

BLACK DIAMOND CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES - RETREAT
June 18, 2021
Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Benson called the special meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Councilmembers Deady, Oglesbee, Wisnoski, Mulvihill, de Leon, O'Donnell, Page

ABSENT: None

Staff present: May Miller, Finance Director; Jamey Kiblinger, Police Chief; Seth Boettcher, Public Works Director; Andrew Williamson, MDRT/Ed Dev Director; Krista White-Swain, Municipal Court Judge; Rob Reed, IS Manager; Mona Davis, Community Development Director; Greg Smith, Fire Chief; and Brenda L. Martinez, City Clerk/HR Manager.

Mayor Benson welcomed everyone and turned the meeting over to our facilitator, Jim Reid of The Falcon Group.

For meeting content and discussion attached is the meeting summary which is incorporated into the minutes.

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 3:34 p.m.

ATTEST:



Carol Benson, Mayor



Brenda L. Martinez, City Clerk

CITY OF BLACK DIAMOND CITY COUNCIL RETREAT

Friday, June 18, 2021
10:15 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Via Zoom Meeting Conferencing

SUMMARY

OF THE MEETING'S MAJOR DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS

ATTENDED: Mayor Carol Benson; Councilmembers Tamie Deady, Kristiana de Leon, Leih Mulvihill, Bernie O'Donnell, Melissa Oglesbee, Debbie Page, and Chris Wisnoski; Leadership Team Members Brenda Martinez, City Clerk; Rob Reed, Information Technology Manager; May Miller, Finance Director; Mona Davis, Community Development Director; Jamey Kiblinger, Police Chief; Andy Williamson, Master Development Review Team (MDRT)/Economic Development Director; and Seth Boettcher, Public Works Director; Krista White-Swain, Municipal Court Judge; Greg Smith, Mountain View Fire and Rescue Director; residents Virginia Jeffries, Kristen Bryant, Justin Wortman, and Andre Koch; a representative of the Chamber of Commerce; and facilitator Jim Reid, The Falconer Group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE MAJOR DECISIONS

This meeting focused on three major substantive issues: 1) the City's capacity to address the major challenges of the future; 2) Black Diamond's economic base; and 3) the City Council's role in governing the City. Below are highlights of the discussions and decisions that emerged from each conversation.

Department directors provided contextual information about their departments' missions, priorities, and work plans during the first two hours of the meeting. This summary does not capsuleize the briefings. Their PowerPoint presentations were sent to the Council after the meeting

STRENGTHENING THE CITY'S CAPACITY TO ADDRESS FUTURE CHALLENGES

The City Councilmembers are interested in ensuring that City government has the resources it needs to meet the challenges of the future. Black Diamond is changing as a result of the community's rapid growth and development, and changes Black Diamond is experiencing are likely to accelerate.

Councilmembers and Mayor Benson discussed the resources the City will need to successfully manage change and lead the community into a bright future, including:

- additional employees to manage an expanding portfolio of programs and services;
- competitive salaries and benefits to attract the best talent;

- hiring processes that ensure positions are filled as quickly and efficiently as possible so that the delivery of services and programs is seamless;
- a diverse workforce that reflects the changing demographics of Black Diamond's population;
- facilities that allow employees to provide effective customer service and the public to gather for community events and celebrations;
- up-to-date technology to enable employees to work productively and efficiently;
- infrastructure necessary to maintain Black Diamond's quality of life, including roads, bridges, trails, parks, and cable; and
- strong administrative leadership to facilitate agreement among the Mayor, Council, and employees for a common vision, and the goals, priorities, and work plans to advance it.

A recurring theme of this discussion was the need for long-range strategic planning. For example, department directors and Councilmembers cited the need for succession planning to ensure that the size of the staff and the level of talent accurately reflect increasingly demanding challenges, responsibilities, and services.

The Council and Mayor agreed that a succession plan is an urgent need. It should "right size" staffing, prepare the City for the departures of long-time employees with institutional knowledge, prepare the next generation of leaders, ensure seamless transitions between employees, strengthen hiring processes, update job descriptions to reflect future demands and needs, and illuminate strategies to diversify the workforce.

Councilmembers agreed that hiring an Administrator is the first step toward matching the City's human and physical resources to the demands and needs of the future. Mayor Benson stated that she would prefer to focus on filling vacant positions and building the staff's capacity before hiring a City Administrator.

Councilmembers suggested that they, the Mayor, and department directors should meet in Council study sessions to further define the role and responsibilities of an Administrator. Then the Council's Finance Committee could work with Mayor Benson and May Miller to estimate the costs involved, including the position's salary and benefits and consultant services to recruit and hire an Administrator.

The Council and Mayor also agreed on the need for a long-term facilities plan. At the beginning of the meeting department directors and Judge White-Swain had described the difficulties both the staff and public are experiencing because of insufficient space. Mayor Benson mentioned that work to produce the long-term facilities plan was started but suspended because of higher priorities and understaffing. She suggested that federal funds might help pay the cost of the plan. Councilmembers expressed an interest in her suggestion as a way to revive the long-term space planning.

As this session drew to a close, Councilmembers stated their desire to help the Mayor succeed in her role as the Chief Executive Officer of the City.

EXPANDING BLACK DIAMOND'S ECONOMIC BASE

The Council expressed an interest in focusing on local, homegrown businesses as a strategy for distinguishing Black Diamond's economy from that of other South King County cities that have banked on big box stores to expand their economies and budgets. A few members observed that encouraging

and nurturing smaller businesses, including home-based enterprises, would help preserve Black Diamond's small town, rural character. And a homegrown economy could provide a unique, competitive advantage.

