San Rafael Action Plan

A City-Focused Action Plan for 2013-14

March 2013

Purpose of the Plan

In the beginning throes of the 2008-12 Great Recession, the San Rafael City Council approved a "Recession Action Plan" which carried the City through the reduction of almost 70 staff positions and massive budget deficits. Now that a level of some financial stability has been achieved, a new plan is needed to guide the City into what some are calling "the new normal" or the "Great Reset."

Past Great Depression or Recession-type events have led to new systems of doing things that replaced the old way over a period of years. Cities need to "reimagine" and evolve to a new way of prioritizing and providing community services with new fiscal constraints.

This Action Plan document is a brief summary of the strategies and action steps that illustrate what the City of San Rafael expects to embark upon as an organization in the near future.

"The City organization is moving beyond existing community service approaches to create something new – operationally, fiscally, and in terms of communications and quality of life."
Mayor Gary Phillips

"Reimagining" Philosophy

We can no longer count on growing staff numbers and growing resources to return to the exact service levels of the pre-Great Recession. The City has eliminated close to 20% of its workforce in the past few years and only expects to add staff in a very limited and strategic way moving forward. Therefore, the City must reimagine and reform itself to be successful into the future. This means a more strategic view of efficiency, innovation, creativity, technology, and partnerships.

Another part of the City's plan must be a very deliberate focus on specific core services. The City must do a superior job at carrying out a newly formed set of services, rather than doing a merely satisfactory job trying to offer widely comprehensive services to meet all requests.

Moving into the future, local governments may likely have even fewer resources than they have today. Part of the City's plan must include even more partnerships to deliver the results that our community desires. It is going to take the additional power of our business and residential communities to help address significant social, environmental, and cultural issues.

Four "Reimagining" Areas

The philosophy is expressed through specific actions in four key areas:

Operational – Focuses on the internal structure and management of the City's employees. The "Reimagining" view is an organization that focuses on the most efficient way of delivering needed services while utilizing creativity, technology, innovation, and a shared service mentality.

Financial – Focuses on how the City should approach its municipal finances. The "Reimagining" view is an organization that is planning strategically for slow long term growth rather than the "survival mode" of the past several years.

External Communications – Focuses on the importance of communications with neighborhood groups, business groups, visitors, and all those who make up the San Rafael community. The "Reimagining" view is an organization that is actively open and transparent.

Quality of Life – Focuses on community interests and improving San Rafael for its residents, businesses, tourists, etc. The "Reimagining" view acknowledges that the past tools (e.g. Redevelopment, staffing levels) are no longer available and new ways of doing business are required.

Operational Actions

Focus on Shared Services. The City must move from "shared services" being the exception to shared services being the norm.
- Create new shared management and service delivery with nearby agencies such as vehicle maintenance.
- Seek shared service opportunities at the regional level as well including new frameworks and systems.
- Continue the successful shared services efforts such as Battalion Chief services with the City of Larkspur, pool management services with the City of Novato, etc.

Analyze and Reimagine Existing Services. Department Directors will work with their management and line staff to analyze existing services and make recommendations regarding:
- Whether the service should continue and in what form
- The most cost effective delivery method
- Ways to improve the current practice.

Analyzing services will include consideration of needed staffing levels and abilities and public input will be sought. The City Council will assess these recommendations and delineate staff priorities. This will be the measuring stick to which requests for new services will be considered. Formalizing this will help align expectations with organizational capacity.

Further Streamline Regulations.
- Staff will analyze existing regulations (e.g. planning, building, and other permits) and the impact versus capacity with a goal of facilitating permits to improve the business climate and overall health.

Reinvigorate Accountability and Incentives. Staff accountability, which is always important, becomes even more important in a smaller organization.
- Managers will work with the Human Resources Department to fully implement a new Performance Appraisal system that reinvigorates accountability.
- Create new recognition and incentive programs to acknowledge excellent staff.

Enhance Internal Communications.
- Create new communications tools from the City Council to managers to all employees.
- Engage mid-management staff and managers to jointly focus on key issues.
- Create a series of informational "brown bags" on topics of interest to employees.

Financial Actions

Fund Current Obligations with Current Operating Revenues. During the Great Recession, the City made many strategic decisions to use reserve or one-time funds to pay for on-going needs.

- The City will fund current operating costs with current operating revenues.

Eliminate Reliance on One-Time Solutions to Balance Budget. The City made many strategic decisions during the Great Recession to use one-time funds to pay for on-going needs and balance the budget. Examples include the use of furloughs, other employee concessions, bond proceeds, and special funds.

- The City will use one-time funds for one-time uses and on-going funds for on-going uses.

Grow Emergency Reserve. The Great Recession severely eroded the City's emergency reserves.

- The City will grow emergency reserves and bring the level back to the 10% stated goal.

Clarify Financial Goals. During the Great Recession, a "deficit" was loosely defined as any remaining gap *after* one time funds and all other revenues were used and all discretionary expenditures were halted.

