

OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL PLANNING RETREAT FEBRUARY 20, 2014

**Oconee County Council Chambers
Walhalla, SC 29691**

BACKGROUND

Oconee County Council met on Thursday, February 20, 2014, in council chambers for its fourth annual planning retreat. All council members were present and participated in the discussions that serve as the basis of this report. In preparation for the retreat Council members were also provided a worksheet to help guide them through the retreat. A copy of this worksheet is provided at the end of the report.

The first planning retreat was held in 2011. The purpose of each of the retreats has been to provide council members an opportunity to discuss policy priorities that can be used by the county administrator and staff in developing Oconee County's annual budget. As a general rule the policy priorities are also used to identify short-term goals, usually within a 12 to 24 month time-frame that should be achieved. Given the progress being made by council and staff in achieving the initial goals set in 2011, council also spent some time in this retreat discussing longer range goals that need to start being considered.

The retreat began with a review of the county's most recent audit report. The discussion which followed allowed council members another opportunity to ask questions and clarify the information provided in the audit report. It also provided an opportunity for staff to highlight significant elements of the audit that relate to the overall budgetary health of the county. This was followed by a presentation by the county administrator that provided council an update regarding the status of goals and priorities set during the 2013 retreat.

DISCUSSION

The budget is the one document that reflects the policy priorities that council has for the county and the goals that council wants achieved during the budget year. In 2011, Council spent considerable time and discussion to develop a vision for the future of Oconee County and a mission statement that reflects county council's role in helping to move the county toward achievement of that vision. It is important that the annual goals and priorities set by council are consistent with that vision for the future of Oconee County. The vision and mission statements were reviewed and council. No changes were recommended. They are included below.

Vision

Oconee County – A diverse, growing, safe, vibrant community guided by rural traditions and shaped by natural beauty; where employment, education and recreation offer a rich quality of life for all generations both today and tomorrow.

Mission

It is the mission of Oconee County to provide our current and future citizens and visitors quality services and to protect our neighborhoods, heritage and environment by managing growth and change through smart, inclusive planning.

Achievements

- Lower unemployment
- Restructure of administration
- Employee morale
- Economic development
- Sewer south
- Improvement in relationships with schools
- Broadband network
- Land around rock quarry
- Jail solution
- Refunding of spay and neuter program
- Public understanding and acceptance of new millage for roads
- Sewer referendum passes

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

A SWOT analysis addresses strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were identified by council and serve to facilitate informed discussion of the priority issues facing the county. They are presented here in no particular order. No attempt was made to rank or prioritize any of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats discussed.

Strengths

- Educational system
- Cooperation with technical schools
- Clemson and other higher learning opportunities
- Stability of county governance
- Competence of staff
- Stability in government services
- Low taxes – mil value
- Economic health
- Agricultural community
- Natural resources
- Tourism
- Ability to do many projects “in house”

- Cooperation among departments
- Growth of tourism industry
- Healthy business climate
- Growing manufacturing climate
- Transportation system access
- Growth in rail service
- Volunteerism
- Stable source of electric power
- Rock quarry
- Workforce
- Airport
- Existing industry
- County administration
- Regional cooperation
- Intergovernmental relationships
- Chattooga - wild and scenic river

Weaknesses

- Need to diversify tax base/revenue sources
- Lack of county-wide public transportation
- 80% High School graduation rate
- Ability/capability to fund social welfare needs
- Drugs
- No sewer in northern Oconee County
- Lawsuits on pride vs. facts
- No lake fireboats
- No good jobs for youth
- No youth programs
- Gangs
- No litter control
- Over-dependence on Duke revenue
- Lack of comprehensive planning
- Zoning issues

Opportunities

- Economic development
- Short to intermediate successes in education and workforce development
- Further expansion of public transportation
- Expansion of tourism
- More/better marketing of rail system
- Expanded Tri-County Technical School programs
- New industry
- Move toward 85% recycling rate
- Get youth involvement in governmental affairs
- Finish Industrial Parks
- Agribusiness
- Stable federal and state funding

Threats

- Lack of solution to drug problem
- Potential legislative initiatives impact on county government
- Shrinking home rule
- Not enough deputies
- State and federal tax policy
- Losing hospital
- Threat to water supply
- Impact of taxes on small business startups
- County relies too much on truck trade
- Rely on contractors for solid waste
- Only one large water service

Evaluation of Stakeholder Expectations

Council identified key stakeholders in the county and went through an exercise to identify what they felt were each of the stakeholders' expected actions of county government. They then discussed how well they felt county government was doing in meeting these expectations. The purpose of this exercise is to identify the differences in expectations and county responses, and from these differences, begin to identify new goals for council. The key stakeholders identified and discussed by council were: Industrial/Business Community; the Public/Voters; Youth/Young People; Seniors/Retirees; Agriculture/Agribusiness. Listed below is a summary of the discussions of expectations and the degree to which council feels it is meeting those expectations.

