

**MINUTES**  
**COUNCIL VISION AND GOAL SETTING/SPECIAL WORKSESSION**  
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF YUMA, ARIZONA  
YUMA ART CENTER  
254 S. MAIN STREET, YUMA, ARIZONA  
**October 26, 2020**  
**10:00 a.m.**

**CALL TO ORDER**

**Mayor Nicholls** called the Special Worksession to order at 10:04 a.m.

Councilmembers Present: Shelton, Morris, Watts, Knight, McClendon, Shoop, and Mayor Nicholls  
Councilmembers Absent: none  
Staffmembers Present: City Administrator, Philip A. Rodriguez  
Deputy City Administrator, Jay Simonton  
City Attorney, Richard W. Files  
Fire Chief, Steve Irr  
Police Chief, Susan Smith  
Various Department Heads or their representative  
City Clerk, Lynda L. Bushong

**I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

**Rodriguez** briefly addressed City Council about the goals of the 2-day retreat. He encouraged City Council to be creative and share ideas that will help to create goals of moving the City forward.

**II. THE CURRENT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT – ROUND 1**

**Rodriguez** introduced Joseph Benesh with Arizona Citizens for the Arts. **Benesh** presented several ‘before and after’ pictures of buildings that depicted How To See What Is Not There, the title of his presentation. He stated that art is a cornerstone and one of the biggest values to communities. **Benesh** provided the following statistics relating to arts in Arizona

- Arizona Arts and Culture industries:
  - Contribute \$9.3 billion to the state’s economy
  - Employs 91,878 Arizonans
  - Earn a combined total of \$4.9 billion annually

**Benesh** stated that artists, commonly referred to as creatives, want to help integrate the arts. They understand marketing and branding and see Yuma as a blank canvass. He suggested the following:

1. Move away from a historic/economist mindset to a creative/entrepreneurial mindset
2. Work in tandem with creatives at every stage – don’t just put a mural on it
3. Make it easy for creatives to work with City departments/divisions
4. Put a creative on every City Board and Commission, as they bring a different perspective

Discussion

- To curb the challenge of getting volunteers on the Boards and Commissions do some additional outreach through groups/boards that have participating artists and art sponsored events in order to seek more involvement of creatives. A personal invitation always makes people feel wanted. [Mayor Nicholls, McClendon and Benesh]
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**Rodriguez** introduced Jim Schuessler, CEO of the Yuma MultiVersity Campus. **Schuessler** stated that planning for this project has been underway for many years, and reviewed the timelines based on the concept. He noted that Phase 1 is complete, which included establishing a non-profit -not dependent on the City or County- and coordination with universities, primary employers, non-profits and other stakeholders, as well as assisting to establish a site.

In speaking with the private sector, **Schuessler** said employers expressed the following concerns:

- Four year degrees or technical fields are needed
- Only 68% categorize the workforce as ‘good’
- Difficulty recruiting/retaining skilled workforce
  - Approximately 25% of trained employees leave for a larger company/city
- 78% of the workforce is middle aged
- The healthcare industry is hiring from India and/or Mexico

**Schuessler** summed up Yuma’s socio-economic reality weaknesses and/or threats as:

- Having only a 72% high school graduation rate, which is 17% lower than the state rate and 18% lower than the U.S
- One in five people are neither working or going to school and are receiving government assistance
- Yuma’s unemployment rate for the past 24 months is over four times greater than the national pre-COVID unemployment rate
- The income level is a third lower than the national average per capita income.

**Schuessler** stated that local employers will hire if Yuma has the talent and the Yuma MultiVersity Campus can be the catalyst by bridging higher education, industry and prospective talent to provide the means to achieve the skilled careers of today and the future in Yuma.

