



TOWN OF KILL DEVIL HILLS

Land Where Flight Began

MEMORANDUM

January 13, 2020

TO: Mayor and Board of Commissioners

FROM: Debora P. Díaz, Town Manager

REF: New Business

2. Discussion to establish goals for possible facilitated Board of Commissioners retreat (Attached NB-2A, NB-2B, NB-2C and NB-2D)

Members of the Board of Commissioners (BOC) have expressed a desire to have a facilitated retreat conducted. Staff has been in contact with the UNC-CH School of Government (SOG) and they have requested completion of the attached form (NB-2A) prior to scheduling a retreat. One of the instructors at the SOG offers the following as a beginning point of discussion:

“What do we need to accomplish to consider the retreat a success? Once this desired retreat outcome is reached, it becomes easier to filter out the possible agenda items that don’t move the board towards this goal.”

Several retreats have been held by different governing boards for Kill Devil Hills, with the most recent on March 20, 2012. A copy of those minutes is attached (NB-2B) for your information. This retreat was facilitated by Mayor Davies. The Board established ground rules for the session and proceeded to discuss:

1. General expectations of all governing board members;
2. The Board’s expectations of the Mayor;
3. Format of regular meeting agendas;
4. Term limits for appointed boards and committees; and
5. Updates for the 1997 Mission Statement and Goals and Objectives.

The March 20th meeting was also that at which the Board’s Code of Ethics was originally adopted.

On January 6 and 7, 2000 the BOC held a retreat facilitated by an instructor at the SOG, Kurt Jenne. The agenda for the retreat was:

1. Board relations;
2. Goals and Objectives;

3. Planning issues;
4. Beach nourishment and other issues;
5. Evaluation.

A copy of the January 6 and 7 retreat minutes are also attached (NB-2C) to this memorandum.

Additional Staff research included verifying that there are facilitators in the State, other than the SOG, that can and are willing to conduct a retreat for Kill Devil Hills. An option to moving this item forward might include giving the Mayor or Mayor Pro Tem authority to contact facilitators and communicate the Board's goal for a facilitated retreat, obtain a cost estimate for the service, potential dates the retreat could be conducted, generally get a feel for whether or not there would be a good fit between facilitator and BOC, and report back to the Board at the first meeting in February. Staff has included in the attachments (NB-2D) for this item two papers from instructors at the SOG about retreats and how to achieve the goals set for them.

Staff will provide assistance at any level on this issue to help meet the Board's needs and expectations.

Board guidance will be appropriate.

Retreat Facilitation Intake Form
For SOG internal purposes only.

Questions or discussion: Lydian Altman, 919-962-0103

Completed forms, by phone interview or email to: lydian@sog.unc.edu

Name	
Position/title	
Organization	
Address	
Phone/fax/E-mail	
Is contact also the MOU or contract authority? If not, please include that contact information.	
Meeting dates/length of meeting	
Alternate dates	
Location	
Brief description of the group (# in group, membership, history, etc.)	
Topics, objectives, issues or difficulties for the group (specific examples)?	
Used a facilitator(s) before?	

Who?	
Why is a facilitator desired? Does the entire group want one?	
Who will choose the facilitator(s)?	
Willing to have a planning meeting or conference call? When?	
Budget (Fee? Expenses?)	
Other notes	



TOWN OF KILL DEVIL HILLS

Public Notice

Notice is hereby given that on Thursday and Friday, January 6 and 7, 2000 the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners will hold a retreat with UNC-CH facilitator Kurt Jenne to discuss and review items of various interest to the operation and direction of the Town of Kill Devil Hills.

This retreat will begin at 7:00 o'clock p.m. on Thursday, January 6, 2000 in the Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 102 Town Hall Drive, off Colington Road, and resume on Friday, January 7, 2000 at 8:30 a.m.

At this time, the agenda for this retreat is as follows:

1. Board Relations
2. Goals and Objectives
3. Planning Issues
4. Beach Nourishment and Other Issues
5. Evaluation

Posted this 31st day of December, 1999.

Mary E. Quidley
Town Clerk

copies to: Mayor and Board of Commissioners, TM, TA; all department heads; all town bulletin boards; Sunshine List, including all news media; file

Minutes of the Thursday and Friday, January 6 and 7, 2000 Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners retreat held at approximately 7:40 p.m. on January 6 and 8:45 a.m. on January 7, 2000 in the Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 102 Town Hall Drive, off Colington Road.

Members Present: Mayor Sherry Rollason; Commissioners Bill Morris, Bill Pitt, Jeff Shields, and Bob Woodard

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Debora P. Diaz, Town Manager; Kurt Jenne, UNC-CH Institute of Government Facilitator

At approximately 7:40 p.m. on Thursday, January 6, 2000 Mayor Rollason called this meeting of the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners to order. This meeting is being held for the purpose of the Board of Commissioners to hold a retreat with Mr. Kurt Jenne who is an instructor and facilitator from the Institute of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

As the Board conducted their discussions, amendments to the planned agenda were made as it was realized that additional discussions were needed, or intended topics were more appropriately discussed in a planning worksession setting. The agreed upon agenda is highlight in bold text within this document.

1. Convene/Ground Rules

As part of their initial discussions the Board reviewed previously established Groundrules for Effective Communications that will help them conduct a successful retreat.

2. Expectations and Relations.

A. Board Expectations of Each Other.

1. Everyone is to participate in discussions and meetings.
2. Information between Board members should be freely exchanged so that fully-informed decisions can be made.
3. The Board should be more specific in identification and realization of established goals and objectives.
4. Board members should agree on where to draw the line beyond which they should not go to avoid "micro-managing" town

business; where governing board/staff responsibilities separate.

- a. The Board approves positions and funds based on information provided by the manager; the manager hires and fires people in those positions.
- b. The Board approves purchases in accordance with State regulations pertaining to municipal purchasing and bidding requirements; with authority resting on the manager/staff for lesser items.

B. Board expectations of the Mayor.

1. The Mayor should be strong on enforcement of time rules at public hearings and be consistent in handling speakers time limitations.
2. The Mayor should share public functions, and in turn the Mayor can count on Board members to provide assistance with public functions.
3. The Mayor should use her position to guide discussion procedure on issues during meetings: discussion/motion/discussion/vote.

C. Board expectations of the Manager.

1. The Board should be offered a range of feasible/reasonable options or alternatives in addition to a recommendation from the manager.

D. Manager expectations of the Board.

1. Discussions with department heads and employees are fine, but expect that Staff and/or Board will bring these to the manager who must know about them in order to effectively do her job.
 - a. It is okay for Board members to listen to employee concerns but steer employees toward getting those concerns resolved through proper administrative means.
2. The Groundrules for Effective Communications established by the Board should apply to the staff as well.
3. When Board members receive complaints, properly channel them through staff, giving as much information as possible so the

problem/issue can be properly addressed.

