

**MINUTES**  
**SPECIAL WORKSESSION\CITY COUNCIL RETREAT**  
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF YUMA, ARIZONA  
COCOPAH RESORT AND CONFERENCE CENTER  
15268 S. AVENUE B, SOMERTON, ARIZONA  
**March 24, 2025**  
**9:00 a.m.**

**CALL TO ORDER**

**Mayor Nicholls** called the Special Worksession/Council Retreat to order at 9:35 a.m.

Councilmembers Present: Martinez, Morris, McClendon, Smith, Morales, Watts, and Mayor Nicholls  
Councilmembers Absent: None  
Staffmembers Present: Acting City Administrator, Jay Simonton  
Deputy City Administrator, Jenn Reichelt  
City Attorney, Richard W. Files  
City Clerk, Lynda L. Bushong  
Deputy City Clerk, Janet L. Pierson  
Mayor's Chief of Staff, Kathy Moon

The retreat was facilitated by Nicole Lance, CEO, Lance Strategies.

**I. WELCOMING COMMENTS**

Welcoming comments were made by **Mayor Nicholls, Simonton**

**II. COUNCIL DYNAMICS AND STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS**

**Lance** started the morning with a few icebreaker exercises designed to gauge how City Council/City staff is showing up, their mood for the day, and to engage them in conversation by asking them to answer one of three pre-selected questions.

City Council/City Staff was then asked about a "Win" they would like to see out of this retreat. Responses included:

- Clear direction from City Council
- Are we meeting City Council's expectations
- Innovative ideas
- Look back 12 months from now and seeing what was accomplished out of the retreat
- Understand role and work as a team
- Better communication.
- Affirmation of where we have been and building on that into the future
- Continue to see things discussed during the retreat getting done
- Clear, defined set of initiatives that the group agrees on and a goal at hand
- Building trust amongst each other

**Lance** went over Polarities and the Overview of the Process for the next two days.

## Polarities

|                           |   |                       |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Efficient pace            | ↔ | In-depth discussions  |
| Diverse perspectives      | ↔ | Strong points of view |
| Ensuring clarity          | ↔ | Tolerating ambiguity  |
| Large group discussion    | ↔ | Individual processing |
| Concrete work output      | ↔ | Background & theory   |
| Strategic/long-term focus | ↔ | Operational/immediate |

## Overview of the Process

### Today

- Connectivity & Communication
- Policy/Administration – Structure & Strategy
- “What’s working well?”
- Strategic Conversations
- Prep for an efficient tomorrow

### Tomorrow

- Review of Strategic Plan: “add, edit, delete”

The group participated in a translation exercise which illustrated the importance of context and saying what you really mean as everyone interprets things differently. Staying out of judgement.

### CONNECTIVITY & COMMUNICATION

- **Lance** directed City Council through the 4 Goals of Extraordinary Dialogue
- Takeaways and critical thinking points included:
  - Defense modes: offense and defense – stay out of either perception
  - Mastering your story: Did you tell yourself a story without facts or perceptions? What meaning are you adding to the action you observed? What can you add to clarify the story in order to move on, what can you do to help get to a point where both parties better understand

- Question the stories in your mind versus the actual events that took place (facts): Why would a reasonable, rational person do or say this? What's your role in the conflict?

## 4 Goals of Extraordinary Dialogue

1. Learn  
(Mind The Illusion of Certainty)
2. Find the Truth / Best Path Forward  
(Monitor Perception vs. Reality)
3. Produce Results  
(Are we moving towards action?)
4. Strengthen Relationships

### POLICY/ADMINISTRATION – STRUCTURE & STRATEGY

- **Lance** shared some slides from the International City/County Management Association on the Council-Manager form of government including the purpose of Strategic Plans.

