customers and to each other.

Proposed goals and objectives supporting these vision statements are attached. Each of these vision statements is addressed in more detail below.

Community Building. The hallmark of sound strategic planning is an engagement of constituents and stakeholders in defining desired outcomes – in this case, community identity. To that end, the following proposed goals reflect community values that must drive the strategic planning process:

- Citizen participation sought and encouraged
- Services developed and provided with full weight of citizen input
- Diverse community dialogue encouraged and supported

A concerted effort to engage the community is underway in connection with the 12-month transition plans approved by the Board as part of the FY 11 Budget adopted for those programs that were funded with non-recurring, one-time funding discussed earlier. As difficult choices are considered about the delivery of services, citizen participation and dialogue is being sought in developing funding strategies for the biennial budget. Other examples of community dialogue about seminal issues include the Cell Tower Advisory Committee and the Panhandling Ordinance Working Group.

We will not be successful in this endeavor unless rapport and trust can be cultivated with those whom we serve. To do so, we must be present in the community. More frequent and effective interaction with clients will be greatly facilitated by locating services where they are needed. The predominant presence of services and resources housed in the County Center does little to foster community building. Therefore, I recommend that we evaluate the sale or lease to commercial tenants of the County Center Building. Services and resources can then be housed in existing County facilities: libraries, fire stations (by building modest additions to structures), existing service centers, and recreational facilities.

When appropriate, the use of telecommuting and virtual offices (i.e., vehicles) should be optimized. This approach is already working well in the Code Enforcement Department and will soon be implemented in other departments. When we consider the need for office space that cannot be addressed effectively through a decentralized approach, it should be done in a manner that minimizes life-cycle cost, maximizes cross-organizational effectiveness, and recognizes the importance of access to our citizens.

Along with a more predominant and effective physical presence in the community, the greater use of survey tools, focus groups and citizen committee participation will generate the required community investment in the strategic planning process. A valuable spin-off effect of community building in this manner is improved customer service.

Defining Essential (Core) Services. A fundamental tenet of economic viability and sustainability, as well as the key to providing cost effective government services, is a limitation on government’s ability to interfere with the creation of private capital and innovation. In other words, government – together with the community – must define the essential, core services it should provide to support the following goals and values and then, in the words of Tom Peters, “stick to its knitting”:

- Health and safety needs of the community and residents responsively provided
- Economic recovery and growth stimulated through diversified and innovative solutions
- Environmentally sustainable growth promoted
- Recreational, cultural and natural resources that nourish the body and spirit
- At-risk children, seniors and families protected and nurtured to promote self-sufficiency

Embedded in this paradigm is the further goal of how best to provide the essential, core services. Outsourcing and partnering with non-profit companies, private companies, or other government agencies may, in some cases, provide the best service at the lowest cost. In these cases, the government’s role remains crucial in providing oversight and assuring accountability.

In the domain of economic development, government’s role is to ensure that adequate physical and administrative infrastructure exists to facilitate the free and efficient flow of goods and services that lead to job creation. In severe economic downturns such as the one we are currently experiencing, government can provide a valuable role in stimulating economic activity. Therefore, I am recommending that we immediately consider implementing some or all of the following approaches:

- Realign capital spending to accelerate projects that immediately create construction jobs.
- Review and revise as necessary regulations that may inhibit job creation.
- Utilize non-recurring, one-time money to:
 - provide additional investments in economic development that create or retain jobs; and,
 - fund limited duration “civilian corps” jobs for the unemployed (especially those losing unemployment benefits) to work in areas that target economic development, public health, and public safety needs. [This program may provide the additional benefit of keeping some people in their homes].
- Utilize the broad charter of the County’s Industrial Development Authority to expand its focus to that of an Economic Development Authority. With professional management and a policy board of directors made up of stakeholders, the Authority would carry out the strategic mission of deploying economic development resources that optimize our “competitive footprint” in the following ways: negotiating incentive arrangements; owning land, raising private equity to fund development of research parks / inventoried land, issuing debt.

Customer Service. In the book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap – and Others Don't*, the authors stress the importance of unifying the organization and its most valued asset: employees around a guiding principle. An organization that is passionate about serving its customers and unifies its employees around this principle is an organization that remains true to its mission. We do provide good customer service. In fact, I hear many examples of extraordinary efforts to satisfy our customers. But, the way to become a great customer service organization is to provide service consistently, reliably and faithfully – this is the mission of our newly created Client Service Group. Organizational-wide dedication to customer service begins with changing our beliefs: that we are an organization which,

- Is fully aligned with customer needs
- Effectively and proactively addresses customer needs in order to reduce the cost of service delivery
- Promotes business and partnership practices that support new ways of providing essential services at lower cost with greater efficiency

As described above in Community Building, placing our services closer to our customers is the key to our success. A consolidated call center – perhaps operated in partnership with the private sector, greater use of cutting-edge communications technology, and more intensive use of virtual (internet) resources for such services as bill paying and permitting (including remote digital kiosks in commercial establishments) are examples of tools that will be instrumental in transforming us into a great customer service organization.

Organizational Culture Success in realizing the vision described thus far is solely dependent on our ability to transform the organizational culture. Palpable signs of transformation are evident at all levels of the organization as employees begin to feel empowered to become part of the change process through the following initiatives:

- Leadership development training has been established as an urgent priority and the first class is underway
- Employees have been motivated and trained to become “change agents” throughout the organization
- Employees are learning to become accountable to customers and each other; measureable performance standards are being established related to levels of service and resource sufficiency
- Organic teamwork and functional integration is being instituted through department restructuring
- The establishment of ethical standards of personal conduct embraced by diverse and morally strong employees.

A key to the success of this cultural transformation are fairly and equitably compensated employees who are educated, trained, motivated and supported in their pursuit of creative, satisfying work which fulfills their sense of purpose, passion and pride. To that end, I first recommend that the County undertake a comprehensive pay and compensation study that measures our salary and benefits structure against comparable private and public employers.

Before this study would be undertaken the remaining organizational restructuring will be completed. To ensure that job classifications and job design are consonant with a 21st century workforce and organization, I will seek the advice of a small group of four or five human resource professionals from the private sector. A critical piece to this puzzle will be the willingness of Civil Service to consider such transformations.

In conclusion, I and my staff are committed to achieving the vision, goals and objectives recommended in this proposal. Budget preparations have already begun in strategy meetings I am conducting with all departments in which we examine and question long-held beliefs about the role of government and the most effective way to deliver service (see attached document entitled, *Required Information for First Pre-Budget Meeting With Departments*). I look forward to our discussion of these most important policy decisions at the upcoming Board retreat.

Michael Merrill, Interim County Administrator
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