The Council and Administration agreed that the City's ambitions for the future depend on expanding its economic base, including identifying, gaining public support for, and implementing a sustainable source of revenue. For example, the City is currently working with the Mountain View Fire and Rescue Department to find new funding sources to sustain its services in the future.

The group acknowledged that sales tax revenues from the construction of Ten Trails and other developments will continue to be the City's sustainable revenue source for the foreseeable future. But everyone anticipates the time when that is no longer the case. Therefore, long term strategies are needed, including new, sustainable funding sources. Mayor Benson mentioned one possibility—revenues generated by the sale of marijuana were the City to allow it to be sold in Black Diamond.

Other strategies may be needed, too. Here are three that were briefly mentioned:

1. Councilmember Page recommended reducing "sales tax leakage." She cited a 2008 study that documented the loss of sales tax revenue to a city when its residents must leave town to purchase goods because they are not available in their community. An example of "sales tax leakage" experienced by Black Diamond is this: With no grocery store in town, Black Diamond residents must travel out of town to purchase groceries. Thus, they pay sales tax to the jurisdiction in which they are shopping. If Black Diamond had a grocery store, the City would capture this source of sales tax revenue, at least in part.
2. Zoning is an important tool for expanding the City's economic base. Updating the zoning along Highway 169 might increase commercial and business opportunities. Zoning could also be used to incentivize home-based businesses. Mona Davis mentioned that she is interested in exploring with the Council how zoning could be more creatively used as an economic development tool.
3. Partnerships might result in the expansion of the City's economic base. One that was suggested was a partnership between the City and a community college to offer "satellite" educational opportunities. Another could be in "green" technology, where the City and solar companies could work together.

As the discussion was closing, Councilmembers reiterated that expanding the economic base is needed to fund core services, such as police and public works, let alone new programs or services. The 2022 Budget development process should identify if there is a gap between revenue and cost projections. That would help the Mayor and Council determine if additional staff could be hired, including a City Administrator. These projections would also assist in consideration of "one time" expenditures, such as a new City Hall or a facility for the Courts and Police. In response to Councilmember O'Donnell's suggestion that the City needs a better understanding of the revenues that Ten Trails will provide the City, Andy Williamson said he will send to the Council the fiscal report from the Master Planned Development. And at the very end of this conversation, potential long-term strategies were mentioned, such as the Business and Occupation (B&O) tax.

THE CITY COUNCIL'S ROLE AND PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MAYOR

City Councilmembers are interested in fulfilling their role as the City's legislative body. They seek to be proactive rather than reactive. They also have great respect for the Mayor and department directors, and, therefore, wish to work cooperatively and collaboratively with Mayor Benson and her leadership team.

As the discussion unfolded, Councilmembers defined an equal partnership with the Administration as one where everyone works together as a team, providing support to each other and defining and agreeing on a common vision and agenda. In other words, they would be guided by long-term, strategic thinking and planning. They would all work to strengthen communication so that the Council is kept informed about what the City is doing to advance the vision, and no Councilmember is surprised by questions or comments they receive from the public.

One Councilmember commented that periodically the Council should "get into the weeds" with the Mayor and her staff. For example, the Mayor would seek the Council's interests and opinions about how to transform Highway 169 into a safer connector through the community and an economic development engine for the City.

The Council also stated that it should play a role in helping to establish a vision and the goals, actions, and performance measures that are used to gauge progress in achieving that vision. Early in the meeting Mayor Benson articulated a set of goals, so Jim Reid asked if these might be the starting point for a set of goals that could be agreed on by her and the Council. The goals Mayor Benson offered were:

1. **Growth and Development:** Growth is planned and communicated in a responsible way that retains our strong sense of community and livability.
2. **Social and Economic Vitality:** An economically vital and diverse community that is supported by robust businesses and supportive services.
3. **Environmental Stewardship:** Environmental resources are proactively enhanced, protected and stewarded.
4. **City Leadership and Services:** Leadership and accountability is provided in the delivery of public services for our growing and diversifying community.
5. **Infrastructure:** Infrastructure systems that are planned, designed, built, and maintained well to support current and future community needs.
6. **Mobility:** Getting around town is easier for people who live, work and play here.

After the Mayor presented the goals, Councilmember de Leon suggested incorporating accountability and inclusiveness. Mayor Benson welcomed that suggestion by saying that if the Council were interested in the goals and adding the two concepts, she would work with them.

Councilmember Deady added: "Follow up is really important." One way to build upon today's retreat would be to add to a Council work session agenda every month an item from this meeting or from the mutual goals of the Mayor and Council.

At the end of this discussion, Councilmember Oglesbee concluded that "We're all in this together. We need to use the variety of talents among us." Councilmembers also observed that they and the Mayor have the same direction and goals and should sit down together to agree on a set of annual or bi-annual priorities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS MEETING

At the beginning of the meeting Councilmembers identified what they hoped they would accomplish today. Councilmember Wisnoski said they needed to “start a journey of a thousand steps with one step” toward working together with the Mayor and her team so that the Council can “understand how everything fits together.” They also recognized that this is a unique time in which big decisions are needed to manage growth and development and to unite the community. And they mentioned keeping current projects and future ambitions, such as a new City Hall, on track.

At the end of the retreat, the Councilmembers who spoke said they felt they had taken that first step and accomplished the purposes they had intended the meeting to achieve.