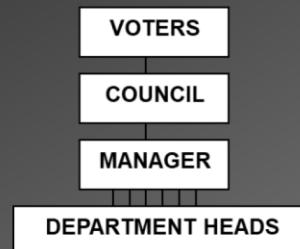
## COUNCIL/MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT

### COUNCIL

→ Governing body, elected by public

→ Primary duties

- Policy setting
- Approving Budget
- Setting tax rates



## COUNCIL/MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT

### MANAGER/ADMINISTRATOR

→ Chief Administrator, appointed by Council

→ Primary duties

- Administration (CEO)
- Chief Advisor to the Council
- Day-to-day operations
- Prepare budget
- Personnel management

— EST. 1924 —  
**CODE OF  
ETHICS**

ICMA

## Mayor & Council

→ "...the elected officials are the legislative body and the community's policy makers. Power is centralized in this body... The elected officials also focus on the community's big-picture goals..."

→ "The Mayor is the public face of the community who presides at meetings... facilitates communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials, and assists the governing body in setting goals and advocating policy decisions."

ICMA

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY  
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

## COUNCIL/MANAGER FORM

→ "... the elected body has the ultimate authority to adopt policies and establish outcomes to which the manager/administrator is beholden."

→ "...the manager has ultimate authority to determine how government operates in order to achieve the outcomes within the designated policies & budget adopted."

→ "...the manager must have authority to determine how to operate government so they can be held accountable for outcomes."

ICMA

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY  
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

From: Authority v. Power by Jason Grant, Director of Advocacy for ICMA

## Strategic Plans

- High-level policy focus
- Strategic, not operational
- Focused, not all-encompassing
- Broad areas of emphasis, desired outcomes, task-level action items

### WHAT IS WORKING WELL?



**Lance** asked the City Council their thoughts on what is working well / what is making this happen:

- Cohesive group that collectively shows up and works well together / the voters picked some good people; the City Administrator is very communicative and gets City Council what they need.
- Availability of staff; City Council gets along well / more people running for City Council.
- Willingness to learn; assistance from other City Council members; acknowledgment of a job well done from other City Council members; City Council works well together and in the community / They are here for the right reasons; we realize you cannot get everything done as one person;
- Mutual respect; communication; unity in accomplishing goals; support / listening

- City Council is engaged and does their due diligence; City Council relates to the community / a Mayor that allows you to speak/have a dialogue until everything is spoken about; ability to say what is on mind
- Internal and external communication; diversity and respect of other's thoughts; unity after the vote / willingness to hear and answer questions.
- Everyone has been welcoming
- Respect that City Council gives to staff – impacts morale

## STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS

City Council was then asked what could make things work better and the following common challenges were discussed:

### Common challenges

- Getting items on the agenda
- Travel/events
- Staying informed/partnering with the Administrator (1:1s, communication)
- Staying committed to the Strategic Plan
- *What else could be better?*

#### GETTING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

- Items that City Council request to be placed on an agenda are usually added within 3 meetings or sooner; Sometimes an item just needs a one-on-one discussion; staff has been very engaging and helpful; the City Administrator facilitates when necessary.
- City Council is given the opportunity to request items during each City Council meeting as well
- Giving the Mayor/Deputy Mayor a heads-up as a courtesy is appreciated as facilitating the meeting can be tough.
- The City Administrator will provide the requested information or get it on an agenda.

#### TRAVEL/EVENTS

- Local events are community building events; travel to the League and outside the City is orchestrated/prepared though City staff. There is no travel involved on local events; the League events and the trip to the Capitol are prepared travel events.
- Local events typically are great; travel events can improve a little, for example Day at the Capitol



- Certain travel trips are in mind when putting together the City Council budget; currently there is no process for individual travel; Council strives to be conservative
- Discussed how much is budgeted and what trips are included in that budgeted amount; staff can research other municipalities to see what processes they have in place
- Appreciates that City Council is and wants to be visible; Usually means buying two tables for community events; If you are committed to attending an event, show up or let someone know so the spot does not go empty