Continuing, **Schuessler** declared Yuma’s socio-economic strengths and/or opportunities:

- Yuma has a large population of young people and there is great potential to be gained from educating the youth
  - The number of Yuma citizens under 18 years old is 13% higher than the U.S. rate
  - Overall median age countywide is 12% lower compared to the U.S rate
- Yuma is surrounded by opportunity, such as 4FrontEd and the close proximity to cities/towns just off of Interstate 8
- There is room for improvement and more degrees can be achieved in Yuma.

**Schuessler** outlined the tasks to take place in Phases 2, 3 and 4:

Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Third-party sourced study to determine need, best practices, and identify prospective partners	Proceed with planning, acquisition, construction of campus	Identify opportunities for expansion
Develop a sustainable business plan		
Build community support		

#### Discussion

- Collaboration will be essential to get the coursework necessary to provide skilled employees to our local businesses. [**Morris/Schuessler**]
- Dual track allowance and no age limit in the framework needs to be considered for the students. There is opportunity for creativity [**Shelton/Schuessler**]
- Medical manufacturing is new to Yuma; it is imperative to grow our talent while investing in the industry. [**Mayor Nicholls/Schuessler**]
- The MultiVersity has been 100% grant funded at this point and Phase II is proposed to be grant funded as well. [**Mayor Nicholls/Schuessler**]

**Rodriguez** introduced Chris Camacho from the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC).

**Camacho** stated that he sees the opportunities and the competition in Yuma. GPEC's purpose is to ensure they are advancing the competitive fields across the state. Yuma is going to have to continue to propel forward to remain competitive and will also need to consider the competition with the binational areas. **Camacho** provided the following overview of GPEC:

- Their mission is to attract and grow quality businesses, and advocate for Greater Phoenix's competitiveness
- They lead from the front and promote intellectual curiosity
- GPEC adapts to change and are committed to selfless service
- GPEC works with 22 member communities and more than 160 private investors
- They have a capital investment of \$20.4 billion

**Camacho** expressed concern that Yuma has no large scale product (property) for businesses such as Amazon. He stated that raw dirt is not what these businesses are looking for and that Yuma will need to step up if they want to compete with the outlying areas. **Camacho** defined 10 site selection factors that are looked at:

1. Workforce skills
2. Transportation infrastructure
3. State and local tax scheme
4. Ease of permitting and regulatory procedures
5. Workforce development
6. Land/building prices and supply
7. Utilities: cost and reliability
8. Right-to-work state
9. Higher education resources
10. Quality of life

**Camacho** noted that due to urban versus rural positioning for funding, Yuma needs to be a fierce advocate of fund seeking for their area.

He provided the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats GPEC sees for the Yuma region:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Location	Lack of industrial/commercial product (property)	Mega region cooperation	Educational attainment
Operating cost	Brand awareness	California demise	Urban versus rural divide
Speed to market		Leverage location advantage for advanced industry	Digital divide
City/regional coordination		Conversion of prominent sector	

**Camacho** challenged the City to come up with five sites that can accommodate future businesses.

#### Discussion

- Water is a critical topic in all regional/state conversations [**Mayor Nicholls/Camacho**]
- There is an average of four people dedicated to Economic Development in municipalities across the state. [**Mayor Nicholls/Camacho**]
- There are four Medical schools in Phoenix, and yet we are still underserved in the medical market. Potential partnership would need to be looked into. [**Shelton/Camacho**]
- Private/Public sector both have the same clout, it's what they have to offer and what works for the incoming business. [**Shoop/Camacho**]

**Rodriguez** introduced Lowell Perry, Executive Director of Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (YCNHA). **Perry** provided the following overview of YCNHA's history and its purpose:

- The story of water and its continuing impact on the people, land and economy is the key to understanding the history of Yuma, one of the oldest cities established on the Colorado River
- YCNHA encompasses seven square miles along the Lower Colorado River in Yuma, AZ and Winterhaven, CA, with over three miles of contiguous riverfront parks, trails and 400 acres of restored wetlands
- It also includes some of the top attractions to Yuma: the Yuma Territorial Prison, the Colorado River State Historic Park, and Fort Yuma Indian Reservation, home of the Quechan Tribe

