

**Board of Allen County Commissioners
Efficiency and Effectiveness Task Force**

Tuesday, September 15 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Location: Dupont Branch of the Allen County Public Library (536 E. Dupont Road Fort Wayne)

Task Force Members Present: Roger Hadley, Kent Castleman, Terry McDonald, Michael Eikenberry, Ben Eisbart, Ellen Cutter (facilitator)
 Commissioners Present: Nelson Peters, Therese Brown
 Others Present: Robert Armstrong, Roy Buskirk, Tom Harris

MEETING MINUTES

Welcome

Ellen Cutter called the meeting to order at 6:14p.m. Ms. Cutter passed out a list of eight draft recommendations considered by the task force to date. Prior to the meeting, task force members were asked to assess these draft recommendations via an anonymous online survey. This survey helped to identify areas of consensus among group members.

Group 1: Some Consensus				
3	Implement a regularly scheduled Strategic Planning retreat that engages elected officials and citizens.	Yes	No	Voter participation is only 11% in Allen County elections. A retreat would serve the dual purpose of improving citizen involvement and setting Citizens' Objectives for the Strategic Plan. This would also improve confidence in elected officials, because there is a mechanism in place for citizens to express their priorities.
6	Coordinate employee performance review standards.	Yes	Unsure	Some county units utilize county Human Resources services while others do not. Even if units have their own performance reviews, rather than using those from Human Resources, a coordinated 10,000 foot view across the entire organization is impossible to glean.
2	Adopt a Zero-Based Budget for Allen County.	Yes	No	The current budget process projects the revenues for the year and, based on this, unit budgets are adjusted or kept flat. Each year's budget builds off last year's. Zero-based budgeting brings the budget to zero at the start of each year and every expenditure must be assessed and justified. By adopting a zero-based budget, the County could better coordinate across units to realize efficiencies and savings. Any savings could be redistributed to best proposals for key initiatives/investments, as outlined in the Strategic Plan.
7	Require defined accountability standards for executive (Commission) and legislative officers (Commission and Council) as part of the Strategic Plan	Yes	No	Commissioners are full-time positions in Allen County, Councilmen are part-time positions. Elected representatives must meet the Constitutional requirements of their held position; however, there no standards for hours worked or participation in specific activities. The Task Force has determined that it would be appropriate for each elected official to develop their own standards. It would be useful, however, for someone to track board-level participation across all units. While a tedious task, it would involve going through archived minutes to tabulate participation.
1	Oversight of Strategic Plan by Commissioners and recommendation of a budget to County Council	Yes	Yes	Commissioners oversee 1/3 of county personnel and budget. They do not have the authority to enforce planning or coordination among the rest of the organization. Effectiveness depends on personalities and goodwill, with varying levels of service standards across county units. Councilmembers are part-time positions and do not have the time coordinate in addition to the budget process. This would not override Council's fiscal authority in any way.
5	Consider linking employee performance reviews and merit pay to the Commissioners' recommended budget to Council.	Yes	No, contingent on #1	Eighty-percent of costs in Allen County government are associated with personnel. Challenges arise with unique circumstances (e.g. judicial performance) and consistency (e.g. a certain percent of the annual budget must be earmarked to carry out). As one option, 3% could be reserved each year for merit pay with the expectation that managers divvy this up based on performance reviews.
Group 2: No Consensus				
4	Create a Continuous Improvement Manager position to oversee Strategic Planning and promote accountability and visible reporting.	Yes	No	Even if Council were to request more stringent Strategic Planning as part of the budget process, there is no staff support to ensure planning is effective. This position would bring a systematic approach to evaluation and continuous improvement of governance processes. This position would help track implementation of the plan to promote accountability and visible reporting.
8	Collect burdensome and seemingly unnecessary statutory requirements from each Department, via a Continuous Improvement manager position, and consider appeal to State Legislature.	Yes	Yes	State statute mandates the existence of departments and/or how they operate. A comprehensive review (possibly as part of the Strategic Planning process) would illuminate which areas have a high level of burdensome requirements, which could then be examined for appeal to the Legislature. This could potentially be done by the proposed Continuous Improvement Manager.

Mike Eikenberry and Kent Castleman discussed if elected officials need someone to drive the strategic planning process. While Mr. Eikenberry expressed hesitation about adding staff, Mr. Castleman questions if elected officials had the time to commit to developing a meaningful plan.

Commissioner Brown noted that the Commissioners developed the initial Strategic Plan and obtained needed buy-in. However, changes in elected officials resulted in shifting priorities.

Mayor McDonald suggested that the critical first step would be to set a vision and buy-in needed for a rejuvenated strategic planning process. After that, the assessment to hire someone can be made. He likes the recommendation related to a regularly scheduled planning retreat (#3), but would suggest that elected officials have the opportunity to present proposed initiatives as part of that process.