4. Utilize staff expertise and knowledge to answer questions and obtain information.
5. Be informed. Review information provided by staff. Request additional information if desired.
6. Board members should share concerns they have about another elected official or appointed staff with that individual.
7. Realize that the personalities and character of past governing boards were unique; that future boards may be comprised of past and current board members; and that staff must deal fairly and consistently with all.
8. Let staff know why information is requested. This may help clarify what the Board members want to learn or achieve from the information and allow staff to provide input on other available resources that might be relevant, and thus avoid unnecessary busy work.

D. Relations.

1. The Board determined that seating arrangements for Board of Commissioners meetings would remain the same.
2. Board relations is further defined in the above "expectations" lists.
3. Continue "top-down" budget guidance.
4. Fit annual goals session into budget worksession but do a retreat after each election of new Board members.

3. Advisory Board Appointments.

- A. There needs to be some means to familiarize Board members with candidates for appointment.
- B. Appointments and Reappointments should be phased with elections so that when the governing board changes board/committee appointments can also be changing to reflect the changes in leadership.

- C. Limitations on terms of service for board/committees should be considered to provide more opportunities for citizens to contribute.
- D. To initiate this process, staff will research practices elsewhere and report to the Board of Commissioners.
- E. Evaluation on the use of advisory board/committees.
 - 1. Brainstorm on how to make appointments and criteria for those appointments.
 - 2. At the second January meeting, meet with the chairs of various boards/committee to discuss the scope and purpose of each respective group. Prior to this worksession, the manager will report on committee backgrounds, purpose, origin, terms of office, etc. The governing board will consider whether to keep, abolish, or change appointed boards/committees as they deem appropriate.
 - 3. After the worksession in January, establish new procedures that will be shared with board/committee chairs.

4. **Goals and Objectives.**

In order of their prioritized importance, from 0-10, with 10 being most important the Board of Commissioners established the following goals and objectives, including concerns and possible solutions for certain issues:

*A. Beach Nourishment (10) - The issue of beach nourishment is ongoing as a multi-jurisdictional committee.

B. Environment (10)

1. *Issue: Stormwater Management and Sewerage.*

Problem: Runoff and septic goes into Kitty Hawk Bay and Buzzard Bay.

Solutions: Investigate Nags Head program as possible basis for ordinance or other controls; formulate plan/ordinance for Kill Devil Hills; invite Nags Head Commissioner Bob Muller to a Kill Devil Hills meeting to discuss Nags Head's experience and possible application to Kill Devil Hills.

2. *Issue: Trash/Litter Blowing.*

Problem: Blowing trash - what are the sources?

Solutions: Develop ordinances that can be backed up by staff; examine refuse collection schedule (including frequency); investigate what other localities (including resort municipalities) are doing; use inmate labor on a regular basis.

3. *Issue: Land Protection.*

Problems: Protect Nags Head Woods land owned by Kill Devil Hills; removal of vegetation on sound-front properties.

Solutions: Board of Commissioners should take the initiative to provide environmental conservation of Nags Head Woods and over the next two years seriously consider some long-term/permanent conservation measures; CAMA will require retention of a vegetative buffer and enforcement will probably fall to the local jurisdiction what should the Town's enforcement posture be?

- *C. Internal Structure/Productivity (8) - The Board of Commissioners expect the Town Manager to tell them when more people are needed to maintain successful performance levels in any area; such needs are to be clearly supported by data; we should strive to realize productivity gains that can allow redeployment of existing staff; locate "best practices" or benchmarks that will help in evaluating our own operations; the Board and Town Manager should seek out opportunities/projects (\$25,000 - \$100,000) that can help make a higher investment in productivity to yield identification of direct (non-administrative) and indirect (administrative) employees and benefit the Town by increasing the direct employee positions and decreasing the indirect employee positions.
- D. Stiffen Language in Existing Ordinances and Enforcement of Ordinances (6) - There needs to be a stronger, more restrictive home occupation ordinance that will prohibit clearly incompatible non-residential activities and material and the rewrite of Chapter 21, Zoning, needs to take this into account.
- *E. Progress on Streets/Drainage (6)

- F. Project Mainstreet - US 158 (6) - The Board should work to turn the bypass route into a "main street" for Kill Devil Hills by deciding what we want it to be, then charging the Planning Board with the task of recommending development controls to implement the vision by 2003. Can this be done in cooperation/coordination with other adjoining municipalities on US 158?
- G. Beautification (5) - addressed above
- *H. Aviation Park (3) - Recreation.
- *I. Town Hall (2) - This includes the new building and renovation projects
- J. Revenue Formula Revision (1) - The Board needs to consider the feasibility of requesting amendment of certain revenue distribution formulas.
- K. 100th Anniversary of the First Flight/Kill Devil Hills 50th Anniversary of Incorporation (0)

*In Progress

5. Evaluation.

- A. Those things done well.
 1. The Board worked well together.
 2. Each member spoke up and expressed themselves.
 3. There was a good prioritization of goals.
 4. There was good flexibility in adjusting the agenda to fit the Board's needs.
 5. The Board deliberated issues to there resolution.
 6. The Board adhered to stated time restrictions.
- B. Those things that need improvement.
 1. There should be more coverage in detail of other goals.

This concluded retreat discussions and at approximately 3:15 p.m. Mayor Rollason adjourned this meeting (January 6-7, 2000 retreat) of the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners.



Submitted by:

Mary E. Quidley

Mary E. Quidley
Town Clerk

These minutes were approved at the January 26, 2000 meeting of the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners.

Sherry Rollason

Sherry Rollason
Mayor



TOWN OF KILL DEVIL HILLS

Land Where Flight Began

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

NOTICE is hereby given that on Tuesday, March 20, 2012 at 8:30 a.m. the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners will hold a planning retreat in the Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 102 Town Hall Drive, off Colington Road. During this meeting, the Board will discuss and possibly take action on items of importance related to the ongoing business of the Town, Board of Commissioners policies and procedures, and issues that may be prioritized for action during the 2012 calendar year and beyond.

The public is cordially invited to attend this planning retreat.

Posted this 28th day of February 2012.

Mary E. Quidley
Town Clerk

Copies to: Mayor & BOC, TM, TA in their packet materials; all department heads; all Town bulletin boards; KDH Sunshine List, including all local news media; KDH Electronic Distribution List; KDH website and Facebook; file

Minutes of the Tuesday, March 20, 2012 special meeting of the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners held for the purpose of conducting a planning retreat in the Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 102 Town Hall Drive, off Colington Road.

- Members Present:** Mayor Sheila Davies; Commissioners Mike Hogan, Brandi Rheubottom and Bob Woodard
- Members Absent:** Commissioner Paul Buske
- Others Present:** Debora P. Diaz, Town Manager; Greg Loy, Planning Director; Mary E. Quidley, Town Clerk

Call to Order

At 8:30 a.m. Mayor Davies called this meeting of the Board of Commissioners to order and welcomed all present. Commissioner Buske is still recovering from surgery and may or may not be able to attend.