1. Industrial/Business Community/ONS/Duke

Expectations:

- Healthy business climate
- Good transportation
- A trained and trainable workforce
- Low cost of doing business
- Ease of expansion
- Stable and fair treatment by government

Council:

- Need better workforce development
- Provide realistic incentives for updates and expansion
- Rated the degree to which council is meeting these expectations as "B+"

2. Stakeholder expectations - Public/Voters

Expectations:

- Predictability/stability/fair treatment from county government
- Better/wise use of revenue
- Appropriate infrastructure county-wide
- Community inclusiveness
- Services
- Low taxes
- Protect natural resources
- Ongoing and timely communication
- Intelligent plan to address problems

Council:

- Rated the degree to which council is meeting these expectations as "A"

3. Youth/Young People

Expectations:

- Parks and recreation facilities
- Opportunity for career in Oconee county
- Good education; entertainment options

Council:

- Develop strategy to meet needs of youth/young people
- Needs work –
 - Partnerships – can council help recreations programs throughout the county
 - Perhaps capital investment by county they turned back to district/city
- Council gave itself no grade

4. Seniors/Retirees

Expectations:

- Public, non-emergency transportation
- Medical care
- Entertainment/activities
- Affordable assisted care facility
- Low cost of living/ease of living

Council

- Council gave itself no grade.

5. Agriculture/Agribusiness

Expectations:

- Resource support (e.g. agriculture center; tax incentives)

Council:

- Consider “farm week” or other similar awareness programs
- Support for farmer’s market
- Expansion of Heritage Fair
- Council gave itself no grade

The next step in this process is for Council to continue to identify key stakeholders, evaluate the degree to which Council is meeting those expectations, and identify specific policies and goals that can be established to move in the direction of meeting those expectations.

Goals

Council next identified short and long-term goals that will be used by the Administrator in developing and presenting the budget as well as preparing the annual action plan to provide guidance to staff on the priority issues to be addressed. Each council member was given the opportunity to identify both their short and long term goals. These goals were reviewed and the following goals were adopted. Because the short-term goals support and are consistent with the current priorities being address they serve as supplements rather than new goals. Given the relatively small number of long-term goals and they are goals that begin development of strategies these were not given a specific priority ranking.

Short-term Goals

Existing

- Continue working on issues identified during previous planning retreats
- Finish the jail project
- Move toward achieving an 85% recycling rate throughout the county
- Develop a plan to improve boating safety on the county's lakes to include fire boats
- Continue to improve the county's efficiency programs
- Continue workforce development programs
- Partner with the Oconee County Sheriff's Office to address the issue of distracted driving consistent with state law

New

- BTOP accessibility and utilization county-wide
- Phase II Sewer South/I85
- Recruit occupants for industrial parks
- Begin development of a county-wide sewer plan

Long-term goals

- Use Task Force to develop a plan for public transportation
- Work with the Oconee County Sheriff's Officer and Solicitor to develop strategies to address the drug problem in the county
- Seek opportunities to reach, to communicate with, and increase the interest of youth in business, industry, and government in Oconee County
- Use revenue saved through improving efficiency in county operations and service delivery to increase support for law enforcement

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHEET

The purpose of any strategic planning process is to identify a set of goals and objectives that provide guidance to the County Administrator in implementing the policies and procedures adopted by county council and achieving the goals identified by county council. The goals identified can be both short term and long term. The short-term goals form the basis of the organization's 12-month action or work plan. The long-term goals identify the council's role in providing the leadership needed to ensure that resources are available to accomplish those goals. Those resources might include policy guidance funding, infrastructure, personnel, or public/political support for the county's vision or direction.

Strategic planning is different from other types of planning efforts. In addition to setting goals, it identifies strategies needed to ensure successful implementation. From the council member's perspective this requires two distinct outcomes. First, it must focus on the 'ends' toward which the County Administrator should be moving the organization. Second, it must ensure that policies are in place which will facilitate accomplishment of those 'ends.'

This worksheet should be used as you prepare for the upcoming Council retreat. It will help focus your thinking on the future directions for the organization. Your responses will be combined with those of the other council members in developing your strategic plan.

STRENGTHS/ WEAKNESSES/ OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS (SWAT ANALYSIS)

1. What do you consider to be the five (5) most significant accomplishments of Oconee County Council in the past 12 months?
2. What do you consider to be the five (5) greatest strengths of Oconee County?
3. What do you consider to be the five (5) greatest weaknesses of Oconee County?
4. What do you consider to be the five (5) greatest threats to Oconee County?
5. What do you think are the five (5) greatest opportunities for Oconee County?

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Stakeholders are any group which has an interest or stake in actions of government in Oconee County. For example, any of the following groups could be considered stakeholders: the citizens, citizens groups, industry, taxpayers, visitors, employees, commercial interests, or vendors. Each of these stakeholder groups has a set of expectations on what the government does to address their interests or concerns. One way to determine the success of Oconee County government is to get some sense of how government is doing to meet or address those expectations. The next set of questions will help guide our discussion.

1. Who do you consider to be the three (3) most important stakeholders in Oconee County?
2. What do you think each of these three stakeholder groups individually expect from Oconee County government?
3. How well do you feel Oconee County government is meeting these expectations?

GOALS

There are two desired outcomes of this planning retreat. The first is to provide the County Administrator guidance in preparing a budget based on Council's priorities. The second is a listing of short and long-term goals that can be used by the County Administrator in establishing action or work plans. These questions will help provide that information. As with the responses to other questions on this worksheet, your answers will be combined with those of other council members. This list of goal will then be prioritized using the 10-4 ranking process that has been used in past retreats.

1. What do you consider to be the three (3) most important goals that should be accomplished for Oconee County in the next 12 months?
2. What is the most important goal that should be accomplished for Oconee County in the next three years?

(NOTE: The worksheet that was provided to council contained space for members to answer or make notes on the questions asked. That spacing was removed from the worksheet that is provided above. The text is the same as was provided to council.)