Commissioner Brown provided observations on previous strategic planning processes. Participation across units was good; however, she questioned if what was produced was actually a strategic plan. What was submitted varied widely across units. She also asked: what's the hammer? The perception is that Council does not hold managers accountable to the Strategic Plan. So, it turned into an exercised instead of a tool to direct the future of investments and services of county government. Because of this, participation eventually fell off.

Mike Eikenberry noted that it is important for Council and the Commissioners to create a culture of strategic planning. Council must be vigorous about tying budget appropriations to the Strategic Plan. If Council takes it seriously, other elected officials and managers will also take it seriously. To this point, Commissioner Peters noted that often times budget request are made and no one on Council verifies that the request aligns to the plan.

Mr. Eikenberry continued by questioning who approves the Strategic Plan. The Commissioners and Councilman Harris noted that the plan are not approved, they are simply submitted. Hence, quality control is an issue.

Commissioner Peters noted that there must be central point of accountability to the Strategic Plan via two-step process: accountable in day-to-day management and accountable in County Council budget appropriations. Mayor McDonald asked if there is a budget committee that can work with the Commissioners to develop a Strategic Plan to develop this system of accountability Commissioner Peters was referencing. The group discussed that there is not a budget committee, but one could be established with representation from the Commissioners, Council, the Auditor, the Assessor, and other relevant offices.

Mr. Eisbart noted that this brought the crux of the issue full circle. Commissioners appear to need more leverage to manage across the entire government entity to align the visions of each elected official in a way to results in coordination and efficiency and good service.

Commissioner Brown suggested that a budget committee would be a topic of discussion for a strategic planning retreat with County Council. Councilman Harris noted that the courts and law enforcement have resisted participation in any sort of countywide effort. The perception is that units would resist the Commissioners attempting to extend their reach. Another perception is that Council only wants to cut the budget. He suggested that a strategic planning retreat would be a first step to get over some of these issues.

The conversation shifted to capital improvement requests and how those request are assessed. Mayor McDonald referred back to the draft recommendation (#2) related to a zero-based budgeting process. If each department had to adopt a zero-based budget, it might be easier to assess capital improvement requests. Mayor McDonald also noted that this process is an opportunity to innovate in government, for managers to show their leadership, and to identify efficiencies and service improvement possibilities.

A comment from the floor suggested that in order for this to happen, the culture within the organization must change. Kent Castleman noted that the issue goes back to the organizational chart. The nature of the organization makes cultural change difficult.

Ms. Cutter moved the group toward formalizing the draft recommendations. Commissioner Brown suggested paring down the recommendations. Mike Eikenberry concurred. He would like to see two or three recommendations finalized. Mayor McDonald suggested eliminating recommendation #7 regarding accountability standards, for reasons the group had discussed in previous meetings. There was support among the group for doing so.

Commissioner Peters revisited the idea of a budget committee. Kent Castleman noted that programming and capital expenses could be prioritized and articulated in the Strategic Plan; however, the culture needs to be changed to one of collaboration and continuous improvement. He noted that he sees opportunity for a renewed strategic planning process as a way to drive that change.

Mr. Eikenberry noted that the organization has no "CEO" and there are elected, appointed, and hired staff in the mix. He came back to the need for a structure to support organization-wide issues.

Ms. Cutter suggested that the group seemed to have consensus around recommendations 1,2, and 3; however, they may need fine-tuning. Kent Castleman agreed, but again expressed the desire for continuous improvement coaching. Mike Eikenberry suggested we try to alter this list to get it down to two recommendations.

Commissioner Brown noted that there would be blowback if there is any perception about increased authority among the Commissioners. Mike Eikenberry noted that an organization-wide strategic plan linked to a recommended budget would, in all likelihood, be a benefit to part-time Councilmembers. Commissioners Brown and Peters expressed that they would desire greater accountability as the number one outcome. They too suggested the group get this down to two recommendations.

Mr. Castleman asked Councilman Harris if Council would be open to the conversation. He said they would.

The group determined that Ms. Cutter would redistribute the draft recommendations, based on the feedback. A follow up meeting would be scheduled. Comments were taken from the floor.

Councilman Buskirk noted that the Strategic Plan must be flexible enough to allow the Council to respond to state changes. He requested additional clarity between the capital improvement request and the strategic plan. The group discussed that the purpose of the strategic plan is to determine where the organization "needs to go" and the capital improvements are part of "how we get there." Councilman Buskirk also went on to say that he would support a zero-based budget, but to accomplish its implementation would require professional development resources for managers and elected officials. It was noted that Fort Wayne Community Schools approach budgeting in this way and it has been successful.

Adjourn

The next task force meeting time and date will be announced, once scheduled.

Ellen Cutter adjourned the meeting at 8:10pm.