She explained that the stated purpose of the retreat is for the Board to discuss and possibly take action on items of importance related to the ongoing business of the Town, Board of Commissioners policies and procedures, and issues that may be prioritized for action during the 2012 calendar year and beyond.

1. Board of Commissioners Interactions

A. Meeting Ground Rules

GROUND RULES

- Be open and honest;
- Be loyal to each other;
- Be helpful to each other;
- Listen actively;
- Bring a sense of humor;
- Show interest in other's issues;
- Disagree when necessary;
- Offer innovative thoughts;
- Be discreet and confidential;
- Trust each other.

The Board of Commissioners agreed to follow these meeting ground rules as closely as possible, and also agreed that it is expected there will be disagreements from time to time but that they should not be taken personally. Seeking common ground is important.

B. Expectations (Attached R-1B)

The list of “expectations” for the Board of Commissioners were proposed to help the Board members understand individual outlooks on the positions they have and how as individuals and as a group the Board can help fulfill these expectations for the benefit of citizens, visitors and Staff. The Board agreed that this list of expectations would be distributed to newly electeds as a matter of procedure.

Members of the Board cited and commented on items they felt of noted importance, which are underlined below. Those that were amended reflect strikethrough lines.

General Expectations of All Members of the Board of Commissioners

- Maintain a professional decorum;
- Refrain from side conversations during the meeting that interrupt the proceeding of the meeting;
- Be courteous and respectful to those who address the Board, of Staff, and of each other; be a good listener at all times; thoroughly research issues and listen to board debate;
- Always remember we are working for the citizens and property owners, and let your actions always be in their best interests; be a representative they can be proud of;
- Contribute your ideas and knowledge on any given issue – share your expertise;
- Keep an open mind, thoroughly research issues and listen to board debate
- Focus disagreements on the substance of an issue, not the person presenting the issue; state disagreements, concerns, dilemmas and reluctance so others can consider, discuss, and address;
- Encourage citizens who express interest in issues to attend meetings;
- Set clear goals, consistent with fiscal constraints, and follow them;
- Share all valid, relevant information with the board; bring factual, verifiable information; base your decisions on good information;
- Individual members should make it clear that they do not speak for the whole board, unless authorized to do so;
- When you have personnel concerns, address those concerns to the Town Manager or Assistant Town Manager and allow personnel issues to be handled in accordance with the Town’s Personnel Policy without interference from the board; do not address any issues about a department to a department head except for issues that any citizen would go directly to the department head to handle;
- Adhere to the provisions of the Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners.

Board Members Expectations of the Mayor

- Keep fully informed and share relevant matters with the board;
- Take a firm leadership role; help the board successfully complete tasks; exercise firm control when needed;
- Assure that all board members are heard;
- Keep the board on track during meetings;
- Take a position on issues;
- Keep open lines of communication with members of the board.

C. Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners (Attached R-1C)

All members of the Board of Commissioners have received ethics training as required by North Carolina General Statutes. NCGS 160A-86 also requires local governing boards adopt an ethics policy to guide members in the performance of their official duties. The packet materials included a draft policy that meets the requirements of law.

Pertinent to this discussion, and also as a report, Mayor Davies explained that students at First Flight High School will be working on “teachable moments” that will address issues of importance, including but not necessarily limited to: speed on US 158, chickens, points of law that pertain to local governments, and issues that may require actions of the Board. Teachable Moments will be filmed for showing at a future meeting of the Board and also for broadcast on Channel 20.

One of the issues noted, which was included in the draft Ethics Policy, was that Board members should not interfere with actions in the departments – should not tell Staff what to do, how to do it, etc. It is important, however, for Board members to have a “sympathetic ear” to citizens’ issues and to help navigate them through the processes at the Town Hall.

It is also important for Board members to speak their mind in the best interest of the Town, without worry of re-election, even when public opinion may strongly go in the opposite direction.

The Board agreed to have this item placed on the March 28, 2012 agenda for adoption.

2. Board of Commissioners Operations

Mayor Davies explained that this is an opportunity for the Board to consider the agenda and make any changes they might desire. Important notes and agreed upon changes are identified by underlining.

A. Kill Devil Hills’ Current Agenda

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence – Staff will continue to make sure the Board knows about things that happen that are suitable for remembering during the Moment of Silence.

Agenda Approval

Public Hearing(s)

Public Comment (Time limit of 3 minutes per person; 5 minutes per group) – When announcing this item on the agenda, the Mayor will note the importance of the public commenting on agenda items at this time. Egregious violations of the time limits will be addressed by the Police Department on communication by the Mayor.

Response to Public Comment

Introductions

Old Business

New Business

Presentations – To be held to an overall time limit of 10 minutes per item. If a presentation includes a request of the Board then it automatically reverts to New Business

Commissioners' Agenda

Mayor's Agenda

Town Manager's Agenda

Town Attorney's Agenda

Consent Agenda

Public Comment (Time limit of 3 minutes per person; 5 minutes per group)

Response to Public Comment

Adjourn

B. Appointed boards and committees term limits (Attached R-2B)

The Board was provided information on service terms and whether or not there were term limits already in place for the Town's appointed boards and committees. This item, of particular importance to Commissioner Buske, was placed on the retreat agenda for discussion and potential action to establish term limits for appointees.

An e-mail on this item was received from Richard Baer, who chairs the Town's Board of Adjustment, and it is included with the minutes of this meeting.

The Board discussed the two main sides of this issue: keeping long-time board/committee members to maintain the strength and knowledge they bring; cycling appointments to bring in new ideas, and as with the Planning Board, to make sure, philosophically, agreement with the Board of Commissioners on the direction of the Town is maintained.

It was also agreed to be of importance that: potential appointees are spoken with to make sure they want to serve; those seated that are not going to be reappointed are given the courtesy of being so informed. This is an important area for good communication between the members of the Board of Commissioners, with the note that the Board cannot discuss such matters as a group, which would violate the Open Meetings Law.

Generally, the Board did not feel that it was critical to establish term limits for those boards and committees which currently do not have term limits. This item will be placed on a future meeting agenda for additional discussion and possible action.

3. Board of Commissioners Aspirations for 2012 and Beyond

A. Mission Statement (Attachment R-3A)

In 1996 and 1997 the Board of Commissioners established a Mission Statement for the Town.

Mission Statement - 1997

The Town of Kill Devil Hills is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all citizens by providing the maximum level of service in the most effective and efficient manner while exercising sound fiscal responsibility. We value: citizen participation, honesty and integrity, unity and teamwork, fairness and equity, and our unique natural environment. Our desire is for Kill Devil Hills to be recognized as a wonderful place to live, where our citizens receive high quality services, our employees work in an atmosphere of respect and support, and our leadership stimulates cooperation and innovation in our community.