To showcase the achievements of YCNHA, **Perry** showed a short video of what the overall area looked like 20 years ago, and what it currently looks like. **Perry** stated the Yuma Crossing Discovery Center tells the story of YCNHA. He spoke about the potential of a Historic Yuma Mega Park and stated a Mega Park Taskforce is exploring funding options. **Perry** noted that they are planning to utilize revenues generated by visitors and also suggested the City could invest, with funding from the CIP as well. **Perry** noted the need for connectivity through sidewalks and bike paths leading to the top attractions of Yuma is key. **Perry** concluded by stating, we need to make sure Yuma is not just a gas stop between Phoenix and San Diego – we cannot get to the fun stuff without investing in our historic assets.

#### Discussion

- The river has a future, but not necessarily at the City's expense; there is an opportunity for private investment. Having a well-diversified funding source is essential. [**Shoop/Perry**]
- The vision has been actively networked with the community, private industry and counterparts in other areas. [**McClendon/Perry**]

*Break for lunch 12:10 pm – 1:04 pm*

### III. THE FUTURE OF YUMA AND HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY

**Julia Novak**, Executive Vice President of the Novak Consulting Group, explained strategic planning comes from what we know, what we hope for the future, and how are we going to get there. She went around the room asking everyone what their expectations from this retreat are. In summary, the responses from Council and staff included: strategic planning for 10-20 years, finding ways to keep the younger generation in Yuma, seeking a good economic plan for new and existing businesses, development of the riverfront area, and excitement for the journey to plan and gain a better understanding of City Council's vision.

**Novak** prompted City Council to give their thoughts on what they believe is true for the future of the City of Yuma. The following thoughts were shared:

- In order to go forward the City needs to look at history, think differently about expectations and consider possibilities - there needs to be give and take. [**Shoop**]
- Quality of life is the cornerstone of the future. We need to promote a 'we CAN do that' perception, Yuma is a prosperous fun place to be – a destination not just a pass-thru gas stop. [**McClendon**]
- The people are Yuma! They historically rise to the challenges and this process will help bring us all together to work on future challenges. [**Mayor Nicholls**]
- Concentrate on keeping the younger generation in Yuma, don't lose ground with arts/culture and the projects, such as the MultiVersity Campus. There is a lot of opportunity in Yuma. [**Watts**]

- Yuma is a state of mind built on specific values and perspectives carried from each generation and visitors to the area. It is imperative that we keep moving forward with open citizen communication, continuous celebration of youth in all aspects, welcome innovation, and being inclusive of all people. The City needs to make the most of our assets, such as agriculture. [Shelton]
- The City can be more self-sustaining and attractive through education – provide opportunities that keep the youth in Yuma and not seeking opportunities elsewhere. Having an attractive business climate will likely attract other businesses to the City. [Morris]
- The Colorado River is a large part of the history of Yuma; the City needs take advantage of this asset and expand our riverfront area for tourism. Unused City property needs to be sold/leased to private sector for development. The City cannot get stagnant – we need to change the mindset so the City can grow. The MultiVersity will be beneficial to the Yuma community. [Knight]

**Novak** facilitated a breakout session where City Council and staff were broken into groups to discuss events, actions and people from each decade that have molded the City of Yuma to where we are today. When the groups reconvened back into the main meeting room the data was placed on the dry board to capture commonalities and view any trending patterns.

Each of the decades were labeled accordingly to what City Council felt they represented in time:

- Pre 1979: The decade of Breaking Out
- 1980-1989: The decade of Growth
- 1990-1999: The decade of Redefinition
- 2000-2009: The decade of Acceleration
- 2010-2019: The decade of the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

City Council was asked, by **Novak**, how they wanted future City Council's – 10 years down the road – to label the decade we are currently entering.