#### DAY AT THE CAPITOL

- A good event but more preparation for the City Council is needed such as knowing what the City is requesting from our legislators.
- Each Councilmember has a strong background and would like to see key points for better preparation
- Day at the Capitol has many moving parts; Taking advantage of the time and getting key points across in that timeframe gets tricky; Struggling to see how it can be improved; Supports the point of making sure everyone knows what is being talked about.
- Noting next to each item who the Mayor can call on if the opportunity presents itself
- ⊖ The Mayor does a phenomenal job being the spokesperson for the City Council
- Would like to feel that all of City Council is contributing to the day
- Maybe plan a discussion, like was done for the League Conference, where City Council met the week before to discuss who will go where; Possibly hold the discussion at a Worksession
- Worksheet provided on the way to the event; Work on getting it out sooner
- Pull knowledge and talent from Council, when applicable
- Preplanning and leveraging the collective expertise by allowing participation and opportunity; managing expectations
- Continue to refine Day at the Capitol; Have speaking points on each topic

#### STAYING INFORMED/PARTNERING WITH THE ADMINISTRATOR (COMMUNICATION)

- Individual meetings with City Council are scheduled with the City Administrator or Deputy City Administrator as needed. The Mayor and City Administrator meet daily.
- The City Administrator is copied on correspondence the Mayor or City Council has with staff members so he is informed and not surprised when issues are presented
- When possible advanced notice of questions for staff members is appreciated by staff so they have the opportunity to be prepared and have the information requested at the Worksession and/or Council Meetings.
- Maintaining the reputation of high-quality staff is important

#### STAYING COMMITTED TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

- Appreciates that staff identifies which Strategic Plan each agenda item aligns with
- Better tracking of the plan/updates; potentially to be done semi-annual at a Worksession
- A better hand-off of Mayor and City Council's external committee duties would be helpful; knowing what the City wants to achieve needs to be communicated; knowing the timeline or expectation before assigning; possibly meeting with the exiting

councilmember before assuming the position; Mayor and City Council's staff can assist with facilitating those meetings

WHAT ELSE COULD BE BETTER?

- Onboarding for new or returning Councilmembers; Processes and legalese; ride-along or sit-alongs

STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS CONTINUED

**Lance** directed the conversation to the following topics as a discussion precursor prior to meeting with City staff tomorrow:

→ Economic Development

→ What's the strategy?

→ Elevate Southwest study

→ Riverfront

→ Tracking the plan

→ Benchmarks for Spaceport & Innovation District

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- STRATEGY
  - The new Assistant Director of Neighborhood Services/Economic Development, Cynthia Bolt, needs direction on the focus and finding her role with the City as she works with many agencies; **Mayor Nicholls** is supportive of overlapping
  - The focus should be on the strategy for promoting the City of Yuma versus promoting the Region. Focusing on the City may lead to promoting the region as well; however, there are local agencies that focus on Yuma as a region.
  - **Mayor Nicholls** would like to see some aggressive strategies including Foreign Trade Zones (FTZ) where no tariffs are applied until it comes into the United States; Yuma has an opportunity to create free-trade zones. However, City Council are not the experts in this area and should depend on those who are.
  - The focus should be on outside dollars coming into the City; primarily manufacturing and tourism; retaining current businesses.
- ELEVATE SOUTHWEST STUDY
  - The City of Yuma is only a partner with Elevate Southwest in the Innovation Hub/institute of higher education; the study belongs to Elevate Southwest and is focused on how we build and fund the Innovation District, which is the "live, work, play" area surrounding the Innovation Hub; the City should be hearing