The current Board of Commissioners reviewed the 1997 Mission Statement and agreed that it was strongly worded and adequately communicated their values and desires, as well. No changes were proposed. However, the Board of Commissioners did identify changes and additions to the Constituent Elements of the Mission Statement, as follows below:

Constituent Elements of the Mission - 1997 - Samples

Civic

- We are committed to the development of a strong family and community atmosphere in Kill Devil Hills and will offer our citizens opportunities to attend and participate in community-wide programs and events.
- We value, encourage and support the active participation of our citizens in achieving and maintaining excellence in our local government.
- Through the use of established communications and action ground rules, the Board of Commissioners will conduct itself and its meetings in a courteous, respectful manner. We will respect the legitimacy of the goals of each member of the Board and will respect the rights of others to pursue goals and policies different from our own. We will be mindful of unique interests, desires and concerns, and will strive together to reach solutions based on compromise and understanding.

Environmental

- We will respect the natural environment of Kill Devil Hills and the Outer Banks and support a variety of events and programs which will enhance public knowledge and awareness of our unique surroundings.
- We will support programs and events to enhance and improve the visual image of Kill Devil Hills.
- We will be responsible keepers of our natural resources and environment, protecting each to preserve them for future generations, and will encourage, preserve, and create green space.

Professional Development

- Through the development and contribution of all employees to the maximum of their potential, the Town will provide quality service, which results in the highest achievable levels of customer satisfaction and recognition for excellence.
- We are committed to providing employees with a supportive environment for their professional and personal growth and to assist them in effectively fulfilling their responsibilities.
- We encourage open employee communications and participation in decision making.

Fiscal

- Service delivery will be cost effective based on the needs of our community and the requirements of local ordinance, and state and federal laws.
- We will enhance public trust and perception through ethical and responsible management of human and financial resources.
- We are dedicated to identification of new and supplemental revenues that can be used to meet the cost demands of good government without placing additional tax burdens on our citizens.

B. Goals and Objectives (Attached R-3B)

With the Mission Statement, in 1997 the Board also adopted five goals and objectives that helped establish a roadmap of long- and short-term strategies to help reach and reinforce each goal. After establishing their unique thoughts on the Constituent Elements of the Mission Statement, the Board reviewed Goals and Objectives that will help guide them during future decision-making processes.

1. **Foster civic pride by enhancing natural beauty of our area.**
 - Vegetation removal/restoration ordinance to address problems associated with uncontrolled vegetation removal.*
 - *Addressing in the 1997 Land Use Plan Update.*
 - Encourage, preserve, and create green space.

2. **Promotion of public perception.**
 - Enhance Town communication with citizenry.*
 - *Solid Waste Services Survey was developed, distributed through the Winter 1997 edition of Monumental News, and tabulated by volunteers from the Baum Center.*

3. **Promotion of family values and beach atmosphere.**
 - Identify and develop parks and recreation locations.*
 - *Dock Street Access improvements.*
 - Recognize that outside visitation is of vital importance to our economy and continue to identify, develop, and maintain recreational and leisure activities and multi-use facilities and such other pursuits that will offer our visitors and citizens a variety of pastimes for their enjoyment.

4. **Maximizing value of taxpayer dollars.**
 - Reduction of positions through attrition, maintaining current service levels.*
 - *Reorganization of positions within the Utilities Department, Systems Division, combined with a work-share program within the Wastewater Division allowed for elimination of a position in the Systems Division and a savings to the Wastewater Fund by reducing personnel expenses.*
 - *Several vacant positions are being evaluated, overall department needs and all options are to be considered before any staff decisions are made concerning these positions.*
 - Continue to investigate hybrids and propane conversion as determined responsible and fiscally beneficial.
 - Pursue beach nourishment to determine the feasibility of moving forward with a project to protect the Town's threatened oceanfront property base and to provide the Board with information on economic impacts of not implementing beach nourishment.

5. **Protection and accessibility of our natural resources.**
 - Through site plan review, stormwater management plans, and other tools available to the Town, continue to work with developers to require stormwater controls, proper site preparation and good engineering.*

- Pursue beach nourishment to determine the feasibility of moving forward with a project to protect our beach natural resource and encourage choice among visitors.

C. 2012 Objectives

Property Use – It was agreed that this would be a topic for the Planning Board/Board of Commissioners joint worksession. A greenspace plan, which the Board of Commissioners expressed interest in having developed for the Town should include potential recommendations on usage of property, such as these tracts, for passive recreation. It was agreed that a citizens' advisory committee could be pursued to work with the Planning Board on this matter. This will be more clearly defined during the joint worksession. An outline for a greenspace program already exists in the Planning Department and this will be included for discussion during the joint worksession.

- 44-acre tract at the west end of the Baum St. Claire Land Tract – place for events? location for land application of effluent (expansion of KDHWTP, LLC)? About 60% of this property is buildable and the rest is wetlands.
- Fresh Pond property – There may be Homeland Security issues, about maintaining the security of a water source, with utilizing this property for recreation purposes and it was agreed that Nags Head should be involved in any discussions about Fresh Pond as the property is in joint ownership.
- South-end Fire Station property – Could this be used for beach parking to access the East Eighth Street access? Possibly.

At 10:21 a.m. a brief break in proceedings was called. The meeting reconvened at 10:36 a.m.

Hybrid Vehicles – Discussion included cost, maintenance costs (including battery replacement – approximately \$6,000), the newness of hybrids (new enough that there is no real history available on reliability, success/failure in other locations, etc.), and the possibility of converting certain vehicles to run on propane gas. Staff will continue to investigate hybrids and propane conversion for usage as may be determined responsible and fiscally beneficial, including inquiring of other municipalities that have used either to find out their opinions.

Beach Nourishment – The Board agreed to have the Town's consultants attend the March 28th or April 9th meetings, if possible, to provide an update. Further, the Town will investigate the potential availability of funds from the Dare County Shoreline Protection

Fund to prepare a report, for an approximate \$90,000 cost, that will provide the concrete data to develop a scope for Kill Devil Hills' beach nourishment project. All Board members agreed that Kill Devil Hills is not prepared to construct a beach nourishment project the size, scope, and expense of Nags Head's project. Further, the Board realized that federal subsidy funds would not be forthcoming, but funds could be available from the State of North Carolina and the Dare County Shoreline Protection Fund to help with costs of any Kill Devil Hills' beach nourishment project.

Communication to the Dare County Manager will advise that Kill Devil Hills is continuing to move forward with beach nourishment, and request funding from the Dare County Shoreline Protection Fund to complete the above-mentioned report.

Beach accesses - Commissioner Woodard asked the Planning Department to begin looking at accesses, such as East Walker Street/East Eden Street/East Hayman Boulevard, etc., that might be suitable for simple walkover ramps.

