

Agenda Report Reviewed by:
City Manager: 

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM

Meeting Date: November 2, 2021
To: Honorable City Councilmembers
From: Agenda Review Committee
RGS Personnel Consultant
Subject: City Council Retreat
Recommendation : Discuss and Consider City Council Retreat
Funding: Currently Budgeted: _____ Yes _____ No XX N/A
Net General Fund Cost: N/A
Amount: \$0

Account Code/Costs authorized in City Approved Budget (if applicable) AK (N/A) (verified by Administrative Services Department)

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE:

The item before the City Council tonight is to Discuss and Consider a City Council Retreat and possible direction to staff.

BACKGROUND:

City Council is responsible for the legislative function of the City, which includes approving the budget, adopting local laws and regulations, reviewing public policies and adopting big picture goals and related policies that are responsive to the needs of the community. All council members serve at large, which means that each member represents the entire city.

City Council members hold varied viewpoints on matters pertaining to the community which can allow for passionate discourse between Councilmembers and with the public. This exchange of ideas helps to craft better solutions, improve critical thinking, and support decision-making processes. As a body, the common goal of City Council is to address complex issues and balance multiple and sometimes conflicting opinions and ideas from community members and staff to make informed decisions and set fair and equitable policies or goals for the good of the community. To do this, the Council must have mutual respect and embrace differences of opinion as part of decision-making, have a clear understanding of Council expectations of staff and staff's expectations of the Council, agree on the key issues facing the community, develop a clear decision-making process, and be able to articulate the Council's role in the alignment and execution of Council mission, vision, and core values. Conducting a retreat is an opportunity to build stronger working relationships, focus on core values, build better decision-making processes, and craft clearer vision and mission statements.

Retreats are a powerful management tool for local government leaders to refocus on the mission of a City and develop priorities which are in line with a City's core values. A retreat is a meeting that is typically designed and organized specifically to facilitate the ability of a group to step back from their day-to-day demands and activities for an extended period of concentrated discussion, dialogue, and strategic thinking about the organization's future or about specific issues.

DISCUSSION:

During the performance evaluations for City Management, the Council requested an agenda item to hold a City Council retreat.

Should the Council desire to schedule a retreat, the following topics should be discussed, and direction provided to staff sufficiently prior to the event to allow for preparation and acquisition of a comfortable venue allowing for social distancing and food if applicable.:

- **Goals of the Retreat:** Discuss what the Council would like to accomplish. Common Council retreat goals include strategic planning; team building; vision, mission, and core value development; conflict resolution; communication skills; and developing a better decision-making process.
- **Location:** The location of a retreat should be off-site but within the jurisdiction of the City. Council may provide direction to staff to locate a suitable venue. It could also be by Zoom.
- **Facilitator:** Council should discuss and provide direction to staff on who they would like to facilitate the event.
- **Timing of the event:** The timing of a retreat is often tied to the goals identified by Council. For example, if discussing mission, vision, and core values is important, the retreat should occur just before Council goals are established for the next fiscal year. If team building is the focus, the retreat often occurs shortly after new Councilmembers take office. Strategic Planning can be an annual retreat event or every few years as an update to the current plan. Retreats for skill building, such as communication, building a decision-making process, and learning to develop productive conflict skills can be scheduled at any time of the year.
- **Proposed meeting dates and times:** The dates, length and times for the retreat should be discussed. It is best to provide staff with three or four dates at least 1 or 2 months out when retreat activities can be held. This will allow staff the most flexibility for acquiring a venue, refreshments, and for working with the facilitator to plan the event. Retreats on weekend days may provide fewer distractions.
- **Ground Rules:** Ground rules are an important element of a retreat and will often be suggested by the facilitator and agreed upon by all participants. Ground rules promote a safe and courteous environment. Ground rules include agreements by participants related to conduct during the retreat.
- **Participants:** Depending on the Goals of the Retreat, it is important to discuss who should be in attendance. Retreats to resolve a complex problem or multi-faceted issue require the right stakeholders to be involved, strategic planning and goal setting are best done with City management involvement, whereas other topics may be specific to Councilmembers.

Should Council direct staff to schedule and plan a retreat, a special, open session meeting would be scheduled.

Depending on the goals of the retreat, the facilitator may recommend reading material or assessments be completed by participants prior to the retreat. Any materials will be provided to participants well in advance of the retreat.

GOALS:

5.3.3 Encourage and increase public awareness of City Policies, decisions, programs and all public processes and meetings, by investigating effective methods of communication and obtaining feedback from the community.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, staff anticipates receiving public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report. Such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of the agenda item.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with the recommended action tonight.

RECOMMENDATION:

Attachments:

None