about the study soon

- RIVERFRONT
  - There is a need to see the boundaries and what is available to further discuss what possibilities there are in the Riverfront area.
  - Is there anything worth developing? Mixed Use Zoning would likely be the best designation for this area. Concerns for where tax dollar will go, since the river borders California
  - We are being led by the voters to give consideration to the Riverfront area
  - This topic may fit within the Innovation District discussion
- WATER
  - Security of the City's water rights is important and City Council should be vocal about it
  - Mayor Nicholls was approached at the Colorado River Water Users Association about hosting a Municipal Water Conference (no agriculture) to discuss current status and strategy; Councilmember Watts was requested to assist with the planning
- PUBLIC SAFETY – FIRE/EMS
  - There are community concerns with the fire response times; the Fire Chief will present on the issue at the April 2<sup>nd</sup> Regular Council Meeting; several other Phoenix area cities are experiencing the same response-time concerns, mostly due to growth; Administration is working together with Yuma Fire Department (YFD) on correcting this issue.
  - The narrative should not be that the police department's concerns were addressed, but the fire department's needs have been overlooked; The question may be do we have the right number of personnel that is needed at the fire department
  - Council concerns include overtime being used to compensate for the lack of bodies; safety of the employees and consideration of the work/family balance
  - City Administrator meets twice a year to address concerns; This is the first year the City Administrator has been made aware of YFD staffing issues
  - YFD's Report will show a need for 9 personnel to man the ambulance at Station 7, and 12 administration positions; YFD's request is for the 9 plus 4 of the administration positions this budget cycle. The proposal to Council is hire the 9, possibly using a grant that will help pay a portion of the salaries for a set number of years.
  - City may need to prioritize other expenditures/services to make this happen sooner than later; may be a multi-year project
  - Yuma is not an outlier; Yuma's police and fire personnel are well compensated and the City has one of the best retention rates
  - City Council supports the hiring of a few of the administrative positions and the 9 noted fire positions
- PARKS AND RECREATION – WHAT IS WORKING WELL, WHAT IS NOT
  - The City of Yuma has a great park system. Would like to see more parks with water features; the water park by the water tower is run-down
  - Parks & Recreation Department has done a good job listening to what the community needs are; new playground equipment; inclusive playground; Kennedy Skate Park
  - Concerns about losing money; promoting PAAC; Bathrooms renovations a plus
  - Must invest in sports tourism in order to grow the 2% monies; Hotels coming in; advocate of working with ADA in the parks
  - No concrete strategy in sports tourism; Looking to find a show close enough to promote Yuma's PAAC

- Funding all projects in the strategic plan will be challenging; the PAAC is used almost daily by locals; tournaments at the PAAC would displace local kids needing the fields; more athletic fields are needed
- Community surveys are fiscally constrained; must interpret what is economically feasible
- Shaw Field needs lighting and irrigation; finding space for more fields; the basin by Walmart is not off the list, but the focus right now is Shaw Field
- INFRASTRUCTURE – WHAT IS MISSING?
  - Renewable Energy to reduce the heat island effect
  - Estancia annexation south of the Marine base; Currently no water and sewer available, plus police and fire would be a huge issue as well as public works/solid waste; Estancia is like a little city within the City.
  - Getting interconnectivity (signals) in place
- ADDITIONAL
  - Liveability Survey – walkability, safety, health and wellness; accessibility to parks and recreation; economic education and youth engagement; graduation rates
    - Not sure we have the capacity in-house but can use a third-party
    - A yearly survey would be too often
    - Internal survey reports can be pulled each year
  - Youth Council Program
    - Something similar to the Neighborhood Leadership Program; possibly an 8-week program; utilize Spring or Summer break, that culminates with a trip to the AZ League; possibly consider a Youth Government Day to build on the efforts of the leadership classes offered at the high schools; staff will look into the different models and bring information back to City Council.
  - Tourism
    - Information on our winter visitors is unclear; Is there a different way to engage that tax base; Visit Yuma has looked into this type of study, a cost estimate is approximately \$40,000 and should be done every 2 years; Arizona Office of Tourism is a place to start.

Councilmember **Morales** was given an opportunity to make some closing comments as he would not be in attendance at Day 2 of the retreat. Issues he would like seen addressed include: updating the City website with regards to Economic Development, Public Safety (YFD first responder situation), beautification of City rights-of-way and vacant lots

The day came to a close with each participant sharing their thoughts on day one of the retreat.

**ADJOURNMENT** - The meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

APPROVED:

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Lynda L. Bushong, City Clerk

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Douglas J. Nicholls, Mayor

DRAFT