Zoning Ordinance changes

- Nonconformities – This item will be placed on the joint worksession agenda, including the current nonconformities worksheet and a detail sheet worked up showing changes since it was originally adopted.
- Signs – Smaller and lower commercial, on-premises signs was the primary motivation for this item to be on the retreat agenda. This would be a long-term goal to help beautify US 158 and the Board agreed to re-evaluate the possibility.
- Outdoor displays - (such as folding chairs, umbrellas, advertising and merchandise flags, inner tubes/floats, ceramic pots, and merchandise) This matter was also discussed and an historical perspective provided as this subject was addressed by the Board of Commissioners several years ago. An open meeting with the Board of Commissioners and business owners will also be scheduled for October 24, 2012 to discuss business-friendly issues.
- Trees and vegetation removal – This will be included on the joint worksession agenda as discussion on landscaping. This could also be “species” specific, such as preservation of live oaks. Staff will conduct research and bring information to the joint worksession.
- Others – What is considered “equipment?” Should it be allowed to be parked in residential zoning districts? This item is already under consideration at the Planning Department level and will follow the Planning Board review and recommendation route to the Board of Commissioners. Defining “equipment” and “outdoor storage” are the main points in this issue.

Planning Issues

- Paths connecting paper streets – This will go to the Planning Board and could include allowing community gardens within public rights of way.
- Committees
 - Appearance Committee – The Board agreed to consider establishing an Appearance Committee. Staff will provide the Board with information on this matter.
- Future of Kill Devil Hills
 - Buffer area between residential and business zones (highway sound barrier-type structures, wide setbacks, more vegetation, etc.) - This will also be included on the joint worksession agenda. Buffering should be included during nonconformities discussions to determine whether or not there would be more “weight” given to this item when completing the nonconformities worksheet.
 - LED/LCD lighted signs – This is a matter currently under consideration at the Planning Board level, for which Board of Commissioners input would be helpful and appreciated. The Board was in general agreement that, while attractive, these signs are very distracting and bright and not desirable in Kill Devil Hills.
 - Lighted gas station price signs – Lighting will continue, but not LED or LCD lighting.
 - Visualization of US 158 corridor – The Town currently encourages sidewalks and fewer curbcuts.
 - Sidewalks
 - Curb cuts
 - Protection of the Town as a third-party to private contracts when improvements occur to Town infrastructure, such as roads, and may include road closures, so that the Town has some protection against schedule violations. Staff will investigate this with the Town Attorney and Town Engineer.

The Board of Commissioners agreed to aim for the joint worksession to be held on May 1, 2012 at 5:30 p.m. in conjunction with the Planning Board’s regular meeting.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners at this time, Mayor Davies adjourned this meeting.

It was 12:38 p.m.

Governing Board Retreats

Kurt Jenne

Does your board of commissioners or city council have a hard time resolving members' different views about controversial agenda items, usually leaving somebody mad about the results? Is one or more of your members driven to distraction trying to satisfy citizen complaints while the administration grouses about meddling in administrative matters? Do a few of your members seem always to get angry at each other over every disagreement they have?

No governing board is cursed with all of these problems, but most have experienced at least one of them from time to time. Each of these problems is a signal that the board's process is getting in the way of its products—that what it does suffers from how it goes about doing it. A board needs at least four conditions to function effectively. First, it needs vision, including a clear, agreed-upon set of beliefs and goals to guide its governance. The board does not have to agree totally on this vision for the community, but there should be some common basis for unity. Second, a board needs plans. It needs to map out how it will go about achieving those goals upon which members clearly agree and whether it will try to resolve major policy issues on which they do not agree. This helps to establish a third condition. The board and its administration need to have clear and reasonable expectations of each other so that everyone knows what role he or she is expected to play in achieving goals and resolving conflict. Finally, members of the board and the administration need to be able to work as a team, even during the inevitable conflicts and disagreements. This requires building trust that each member will work for the board's visions and developing the skills to work always as individuals who are also part of a team.

Few governing boards are fortunate enough to create these four basic conditions in the natural course of events. Most have to work at it. New governing board members find themselves together with four to twelve other persons who were chosen by someone else: are varied in their knowledge, skills, and experience; and are expected to produce immediate and effective results as a group. The one dear tie that binds them—service on the board—gives scant guidance for evaluating specific decisions and actions. Those who have never served on the board might have no idea what they can reasonably expect of other board members and often have little or no experience in

working effectively in a group setting. Thus, most boards need to spend part of their time together developing the basic conditions for effective operation.

The regular meeting is ill-suited for pulling the board together into a working team. There is rarely any time-out from the steady stream of routine business. The demands that immediate problems make on attention, energy, and time crowd out those items that have neither strong advocates nor immediate consequences. The board usually is left to deal with long-range thinking, planning, and process issues at the end of a regular meeting, when it has neither the time nor the energy to do them justice.

The setting of the regular meeting also tends to stifle team building. The regular meeting's controlled formality discourages spontaneous and creative thinking and communication. Moreover, board members risk appearing foolish by acting spontaneously and creatively before the large audience at a regular meeting. Special meetings or work sessions held in the same place but at another time do not work much better. Members hardly can resist discussing current problems or issues that are worrying them, and the atmosphere of the regular meeting lingers and haunts the special session, chilling the free exchange of ideas.

Different Time, Different Place, Different Thing

Many governing boards use a retreat to overcome the barriers that the regular meeting and its usual environment place in the way of building teamwork and setting directions. The governing board and any number of its top management staff that the board wants to include literally retreat from the normal patterns of the workplace to think, talk, and plan about how they will do their work.

The retreat is very different from a regular meeting. Developing beliefs and goals, making plans, clarifying roles, and building teamwork all take a lot of concentrated time and attention. The retreat is an opportunity to focus for a long time on a single question—how to work together—without the pressure of a loaded agenda. Consequently, a retreat typically lasts one or two days, during which as few as only one or two issues are dealt with, and the board usually agrees in advance how much it will attempt to do in the time available. By going away from the

What Some Boards Have Done on Their Retreats

The exact format and content of a retreat varies according to what the board wishes to accomplish. The vignettes below briefly describe what several North Carolina boards have done at their retreats over the past few years.

- The largely new council and the new mayor were unclear about exactly what they could accomplish during their terms and exactly how they should go about it. They spent a lot of time discussing their ideas about the respective roles of the mayor, the mayor pro tem, the council, and the city manager. They listed, discussed, and clarified specific expectations they had of each other. The group then discussed how it should make decisions. Members participated in an exercise to test the effectiveness of consensus building as an alternative to majority voting. Finally, the board listed all those matters that would command its attention during the next five years and established a time table for setting priorities among these issues.

- The mostly new governing board was unhappy with the performance of the manager and wanted to identify and resolve the specific sources of its dissatisfaction. Discussion revealed that the previous board had expected the manager to be aggressive in recommending policies for the board to adopt; however, the new board was interested in providing its own policy direction and in having the manager serve largely to carry out the wishes of the board. The group carefully delineated and clarified what the board expected of the manager and what the manager expected of the board. Participants negotiated a clear agreement of what roles the board as a whole, individual members, and the manager would play in decision making and administration.

- In two separate retreats, the governing board developed a management-by-objectives process to help it to achieve a four-year agenda. In the first retreat, the board and the manager developed a set of beliefs that would guide the city's planning and management process and broad goals for the next four years. In the second retreat, the board, the manager, and key staff decided on a process and a schedule for developing a management-by-objectives system. Finally, the board instructed the manager on how he should report progress on the system's development.