- The City will clarify financial goals to demonstrate that there are funds (e.g. facility maintenance, capital needs, liabilities) that are underappropriated and will be a key focus of future resource allocation.
- The City should adopt the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) Best Practice Guidelines for Funding Defined Benefits and develop a written funding plan.

Sustain Existing Funding Measures, such as Measure S and C, to Avoid Massive Backsliding. Measure S proceeds make up over 11% of City general fund revenues and are vital to delivering services. Measure C proceeds are also crucial to the Library.

- Such funds must be sustained in order to continue to provide quality services.

Seek Additional Funding Measures. Many of the key issues facing the City can not be addressed with current sources of revenue. For example, many of our public safety and other buildings and infrastructure were built forty to over a hundred years ago and can not continue to serve without maintenance and care.

- The City will continue to seek funding measures that will meet such needs.

External Communications

Improve External Communications to be Actively Open and Transparent. This is a distinctly new and different period for City government but that may not be easily recognized outside of City Hall.

- The City must actively communicate what has changed and how the community can partner with the City to bring about change and improvements.

Update Communications Tools to Reach More Residents. The ways in which the community gets their news has changed dramatically over the last several years.

- The City must retain existing methods but also expand on its current tools and encounter the community through social media, blogs, and other on-line means.

Use Technology to Gain Efficiencies in Communication. Tools are available to improve the efficiency of external communication.

- The City should investigate "virtual city hall" and other tools such as issue tracking software.

Quality of Life

Re-Imagine Economic Development. In our new post-Redevelopment environment, analyze economic development approaches to create new strategies.
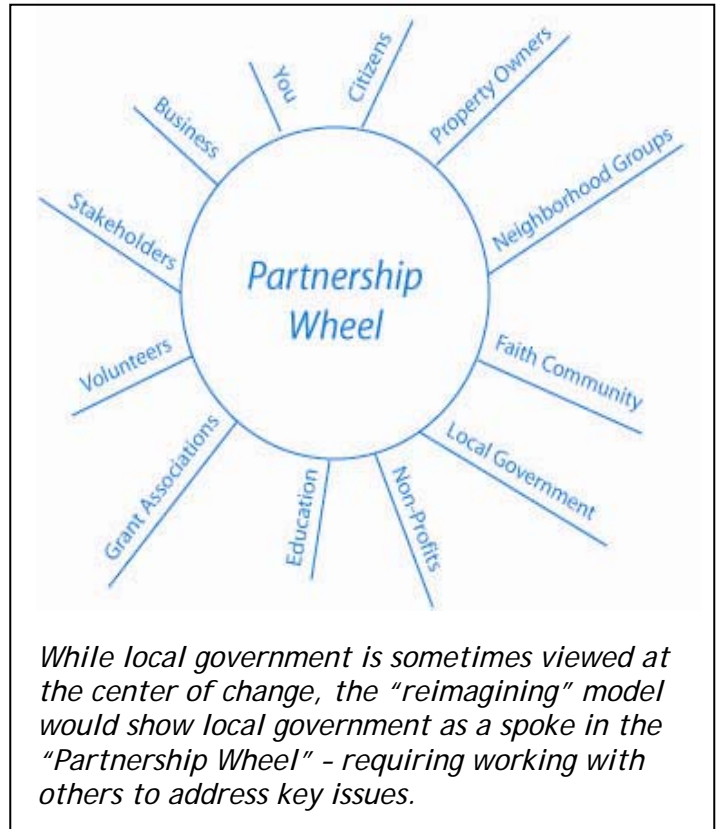
- Utilize new tools and strategies (e.g. Priority Development Areas around commuter rail stations) to re-imagine economic development.

- While the City is fairly built-out and therefore will not "grow our way" to economic prosperity, the importance of business retention and attraction can not be minimized. The City should identify all means to support and incentivize local and sustainable growth.

- Utilize city resources to attract and retain new businesses to improve the local economy.

Re-Imagine Affordable Housing. In our new post-Redevelopment environment, analyze affordable housing approaches to create new strategies.

- Utilize new tools and strategies to re-imagine affordable housing including a full range from "Housing First" to market rate developments.

Partner with the Community to Take on the Key Issues Facing the City. Businesses, non-profits, neighborhoods, schools, faith-based and secular organizations will all be necessary to address key issues. Problems that can be solved by one entity are not very big problems.

- Continue recent efforts such as stakeholder groups, subcommittees, and focused community partnerships to address key issues. Some recent examples include the Homelessness Stakeholders Group, the Climate Change Action Plan quarterly meetings, and the series of workshops on Group Homes.

- Work with the community to retain quality parks, open space, and cultural events as public and private funding declines. San Rafael must retain its identity as an active community with a strong sense of pride.

While local government is sometimes viewed at the center of change, the "reimagining" model would show local government as a spoke in the "Partnership Wheel" – requiring working with others to address key issues.

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