

Bellevue City Council Retreat Report
Special Meeting
January 26-28, 2023
Semiahmoo/ Blaine, WA

Participants:

Councilmembers: Jeremy Barksdale, Conrad Lee, Jared Nieuwenhuis, Jennifer Robertson, Lynne Robinson, John Stokes, Janice Zahn,

Staff: Brad Miyake, Charmaine Arredondo, Nathan McCommon, Diane Carlson, Mike Brennan, and Genesee Adkins

Consultants: Kara Laverde, Laverde Consulting, LLC & Carrie Heron, Unstruck LLC

Thursday 4:00-5:30

Welcome

- Review Agenda
- Review Outcomes
 - Reconfirm our council priorities for 2023.
 - Increase shared understanding of the function of the council and the expectation of the councilmembers in that role.
 - Clarify and practice behaviors that support the effectiveness of the council in working with each other.
 - Celebrate 2022 accomplishments.
- Agreements
- Leadership Values Activity

Friday 8:30-4:30

Getting Started

- Councilmembers shared their intentions for bringing one leadership value to today's session
 - Janice – Service
 - Brad – Respect
 - Jennifer – Productivity
 - Jared – Effectiveness
 - Conrad – Happiness
 - Lynne – Respect
 - John – Truth
 - Jeremy – Honesty/Integrity

- Introduce leadership concepts: finding workability, left/right hand column (content and process), getting on the balcony/techniques to stay present/engaged in difficult conversations

Clarify Council Expectations: Gallery Walk Activity

An activity to clarify assumptions and understanding of council rules and procedures:

- Publicly criticizing or commenting about the council
- Publicly criticizing or commenting about individual councilmembers
- Endorsing opponent of an incumbent
- Stating personal disagreement with a council decision
- When and how to communicate with each other about council business, e.g., in meetings vs outside of meetings
- Expectations about responding to calls and texts

Councilmembers researched specific issues in pairs, bringing recommendations to the group for discussion and approval.

- Introducing new ideas or making promises to other local officials outside Bellevue without vetting with colleagues or staff (Jennifer & Janice)
- Participating as a council representative/liason to a board, committee, advisory council, etc. (Lynne & Jared)
- Acting/speaking as an individual vs. council (Jennifer & Janice)
- Signing a memo or writing an article that is in opposition to a council decision or legislation (Lynne & Jared)
- Level of transparency in decisions and communications, how appointments are made (Conrad, Jeremy, John)
- Role of council as a governing body- approve budget, vote on legislation and policy, and city manager implements (Conrad, Jeremy, John)

The council clarified and agreed to the following:

1. Introducing new ideas or making promises to other local officials outside of Bellevue without vetting with colleagues or staff:
 - add process flow chart (8-hour rule items) to desk manual with minor modifications:
 - add “recommended option” in second box and add that the councilmember will speak to the item under Council Business and New Initiatives, giving their colleagues a heads up that they are working on the item with staff
 - add in the green box under Launch that the request will be written and included on the agenda under Council Business and New Initiatives
 - modify bullet in Chapter 2.03.E to say “Assist and facilitate/serve as a conduit for citizen, other agencies, or organization’s requests of Bellevue government.

- add bullet stating “If no Bellevue policy exists to guide councilmembers in their external representative role, councilmembers will seek input from staff and/or council to shape Bellevue’s position on issues.
2. Participating as a council liaison to a board, committee, or advisory council:
 - Add a bullet to Chapter 2.11 stating “As a liaison to a board or commission, the councilmember shall not vote with the members.”
 - Modify 3rd paragraph in Chapter 2.12 to state “Councilmembers participating in policy discussions at regional meetings will represent the consensus of the Council. Assignment of and direction to staff in relation to regional meetings are at the discretion of the City Manager. Voting will reflect city positions as informed by council, staff recommendations.”
 3. Acting or speaking as an individual versus as a councilmember:
 - Add a bullet to Chapter 7.01 stating “When an individual councilmember is invited to speak, the councilmember should seek assistance from staff to ensure speaking notes are consistent with Council policy.”
 4. Role of Council as a governing body:
 - Add bullet to role of Council to include “introduction of new policies.”
 5. Communicating with each other outside of meetings
 - Can speak to two other people on a specific topic (the other two people that you speak with can’t have already discussed it with other councilmembers)
 - Brad can speak to each councilmember
 - No “reply all” on email (to avoid serial meetings)
 - When leaving a message, indicate the priority (urgent/ important/ non-urgent) and topic (clarify purpose)
 - Mondays are for urgent/ time-sensitive communication and members should respond as soon as possible.
 - Be proactive (reach out early when possible)
 - Assume everyone is doing their best
 6. The definition of “publicly” to include media (TV, Radio, etc.), social media, groups of strangers, on the/a dais (i.e. when voting), giving a speech, committee/commission/board meeting, city partners (i.e. large employers, schools, other councils), any public forum. “Publicly” does not include social situations with friends and family.
 7. When disagreeing:
 - Be polite and factual
 - Speak about my own “why” not anyone else’s “why”
 - Speak to why voted a certain way (except as liaison to committee/commission)
 - Disagree without criticizing the other person/people
 8. Representing the council:
 - We represent the council when serving on PSRC, County Commission, Board or attending a conference as a councilmember

- It's our individual responsibility to represent the positions of the council. We should review staff notes/ briefings, and work to ensure a shared understanding of the council's position
- When an issue comes up on a board or commission and the council doesn't have a position, councilmembers will bring the issue back to the council for clarification
- Councilmembers will leverage city staff for speaking notes when appropriate
- We are speaking for ourselves as individuals when we are running for office

9. Council Priorities discussion:

- Staff reviewed existing council priorities and progress made to advance Strategic Target Areas and the identified Council priorities
- Many of the existing priorities received additional resources in the 24-25 budget which will allow for further advancement
- Most of the priorities have ongoing work that will run through 2023
- Group then turned focus to the body of work that is lined up for council policy direction in 2023 to get a sense of the scale and complexity and timing of the work

Saturday 8:30-12:00

Topics for future discussion (leads to keep the topic moving forward in blue)

- How appointments are made (equity & transparency) – [Jeremy](#), [Conrad](#), [Lynne](#)
- Representing council when there's no council position on an issue or not staffed- [John](#), [Conrad](#)
- Review the rule around no more than 4 virtual meetings- [Janice](#)
 - Consider trade-offs between effectiveness and accessibility
- Allowing more than 3 councilmembers on trips- [Lynne](#)
 - Fairness in sharing trips (focus on equity, rather than equality)
 - Research the rule/ process
- Norms around returning late from meeting breaks- [Jared](#)
- Endorsing the opponent of an incumbent
 - Understand differing perspectives and identify ways to foster respect
- Individual councilmember letterhead/ correspondence
- External perception of agreement vs. internal alignment/ understanding
- Bring feedback directly to a councilmember

Next Steps

- Brad/team to provide more detailed retreat notes per discussion.
- Charmaine to follow up with council on amendments to desk manual.

- Charmaine to create a shared document indicating the communication preferences of councilmembers
- Charmaine to add link to look-ahead document
- Brad/Charmaine to schedule another working session to tackle topics for future discussion