- For the first time in many years, there were two new members on the board. The board held a retreat to orient the new members, to make them a part of the group, and probably to learn more about these "strangers." The board concentrated on developing a set of basic beliefs about the community and its governance and on sharing expectations among the commission, the chairman, and the manager. This group found that it helped to start with a discussion of goals each of them would like the board to have over the next five or ten years. Members then looked at these goals and discussed what kind of basic beliefs about government they implied. Finally, the board concentrated its discussion of expectations on those which members had of each other in personal dealings and in the conduct of county business.

regular meeting place, the board can create a relaxed, informal, creative atmosphere in which to work. By disassociating itself from the time and the place of the regular meeting with its cluttered agenda and formal structure, participants can approach their task with a fresh perspective. While the personal risk of being open and creative seems lower in the relaxed atmosphere of the retreat, participants usually sense that it is, at the same time, higher because they cannot fall back on old protective patterns built around limited time, parliamentary procedure, and custom. Thus, the retreat, by its timing, location, and nature, leads everyone to expect that this is a special event, for a special purpose, and not just business as usual. This difference makes it easier for the governing board and top management to pay particular attention to the unusual business for which they have gathered: focusing on the processes they use to accomplish their work.

Making a retreat a special event is an important ingredient in achieving its goals; however, that alone will not guarantee its success. If what happens at the retreat does not improve the way the board functions by changing board members' attitudes, knowledge, and behavior, then participants will quite rightly view it as a waste of time and will be unlikely to allow their time to be wasted on the same kind of activity again. Thorough preparation, careful execution, and thoughtful follow-up all increase the chances of success.

Preparing for the Retreat

Thorough preparation will help to make the most of the valuable time that board members have together in this special setting. It will also help to prevent surprises or last-minute fumbling that could distract participants from the tasks at hand. Preparations should be made to have everything and everyone in place at the start.

Decide on the participants. Everyone on the board should participate. One of the major objectives of any retreat is to develop some unity among members about major aims and behavior within the group, wherever the board can find it. Nobody doubts that they will disagree often about the substance of specific matters that come before the board; however, if the members handle these matters with mutual understanding and respect, the board will be more effective. It is important—whatever agreement

can be reached about behavior, expectations, goals, or basic beliefs—that every member share in that understanding. It takes only one person who is not a part of the process to undermine the effectiveness of such consensus. Great care should be taken to choose a time that clearly is acceptable to every member so all can attend. Many boards have found that if a member is persuaded to agree to a time reluctantly, it is very likely that he or she will cancel at the last minute or simply not show up.

Who participates in the retreat besides members of the governing board varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Boards in cities and counties with a manager invariably include him or her, for the manager is clearly in close partnership with the governing board in all of its work. If other members of the administration work particularly closely with the board, they might also be included. Some boards ask their attorneys or clerks to participate, and some invite appointed finance officers because financial factors dominate their decision making. This choice is entirely the board's. However, the board should be cautious about casting the net too broadly. If the group becomes too large, then communication becomes harder, less personal, and less open. Also, the inclusion of persons on the fringe or outside of the governing board's closest working relationships might inhibit honest and open expression of feelings and ideas, thereby defeating one of the retreat's fundamental purposes.

Find a skilled facilitator. A participant cannot facilitate the group's work and participate in it effectively as well. Participants will work very hard over their chosen issues, and it simply is too much to expect of one person to give the issues total attention if he or she is also responsible for facilitating the discussion. Also, one of the facilitator's most difficult tasks is to draw out all participants to ensure that all views are expressed, even when this involves leading the group into conflict. To do this well requires not only skill and experience but a disassociation from the group and the issues that a participant is unlikely to have.

The facilitator's job in a retreat is to monitor the direction of the board's work, alert it when it moves off-track, and clear obstacles from its path. He or she normally accomplishes this by doing five things:

1. Directing the board's efforts toward its objectives but being flexible enough to change direction if the board makes a conscious decision to do so;
2. Constantly challenging participants to clarify their expressions and intentions;
3. Helping participants to summarize and present data and information without distorting it with his or her own perspective;
4. Helping the board to crystallize conflict and to manage it by suggesting approaches for resolving it; and

5. Helping the board to agree on a plan of action to accomplish any decisions it reaches during the retreat.

Skilled facilitators are often available from nearby universities or community colleges, the Institute of Government, or private consulting firms. The facilitator should be chosen early in the preparations so that the board can satisfy itself that it will be comfortable with whomever is chosen and so that the facilitator can participate in planning for the time, the setting, and the agenda. There are several things that a board might look for in choosing a good facilitator. He or she should:

1. Be interested in helping the board to clarify and accomplish its own objectives and not have his or her own set agenda;
2. Engender a feeling of complete trust at the very first meeting;
3. Listen well;
4. Be aware of the importance of having concrete results from the retreat;
5. Have training and experience in working with small groups to accomplish concrete results; and
6. Be able to help the board to evaluate how much personal and political risk would be involved in what it wants to accomplish at the retreat.

Often the mayor and the manager meet with a prospective facilitator to plan the agenda and evaluate the facilitator at the same time. In this initial meeting, the facilitator can help to sharpen the objectives of the retreat, define clear roles for facilitator and participants, and help to estimate how much personal and political risk participants are likely to be comfortable with.

Choose the location and time. The only suggested rule for location and time is not to use the regularly scheduled meeting time or place. Beyond that, the retreat should be held any place where the board members will feel comfortable, relaxed, and undistracted. Retreat settings in North Carolina have included a private island, hotel meeting rooms, conference centers, the Institute of Government, church camps, and corporate retreat centers loaned by local businesses. They have varied from very luxurious to very spartan, with everything in between. Most, but not all, have been outside the jurisdiction that the board served.

Most boards choose a one-day or two-day format. Less than one day is probably not effective. Even if only one issue is to be taken up, having the group together for less than 24 hours does not allow the time necessary to pay due concern to how things are done. It is likely that a group will leave feeling a little frustrated that it has not really been able to tie off the matter at hand and to see definitive progress or agreement. More than two days is more time than most elected officials can take away from

home or work, and usually everyone is tired out at the end of two solid days of effort.

Observe the open meetings law. Despite the desirability of making the retreat a closed meeting to encourage open and honest discussion, it is nonetheless an official meeting under the state's open meetings law.¹ Some boards feel that if they do not take action or discuss specific pending business, the open meetings law does not apply; however, most of what is discussed at any retreat would constitute deliberation and, therefore, would require an open meeting. It is unlikely that any of the subject-matter exceptions for which closed or executive sessions are permitted would be an appropriate topic on which to hold a board retreat. Thus, to comply with the open meetings law on a retreat, the governing board must call a special meeting or announce it as a continuation of a regular meeting that has been adjourned or recessed. It must give all required notices in either case.