- 2020-2029: The decade of.....
  - Suggestions from City Council included: Recovery, Dramatic Progress, Sustainable Efforts, Looking Forward, Rebounds, Learning Experience, Vitality

#### **IV. THE CURRENT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT – ROUND 2**

**Rodriguez** provided the following information related to the Citizens Survey and Listening Tour that were conducted this year:

##### Survey

- City received 507 responses from the online survey
- The survey consisted of 18 questions

- Citizens responded in the following manner:

Responded 60% or more positive	Responded less than 60% positive
Yuma is a good destination to live/work	Important to focus on events and festivals
The City's future	Important to focus on arts and culture
Important to focus on health and wellness of the community	Important to focus on investments and revitalization of downtown Yuma
Important to focus on higher education opportunities	
Important to focus on opportunities for the young people to stay in Yuma	
Important to focus on job creation	
Important to focus on entertainment options	
Important to focus on recreation options	
Important to focus on attracting new industries	
Quality of service by the City	
Customer service you receive by the City	
Access to basic needs and services required to lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives	
The City meets the expectation of time to address citizens questions and concerns	

- Citizens expressed their top priorities as: public safety; roads; water; and that just as much, or more, focus should be shown to the local residents as to the winter visitors.

#### Listening Tour

- 65 individuals participated in the Listening Tour that took place at 5 different venues, including one virtual session.
- Citizens expressed that kids, outdoor activities, family activities and events, clean water clean parks, the sports complex, community involvement, community events and sense of safety contribute to the well-being of residents.
- Citizens would like the City to focus on the following to enhance the well-being of the residents: an east side park, address mental health and medical care issues, allow more citizen input, engage young people, utilize open space, promote community events, create a good first impression of the city, and good internet options.
- When asked how the City should address road conditions, the City received the following suggestions from the participants: work on the potholes, educate the community on road construction, scheduling of roadwork, repair of road and allocation of funds.
- When asked about funding those road conditions, responses included an increase of sales or gas taxes, initiate a new tax specifically for roads, HURF funds, and to find a way to have all those who use the roads pay for the maintenance and repairs
- Regarding what the citizens see the role of local government is when it comes to supporting the economy, responses were: business, higher education, impact fees,

advanced degree, tax breaks, college graduates, skilled labor, educated workforce and the private sector.

Key points of discussions captured from table hosts during the Listening Tour:

- Communication was an obvious pattern of concern. The City should utilize every available venue for outreach in order to capture everyone. [**Shelton**]
- There is a misconception that there is not much to do in Yuma. [**Shoop/Chief Irr**]
- City events are mostly gauged for the younger (teens to 20's) and need to be more accommodating to all ages. [**Shoop/Shelton/Chief Smith**]
- Events need to be communicated appropriately for each genre – radio, social media, etc.. [**Morris, Mayor Nicholls, Chief Smith**]
- Citizens felt that City events are framed towards winter visitors, when the truth is that the winter weather in Yuma is more conducive to holding events. [**Rodriguez, Mayor Nicholls**]
- Finding a way to better connect with our citizens is important. The City will continue to seek alternate ways to interact with the community. [**Rodriguez**]

#### V. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

Considering the previous exercises during the day, **Novak** asked City Council what they learned the strengths of the community are today. In summary, the following points were noted:

- Yuma has a small town feel
- Family, home, business and freedom are important factors
- The community works together
- There is lower than average crime rate
- Bicultural

She then asked what is not true today, but something they feel should be true for Yuma within the next 10 years. City Council listed the following:

- Higher education
- East side park
- Wi-Fi availability for all
- Cutting edge philosophy for business
- Higher personal achievement
- River walk and the MultiVersity Campus
- Youth destination with items such as a space port and creation of an 18-hour city

**ADJOURNMENT** - The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

APPROVED:

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Lynda L. Bushong, City Clerk

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Douglas J. Nicholls, Mayor