Deal assertively with publicity. Sometimes news media send reporters to retreats but not in every case. It depends on the attitude of the local newspapers, radio, and television, the relationship the board has with them, and probably the other requirements for coverage that face the news directors during the time the retreat is held. In North Carolina, when news reporters have attended, their presence has varied in its intensity. In one case, representatives of all three media, newspapers, radio, and television, stayed throughout a two-day retreat, including all of the meals board members had together. On the other extreme, some reporters have dropped in once to see what was happening and have left after less than an hour.

Coverage of retreats has usually been favorable when a reporter was present, probably because he or she saw firsthand how hard members worked, how seriously they took the effort, and how productive the results were. Bad press has tended to come from persons who did not attend and who implied that the board went off to relax at the taxpayers' expense. The board might counter this kind of coverage in advance by explaining the value of what it is doing and what it expects to achieve, by preparing to respond to criticism without embarrassment, and by resolving to obtain concrete results that will be visible in the way it conducts its business after the retreat. All successful businesses use retreats to help them to operate more effectively, and the board has no cause to be defensive about doing the same thing to make government more effective.

The board should try to determine whether news representatives plan to attend and, if so, prepare to include them graciously. At the same time, members should be aware that the presence of reporters surely will affect the openness of discussion, and they should be prepared to accept less productive results than might be the case if they were alone.

Conducting the Retreat

Thorough preparation for the retreat should put everything in place before it starts. Although the setting is relaxing, the retreat itself will not be. For this reason, several things should be done during the retreat so that participants gain the trust, the knowledge, and the insights that will help them to operate better as a governing board.

Assemble the night before. This ensures that everyone will be on hand to start promptly the next morning. It is also useful to gather the group together for a short time to greet each other. If not all board members know the facilitator, he or she can get to know everybody before the work begins. Some boards have only a short reception with refreshments or a meal together for this gathering, but even an hour or so of work on this first evening can be a good time to establish clear expectations about the retreat itself. Each member might say what he or she expects to get out of the retreat. If the group believes that it cannot meet all of the expectations on the list, then it can try to reach consensus on how much it will try to achieve. At this time the role of the facilitator can also be agreed upon—for example, how much the group wants him or her to lead discussion as opposed to simply recording it and asking for clarification when necessary. After this meeting, participants should retire early and get a good night's rest so that they are fresh and ready to start work the next morning.

Start on time, work hard, and quit when there's nothing more to do. Starting promptly sets a serious and businesslike tone for the retreat. Moreover, there is usually less time available than anyone thinks. It should not be wasted. To a group that is accustomed to dispatching dozens of agenda items in a few hours, a whole day or two can seem to stretch ahead interminably—that is, until the discussion begins to deepen, as it invariably does. Then, in many instances, the time available becomes too short.

The special effort that goes into setting up a retreat is aimed mainly at promoting frank and open exchange of beliefs, feelings, and data. Therefore, participants should expect to share openly during the retreat and to exert the extra effort that candor often requires. Openness can be risky in the environment of a regular meeting for political reasons. It can still be risky in a retreat for personal reasons. Participants have to deal with the dual risks of self-revelation and conflict throughout a retreat. This is hard work. The facilitator often must take responsibility for drawing out participants in order to resolve issues—often through open conflict—but the real stress and strain of this process ultimately falls on the participants. It is no surprise that, after a day's work at a retreat, almost everyone retires quickly for a good night's sleep.

When the group has finished its work, the retreat should end, even if that happens earlier than everyone

expected. If the retreat has been successful, participants might be tired, but they also will be buoyed by a sense of accomplishment. It is better to end with such a feeling than to allow it to dissipate by lingering aimlessly after the job is finished.

Seek consensus and pinpoint disagreement. One of the valuable products that can come out of a retreat is a clear sense of where board members agree and where they disagree on issues of substance or procedure. While it is worthwhile to find areas of agreement, it is just as important to clarify areas of disagreement.

Consensus is a difficult process, but it is very effective in getting total commitment to the group's decisions. It is difficult because it requires persistent discussion and reasoning to bring everyone together. Deciding by vote occurs as soon as a majority agrees, but voting does not persuade the minority—it only overrules it. At worst, it can create saboteurs of the action that the vote has dictated. Deciding by compromise means somebody gives up a position in exchange for support on something else, closure of the issue, or avoidance of conflict. Compromise is not as hard on those who disagree with the decision as voting is, but it does not make them favor the decision either. Consensus requires that participants talk and use facts and reason to convince everyone that a given action is the best thing to do under the circumstances. It might take a long time, but when the decision is made, everyone agrees with it even though it might not be ideal to some. The setting and the time available for discussion in a retreat make it conducive to achieving high-quality decisions by consensus.

In those instances where consensus cannot be reached, it is important to delineate other views that participants hold. This step establishes that, even if they hold minority positions on an issue, their views and the reasons for them are not insignificant but are recognized as legitimate. It also clarifies for other board members who stands where on what issues and why. The use of reasons for positions throughout these discussions tends to separate people's positions from their personalities. This distinction makes it easier to disagree with each other without disliking each other. The board might simply highlight positions of disagreement or might try to decide on a strategy and a timetable for resolving the disagreement if that is important.

Evaluate the experience. One way to get clues about how successful the retreat has been is to ask the participants to evaluate it. An evaluation both indicates whether a retreat would be worthwhile to do again and allows members of the board to review what went on, how it affected them individually and as a group, and how well it served its purpose.

Decide on some definite next steps. If the board is to use what it develops at the retreat, it should decide on some concrete steps to take after returning home. Two

obvious actions to consider are how the board will practice or use skills, attitudes, and knowledge and to what extent it wants to make formal statements on the beliefs, goals, and understandings it articulated. Experience has shown that if the board does not make these decisions before it leaves the retreat, it probably will not do so later on.

Using the Results of the Retreat

Thorough planning and careful execution can make a retreat seem productive and send participants away feeling good about what they did. However, what they did at the retreat does not matter as much as what they do when they return to the board's normal environment. Thoughtful application of the skills, attitudes, and knowledge developed at the retreat is the deciding factor in whether the retreat will help the board to operate more effectively.

Use it or lose it. The ultimate value of the consensus reached at a retreat is its application in day-to-day business, which is the fundamental reason for holding the retreat. If the board reaches consensus on a basic set of beliefs about how things should be in the community, then those beliefs can be used to guide day-to-day decisions. Members can ask themselves and the group in any instance, "Is this action consistent with our basic beliefs about governing the community?" It is a powerful way to bring policy debate back to basics and to focus on the critical aspects of an issue. Goals developed at retreats can be used in the same way. Plans of action can be used as checklists to monitor the board's progress on its long-range agenda. Agreements on roles of board members, manager, staff, and other boards and commissions can be referred to when conflicts arise over responsibility or authority for routine business. Finally, members can use their better understanding of each other and any new interpersonal skills they developed and practiced during the retreat to reduce the interference of personal conflicts with the substantive issues in their regular meetings and business. If the board does not keep sight of these things and use them on a routine basis, they will soon be forgotten and have little or no effect on the board's work. Thus, the retreat is not an end in itself but a point of departure for a continuous effort to improve the board's effectiveness.

Show off what was done. One way the board can keep the accomplishments of the retreat fresh in its members' minds and, at the same time, demonstrate them to citizens is to publish the results. Some boards have simply posted lists of beliefs, goals, role expectations, or plans in the regular meeting place for everyone to see and refer to from time to time. Some boards have published them in the newspaper along with a brief report about how the board developed them.

Selected Products from Retreats

The statements below are an assortment of beliefs, goals, and expectations which various governing boards school boards and staffs have developed for themselves at retreats held in North Carolina during the last several years.

Beliefs

The city council should be proactive in identifying and solving problems, not reactive (governing board).

There are practical limits to what the board can do: the board should be realistic (governing board).

We should educate every child in our school system to his or her full potential (school board).

We shall be persistent in pursuit of our ideas; however when those ideas are without support we shall react professionally and move on to other activities (staff).

We shall create an atmosphere of caring and respect for one another. People in the organization are its most important asset and are vital to its success (staff).

Council should listen to the public but not be expected to support every voice before it (governing board).

Goals

To stimulate among citizens a greater interest in participating in city government (governing board).

To increase the number of blacks in key positions in the next five years (governing board).

To expand revenues enough to meet the cost of existing and new service needs (governing board).

To build an effective relationship with the [neighboring] town of _____ (governing board).

To develop partnerships between area businesses and schools (school board).

To make administrative decisions and actions always consistent with policies and practices of city council (staff).

Expectations

Boards have expected their managers to:

Keep the governing board fully informed.

Take initiative in recommending policy and urge the board to reconsider when appropriate.

Seek policy direction from the board and fully support the board's decision once it is made.

Maintain good relationships with other governments.

Managers have expected their boards to:

Issue directions as a body, not individually.

Stand behind the manager and staff when they are carrying out board policy.

Handle job seekers according to personnel ordinance and procedures and not apply pressure to hire.

Take initiative to get information and stay informed.

Other boards have taken belief statements and tried to summarize them in a succinct "mission statement" that is widely circulated and used on a regular basis to aid policy making at many levels. (See box at left for the kind of statements produced at retreats.) Keeping the product of the retreat before everybody serves to demonstrate some of the retreat's concrete accomplishments as well as to keep it foremost in the minds of board members and staff so that it will be used in the day-to-day work of governance.

Deciding Whether a Retreat Would Be Useful

The structure and setting of a retreat can produce conditions that will help the board work through some issues that it cannot deal with effectively in its regular environment. But the structure and setting alone cannot guarantee success. The willingness and ability of the participants to work together and to apply the results of the retreat in their regular public business is essential. If members of the board do not believe that the retreat is worthwhile, or if they do not believe it is worth the cost in money, time, effort, and risk, then it might not be worth doing. Based on the discussion above, a board might ask itself the following set of questions in considering whether to hold a retreat:

1. Would everyone on the board participate in the entire retreat?
2. Would a setting be available that would be conducive to open discussion and consensus building?
3. Could it be held at a time when members could get away and when they would not be distracted by pressing business?
4. Could the board find a facilitator who is competent and whom it trusts to be objective?
5. Could the board work effectively with the press present if necessary or are the issues too sensitive?
6. Could the board live with criticism from those who misunderstand or disagree with the usefulness of a retreat?
7. Would those members of the board who are skeptical or anxious be willing to make a conscientious effort to make it work?
8. Would the board be likely to use the products of the retreat when it returns to the regular routine?

If the board could not answer yes to a substantial number of these questions, the retreat might not be worth the required cost and risk. This decision is one that each board has to make for itself.

Retreats for Other Groups

While a retreat of a governing board and top staff is the most common use of this kind of meeting, it can be useful for other groups as well. The retreat can be an effective way for the governing board to discuss mutual beliefs, goals, and expectations with one or more of its advisory boards and commissions. School boards have

held retreats with their superintendents and top management staff. Superintendents hold retreats with the principals in their systems. City managers and county managers have used retreats to do administrative goal setting and planning with their top department heads and staff. In short, many different groups of people whose effectiveness depends on their ability to share common beliefs and goals, to have clear and reasonable expectations of each other, and to work well together on a day-to-day basis have used retreats to build the unity of effort needed to do the best job possible. ❖

Note

1. N.C. Gen Stat. § 143-318.9 through -318.18(19).

If You Don't Want Your Board to Get "Into the Weeds" . . . Stop Holding Your Retreats in a Vacant Lot

This entry was contributed by Peg Carlson on March 21, 2016 at 12:10 pm and is filed under Board Development, Board Governance, Group Process, Tools and Practices.

Please note...

This site welcomes a variety of viewpoints and perspectives on community engagement. Ideas shared here should not be considered as being endorsed by the UNC School of Government in any way as the School is nonpartisan and policy-neutral.

We're nearing the end of board retreat season: the window of time between December, when elected officials are sworn in, and April, when budget deliberations start in earnest. All across North Carolina, local governing boards and managers hold retreats during this time to plan for their community's future, strengthen working relationships, and make strategic choices about how to best allocate resources to achieve their goals.

As a frequent facilitator of local government board retreats, I often ask participants if there is anything in particular they would like me to do—or not do—to help them have a productive session. One of the most common responses from managers is "Don't let them get into the weeds." Board members sometimes echo this wish: "Pull us back if we get into the weeds." My colleague Donna Warner even invites meeting participants to use a non-verbal signal, holding up both hands and wagging fingers in front of their faces to signify "We're in the weeds." It's enough to make a facilitator pack some herbicide along with the markers and flipchart pads!

The concern about being overly focused on details is a valid one. Retreats are the place to think strategically more than tactically; the place to sketch out the big picture of what you want to create, not necessarily to identify each task it will take to get you there.

Ironically, the very person who may be most frustrated about the board's tendency to spend time on the incidentals instead of the major issues is also the one who is most likely to contribute to it—the local government manager.

Here are a few ways I've seen managers (unintentionally) design retreat agendas that invite board members to stroll down a weed-choked path:

- **They ask board members to submit a list of retreat topics** and then feel obliged to address each of them, even if the topics include "broken streetlight on Main Street."
- **They ask department heads to make presentations that include budget requests**, which then leads to a board discussion about the number of chairs needed in the new training conference room.
- **They don't ask the board to identify an overall purpose or desired outcome for the retreat**, so each board member feels free to define the "appropriate" level of detail on each topic in his or her own way.

How can these trips into the weeds be eliminated—ok, not eliminated, but at least minimized?

Recognize that the greatest point of leverage is during the planning for the retreat, not the retreat itself. Ask the board to begin its retreat planning by answering this question: What do we need to accomplish to consider the retreat a success? Once the desired retreat outcome is established, it becomes easier to filter out the possible agenda items that don't move the board toward this goal.

What are your tips to help retreats stay relatively weed-free?

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Warning: Illegal string offset 'thumbnail' in /opt/app-root/src/wp-content/themes/sog/content.php on line 115

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